The US Constitution: Continuity and Change

Developer/Publisher: Library of Congress

View Resource

Review Year: 2013

Note that this resource may have been updated since the review. Check the developer website to see if there is a more recent version available.

Format:

☒ online
☐ PDF
☐ editable document

Professional Development:
Print and Online PD

Standards Correlation:
Found within resource

2013 OER Review Full Report
This resource was reviewed by Washington educators with subject matter expertise and deep familiarity with the state learning standards. Learn more about the review instruments and process by reading the full report.

Educators Evaluating Quality Instructional Products (EQuIP) Overall Rating:
Needs Revision (1.5)  learn more about EQuIP

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OER Project
Learning and Teaching Department
Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

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Amount of work required to bring into CCSS alignment:
Minor-Moderate

Background from OER Project Team
The Library of Congress offers classroom materials and professional development to help teachers effectively use primary sources from the Library's digital collections in their teaching. This unit uses primary sources to examine continuity and change in the governing of the United States. The Library of Congress has extensive print and online professional development facilitation materials.

Reviewer Comments

Review 1

While this set of lessons was given the time required of two weeks and was broken into four lessons, there was no distinct time frame given for each one. Students are being asked to compare so many different pieces of informational text, that thorough consideration would have to be given on how to best breakdown each lesson into manageable teaching chunks. Additionally, no handouts or rubrics are provided which would suggest that in order to bring these lesson plans into today's high school classroom, a teacher would need to spend time preparing student handouts and rubrics with clear expectations. However, the directions provided (while generic) begin to integrate reading, writing, speaking and listening skills into the American Lit classroom. While instructions for how students are to "consider questions" are generic, the beginnings of these questions are focused on text and provide the beginnings of rich, thought-provoking analysis from students.

While the lessons call for students to "write a position paper expressing their views" on varying elements within the Constitution, specific prompt directions and rubrics were not given. The assignments seem obligatory calling for students to "consider questions" and debate certain points as either a partnership or as a whole class, yet students are not told how to specifically demonstrate their comprehension and understanding of the questions they are asked to consider.

The author provided extension activities for taking lessons to a deeper, more advanced level; however, again, no student handouts containing clear and concise directions are provided for these extensions.

Additionally, due to the fact that these lessons are centered on the US Constitution (informational text), all supporting texts are additionally informational as well. There are no literary texts included in these lessons.

While Common Core Standards might not be met in their entirety, the intent was there which is why with minimal work to create student handouts containing concise, concrete directions that include measurable assessment tools these lessons could be brought solidly into Common Core alignment.

I would use this material in my classroom: Agree

On a 4 point scale: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, or Strongly Agree
As an ELA teacher I would not use this unit as it is written, if I was a history teacher or a humanities teacher I would use this unit if it were modified. Lesson 1 of the unit is connected to seminal constitutional documents and in the extension activities they connect to literary non-fiction letters providing background thinking behind our founding documents. Without the extension lesson there is no literature in the entire unit, it is entirely comprised of information text. To shift the balance of text, Lesson 3 could include literary non-fiction or fiction in order to humanize the issues of terrorism, the national debt and veteran’s benefits throughout history. Lesson 4 which is about national holidays could also include literary and or literary non-fiction about national holidays, however, this unit seemed disconnected as its purpose was not as clear as the other lessons.

As this was a unit developed for a history course rather than an ELA course, the ELA teacher might want to consider using each of the independent lessons and resources separately connecting it to various pieces of literature that deal with the topics that the lessons deal with creating new units that balance the informational and literature required in the CCSS.

The scaffolding of the reading tasks for ELL, SPED and low-level readers is completely missing from this unit and will need to be addressed and as it is virtually impossible to scaffold the complexity of government documents the scaffolding of the tasks that students engage in, in order to understand these documents well needs to be carefully crafted and there is no evidence of that here. Pairing students and group work with report outs, as well as independent work that leads to the final assignments would assist those students who might struggle with some of the language in the text. Options for process pieces that teachers and students could select from would address some of the instructional issues that are missing.

The assessments were simple prompts with no rubrics and no guidance for process and no variety. Some of the prompts did not require the students to use the text to answer the questions. Improving the quality of the assessments and increasing the on-demand writing would increase the rigor and allow students to process information as they went along. They did include debates but no guidance for what this would look like.

Overall I thought the resources would be useful, and there were individual questions and sections that a teacher would find useful but as a whole unit for an ELA class there would be a significant amount of work to make this a useful ELA unit.

I would use this material in my classroom: Disagree

On a 4 point scale: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, or Strongly Agree

Review 3

The Library of Congress unit on The United States Constitution has many opportunities for close reading of seminal and complex texts (mostly primary sources) that relate to students' deeper understanding of the historical evolution of the US Constitution. In the reading/analyzing of informational texts, this unit addresses the CCSS. During the four lessons, which take two weeks’ time, the students interpret various primary source documents while analyzing the development of the Bill of Rights and changes to the US Constitution. However, there are few text-dependent questions that help students with specific phrases/sentences and limited activities that deal with vocabulary or style concerning this archaic prose. Many students of lower reading levels will be lost without additional scaffolding.
The unit is strong in its technological inter-activity because it includes hyper-links for some "Extension Activities" and it requires students to use THOMAS (the Bills Text Version) of different House and Senate Joint Resolutions. It also includes selections of many original documents so teachers are able to tailor the learning to the basic "Discussion" elements or to choose "Extension Activities". However, it does not give much remediation or scaffolding for lower level readers. A similar concern is that the unit lacks: Rubrics, answer keys, scoring guidelines, vocabulary activities, formative assignments, more text-dependent questions, and process writing. Close reading and text-specific questions comprise the majority of the exercises in this unit. There are research opportunities but research writing is not specifically mentioned and there is no incorporation of digital editing or reviewing. The targeted instruction of grammar/conventions or writing strategies does not exist. Neither does instruction for discussion rules or debate although the “Cumulative Activities” twice call for debate as a means of assessment.

Although the lack of writing and assessment are the weakest components of this unit, the text complexity is obvious and the juxtaposition of many of the insightful and controversial pieces of informational text is invigorating. With a bit of work, this unit has some real potential to galvanize both the students and the teachers in a quest for stronger literary and deeper critical thinking skills.

I would use this material in my classroom: Agree

On a 4 point scale: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, or Strongly Agree

Review 4

Impressed with: overall objectives of the unit; treatment of materials in terms of connections to American values and intentions; extension activities appear well thought out and have potential for students to demonstrate understanding in meaningful way.

Challenged by: “preparation” section of unit layout (does not provide much to any direction for a language arts teacher to prepare for this unit); lack of direction in terms of assessment (formative and summative, no rubrics?); loose feel of units end purpose.

Overall assessment:

This unit would be exceptionally challenging for a language arts teacher to incorporate into a class without the assistance/collaboration with an American history teacher. This unit does not provide any explicit direction as to assessment (provides no rubrics/answer keys); requires development by any who wish to use it. Certainly, this unit has potential, though it needs more complete materials.

I would use this material in my classroom: Agree

On a 4 point scale: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, or Strongly Agree