

## Lesson 7: Exploring a Public Issue Relating to the U.S. Constitution

### Big Ideas of the Lesson

- It is important for citizens to make informed decisions about public issues.
- To make informed decisions, citizens need to identify factual and definitional questions related to public issues.
- To make informed decisions, citizens need to analyze data and information related to public issues.
- To make informed decisions, citizens need to examine different points of views on public issues.
- To make informed decisions, citizens need to consider how core democratic values relate to public issues.

### Lesson Abstract:

In this lesson, students examine the process used to make an informed decision on a public issue. They distinguish between definitional and factual questions relating to public issues, examine the importance of analyzing data relating to public issues, and explore the connections between core democratic values and public issues. Students then apply what they have learned as they explore the public issue of mandatory school uniforms.

### Content Expectations

- 5 – P3.1.1: Identify contemporary public issues related to the United States Constitution and their related factual, definitional, and ethical questions.
- 5 – P3.1.2: Use graphic data and other sources to analyze information about a contemporary public issue related to the United States Constitution and evaluate alternative resolutions.
- 5 – P3.1.3: Give examples of how conflicts over core democratic values lead people to differ on contemporary constitutional issues in the United States.

### Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects:

- RI.5.2: Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by key details; summarize the text.

### Key Concepts

Bill of Rights  
public issue  
U.S. Constitution

## **Instructional Resources**

### Equipment/Manipulative

Overhead projector or document camera/projector

### Student Resource

Bower, Burt, et al. *America's Past*, Social Studies Alive Program. Palo Alto, CA: Teacher's Curriculum Institute, 2010 or a similar fifth grade social studies textbook. Pp. 201-209.

### Teacher Resource

*The Bill of Rights*. Our Documents. 3 April 2012

<<http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=13>>.

Egbo, Carol. *Supplemental Materials (Unit 7, Lesson 7)*. Teacher-made material. Michigan Citizenship Collaborative, 2012.

*Hearsay and Myths Regarding Effectiveness of Uniforms*. APROD Website. 3 April 2012

<<http://www.aprod.org/myths.htm>>.

*Manual on School Uniforms*. 3 April 2012 <<http://www.ed.gov/updates/uniforms.html>>.

*School Dress Codes and Uniform Policies Policy Report*. Education Commission of the States. 3 April 2012

<<http://www.ecs.org/html/IssueSection.asp?issueid=145&s=Selected+Research+%26+Readings>>.

*School Uniforms*. 3 April 2012

<<http://www.terrebonneparish.com/local/educational/schools/uniforms/uniforms.htm>>.

*School Uniforms*. Scholastic. 3 April 2012

<<http://teacher.scholastic.com/kidusasu/uniforms/chart2.htm>>.

*U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics*. 3 April 2012

<<http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=50>>.

## **Lesson Sequence**

1. Using Word Card #18, review the term 'popular sovereignty', a term explored in the very first lesson of the very first unit of this grade level. Remind students that this core democratic value means that the power and authority of government comes from the people. Briefly discuss how issues relating to popular sovereignty frequently arose during the Constitutional Convention.
2. Explain that because people hold the power of government, they have many civic responsibilities. Have students do a quick journal jot listing some of these responsibilities and then make a master of their ideas. Note that responsibilities include serving on a jury, obeying laws, paying taxes, and voting.
3. Explain to students that another important civic responsibility is staying informed about public issues. Using Word Card 19, review the term "public issue". Ask students what they

remember about this term from previous lessons. Remind students that a public issue may affect an entire school, community, county, state, region, or country. Using “Examples of Public Issues”, located in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 7, Lesson 7)*, review some of the public issues explored in grades 2 through 4.

4. Remind students that people disagree about how to settle or resolve public issues. Briefly discuss different viewpoints people might have regarding each of the issues reviewed in Step 3. For a historical connection, guide students in briefly examining how the ratification of the Constitution became a public issue following the American Revolution.
5. Explain that public issues are difficult to solve. Using Word Cards #20 and #21, explain that this is often because they are related to other issues such as ‘definitional issues’; and ‘factual issues’. Use the following to explain these related issues:
  - **Definitional issues** are related to the question: What exactly does the issue and terms relating to the issue mean?
  - **Factual issues** are related to the question: What facts are relevant to the issue.
6. Display “Definitional and Factual Issues” graphic organizer, located in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 7, Lesson 7)* and discuss definitional issues and factual issues relating to the issue of Great Lakes water diversion. Ask students the following question: “Why is it important to define the term ‘diversion’ in order to understand this public issue question? Discuss student responses. Ask students if they can think of other factual issues related to this public issue besides the one described on the organizer. Discuss student responses. Possible answers include the following:
  - Has water ever been diverted from the Great Lakes in the past? If so, what were the effects?
  - What would be the effect of diverting small amounts of water from the Great Lakes?
7. Give each student a copy of “Definitional and Factual Issues” Student Activity Sheet, located in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 7, Lesson 7)*. Explain that students should think about the public issue of whether or not to place wind farms in the Great Lake and then list related definitional and factual issues on the organizer. When students have finished have them share their ideas with the whole group. Possible answers include the following:
  - **Definitional Issue:** What is meant by the term ‘wind farm’?
  - **Factual Issues:** Have wind farms been placed in large bodies of water like an ocean in the past? If so, what were the effects?
8. Explain that people often use data to support a position on a public issue. For example, in supporting the building of wind farms in the Great Lakes, someone may cite data that shows the amount of ‘clean’ energy a wind farm can produce.
9. Using Word Card #22, remind students that people also use core democratic values to support their position on a public issue. Divide students into pairs and give each pair a copy of “Some Important Core Democratic Values” chart, located in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 7, Lesson 7)*. Explain that pairs should work together to explain the meaning of each of the core democratic values in their own terms. Give pairs time to work and then discuss the meaning of

each value in the large group using the chart with sample answers included in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 7, Lesson 7)*.

