THE MAKING OF THE CONSTITUTION LESSON PLANS

Introduction: These lessons are based on the CALLA approach. See the end of the lessons for more information and resources on teaching with the CALLA approach.

Lesson Elements

Prepare: Engage students in the topic and identify objectives for the lesson. Find out what students already know about it and motivate them to learn more. Teach new vocabulary.

Present: Present new information. Explain the target learning strategy for the lesson. Model what the students are asked to do. Discuss connections to students' prior knowledge.

Practice: Give students an authentic, active task that they can do in a small group or in pairs. Remind students to use the target learning strategy.

Self-Evaluate: Question students so they will reflect on their own learning. Ask students to evaluate their own learning rather than wait for the teacher to assess them. Find out if using the learning strategy helped students' understanding.

Expand: Guide students on how to apply what they learned to their own lives. Point out other contexts where the learning strategy may help. Make connections between content and language or to the student's first language. When appropriate, request that parents contribute to learning.

The Making of the Constitution can be broken into three lesson themes:

- The People Who Made the Constitution
- The Culture of the Time
- Events Surrounding the Making of the Constitution

These lessons can be presented sequentially or individually.

1. Lesson Plan – The People Who Made the Constitution

Essential Question: How do individuals best represent the group?

Strategic focus - Personalize: How would you have represented your state at the Constitutional Convention?

Prepare

Ask students, "What does it mean to represent others? In our government, who represents you?**"** Lead a discussion about local representatives in government, work or school. Convey the basic idea that one person can speak for a group of people.

Explain the attitudes of early America. "Sometimes we ask others to represent us in making a decision. We can express our opinions and choose a representative we think will make the same decisions we would make. But in early America, it was more likely that 'distinguished citizens' spoke for others. A distinguished citizen might meant someone with property, or strong connections in society and business, and a good reputation. He was expected to be intelligent, well-educated, and have virtue. Notice I said 'he.' All the representatives were men. Women did not have a direct voice in the government.

"In the story we will read, we learn more about the men who represented the people in the states of early America. How do you think they made decisions about the new government?"

Stop to solicit student ideas on the basis of the representatives' decisions. Suggest possible motivations such as the good of the country as a whole, benefit to the economy of their own state, and benefit to their own business interests.

Introduce the essential question for the lesson: "As we read and discuss, we will also be thinking of our essential question for this lesson, 'How do individuals best represent the group?'"

Be sure students know the vocabulary that is important to understanding the story. See "Words in This Story" at the end of this document.

Present

Introduce the learning strategy to students. "As we read the story about the making of the Constitution, we will **personalize**. That means thinking of yourself in the situation you are studying. How would you feel? How would you act? Personalizing helps us to connect what we learn with our own experiences. I'm going to begin reading the story. Then I will show you how to personalize."

Read the story aloud, or have students read aloud, to “Today we usually call it the Constitutional Convention.”

Write notes on the board or screen as you talk through your response to this part. "I learned from the story that in 1787 the government is weak. And some protests worried people. So if I'm a representative, I have to go to Philadelphia to talk about improving the government, which operated at the time under the Articles of Confederation. I imagine I'm George Washington, since the story mentions him. We read that he wanted to stay home. Why do you think he did not want to go to the meeting at first?"

Give students a chance to respond. Possible answers might be, "He does not think it will be successful.” Or “He does not want to be active in public life anymore – he was a general in the war. He is tired of being a public figure and prefers a quiet life.”

Continue by saying, "I can personalize now. If I were George Washington, I would think maybe this meeting will not result in an agreement. The states are very independent and it will be hard to get them to work together. But I care deeply about the country and I want it to succeed. My own interests depend on the country being at peace. And people *do* respect me for my service in the war. Maybe the other delegates will come if I attend this meeting. So I'm going to Philadelphia to meet with the other states' delegates and try to work out a better

way for the country to operate. The story tells us that George Washington had led the Continental Army in the Revolutionary War. So, I think he wants the country as a whole to continue."

Possible notes on personalizing:

Personalizing	
George Washington	As a land owner and former general, I want the country I fought for to succeed. The state assembly asked me to be a delegate. People will think I didn't try hard enough if I do not attend. I decide to do my duty and go to Philadelphia.

Practice

Practice Stage 1

Instruct students, "Let's read some more of the story. As we do, let's *personalize*. Think of what you would do if you were a delegate to the convention. Look at the box called 'Portrait of the delegates.' Are these average people of the time? Was it common to attend college? No, it was very unusual at the time. Yet many of these men had received a college education. Look at their record of public service. They held high offices in their states. Some had signed the Declaration of Independence. Others had helped to work out the Articles of Confederation. With this background in mind, put yourself in their place. You are an important, busy man. You are probably wealthy. You are called to spend some weeks away from your business and home. It must be important for you to spend your time in Philadelphia. As we read about the convention, try to imagine what you would say as each of the men who is mentioned."

Ask students to form pairs and take notes as they listen or read along.

Read aloud or have students take turns reading from "Eventually, 55 men from 12 states took part" up to "Many were not sure the convention would succeed."

Have students compare their notes with their partners. Then ask several to share how they personalized in this part. Write their comments on a board or screen as shown below.

Possible notes on personalizing:

Personalizing	
James Madison (Virginia)	I have a good plan. I'm going to ask a man with more experience and a higher office to present it to the delegates.
Edmund Randolph (Governor of Virginia)	I like James Madison's plan. I will help him present it.
William Patterson (New Jersey)	I think the small states should have as much power as the large states.
Delegates in general	This is hard work. I am hot and tired. I miss my home and family.

Practice Stage 2

Direct students to continue personalizing as you read the story from "Three main issues divided the delegates" to "And, they said officials in every state must return escaped slaves to their owners — even if the slave escaped to a state that banned slavery."

Ask students to return to working with their partner and to think about the three main issues on which the delegates disagreed. "What would the people you represent want you to do about each issue? Imagine you are from a large state. What is your position on representation in Congress? What if you were from a small state?" Allow students to choose a particular delegate who is quoted in the text with whom to identify in giving their response.

List the issues on the board or