10. Divide students into pairs and give each pair a copy of “Looking at Both Sides of an Issue”, located in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 7, Lesson 7)*. Review the directions on the sheet with students and give pairs time to work together. Encourage them to use the chart of core democratic values from Step 9 as they work together to look at both sides of the issue of water diversion.
11. Have students share what they wrote on their charts in the previous step. Discuss responses and correct misinterpretation of core democratic value connections if necessary. Note that a chart with sample answers has been included in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 7, Lesson 7)*.
12. Explain that students will now have the opportunity to explore a public issue relating to the Bill of Rights and specifically the First Amendment.
13. Explain that people are often divided over the issue of mandatory school uniforms in public schools. Ask students to think of reasons people may favor school uniforms. Discuss student responses and then guide students to the idea that some people feel uniforms promote a positive learning climate and reduce behavior problems. Ask students to think of reasons people may be against school uniforms. Discuss student responses and then guide students to the idea that some people feel uniforms discourage individuality and infringe on students’ freedom of expression.
14. Share the following facts about school uniform policies with students:
  - The first public school known to have adopted uniforms was Cherry Hill Elementary in Baltimore, Maryland in 1987.
  - In 1994, The Long Beach Unified School District was the first public school district to enact a mandatory uniform policy. The Long Beach dress code policy affects nearly 60,000 elementary and middle school students.
  - The idea of dress codes and uniforms became more popular when President Clinton endorsed the idea of public school uniforms in his 1996 State of the Union Address.
  - By 2000, 30% of the public schools in San Francisco, 50% of the schools in Cincinnati, 65% of the schools in Boston, 85% of the schools in Cleveland, and 95% in New Orleans had school uniform programs.
  - In May 2000, the Philadelphia Board of Education became the first large city board to require school uniforms. This was for approximately 200,000 students in all grades in the city’s 259 public schools.
  - According to the U.S. Department of Education’s “Manual on School Uniforms,” many large public school systems, including Baltimore, Cincinnati, Dayton, Detroit, Los Angeles, Long Beach, Miami, Memphis, Milwaukee, Nashville, New Orleans, Phoenix, Seattle, and St. Louis, have schools with either voluntary or mandatory uniform policies, mostly in elementary and middle schools.
15. Explain to students that the Supreme Court has not decided a case on school uniforms. Cases have been brought before lower courts, however. Most lower courts have sided with school

districts that adopt uniform policies. Share the following information with students regarding two examples of cases:

- In January of 2001, a U.S. Court of Appeals ruled that a mandatory public school uniform policy in a Louisiana school district was constitutional. The court found that “improving the educational process” was an important government interest and that students still could express themselves through other mediums during the school day.
- The Court of Appeals of Arizona upheld a mandatory dress code requiring students attending a particular school in the district to wear uniforms. The court stated that the dress code had a reasonable connection to the purpose of the school including the promotion of a more effective climate for learning and increased campus safety and security.

16. Explain to students that they will be exploring the public issue of school uniforms and then taking a position on the issue in writing. Write the following public issue question on an overhead transparency or board: “Should public schools be allowed to require students to wear school uniforms?” Explain that in order to make an informed decision about this issue they will need to do the following:

- Consider definitional and factual questions related to the issue.
- Consider information and data related to the issue
- Explore different viewpoints relating to the issue
- Consider core democratic values and how they might influence a person’s point of view on the issue
- Make a decision on the question based on the information researched
- State their position in writing and justify their position with a reasoned argument.

17. Divide students in a pairs and ask each pair to come up with one definitional and factual question relating to the issue of mandatory school uniforms. Give pairs time to work and then have them share ideas in the large group. Possible answers include:

- **Definitional:** What is meant by the term ‘uniform?’
- **Factual:** How many schools in the U.S. require students to wear uniforms?

18. Give each student copies of “Data Sheets 1-4”, located in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 7, Lesson 7)*. Provide students with two different colored highlighters. Note that, depending on your students and time, you may want to limit the number of data sheets you use for this step. Place students in groups of four and instruct them to analyze the data sheets as a group using the following questions:

- Which pieces of data could be used to support mandatory school uniforms in public schools? Mark those with one of the colored highlighters.
- Which pieces of data could be used to oppose mandatory school uniforms in public schools? Mark those with the other colored highlighter.
- What conclusions can be drawn from the data?
- Which pieces of data do you think are the most reliable? Why?

19. Remind students that it is important to explore different viewpoints relating to a public issue. Place students in pairs and give each pair a copy of “Arguments In Favor and Against”, located

in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 7, Lesson 7)*. Explain that pairs should discuss and analyze the different viewpoints described on the sheet.

20. Next, have pairs work together to connect core democratic values to some of the statements on the information sheet used in the previous step. Lead a class discussion based on the connections students have identified. Note that possible connections include the following:
- The idea of uniforms making schools safer could be connected to the core democratic value of the common good.
  - The idea that uniforms are costly could be connected to the core democratic value of fairness in that it might be considered unfair for poor students to have to purchase a uniform.
  - The idea that uniforms infringe on a student's freedom of expression could be connected to the core democratic value of individual rights.
21. Explain that in the next lesson, students will use all the information they have gathered in this lesson to make a decision on the public issue question relating to mandatory school uniforms in public schools and write a short essay expressing their opinion and support it with a reasoned argument.

### **Assessment**

Have students write a paragraph identifying and describing the public issue introduced in this lesson and two different points of view on the issue.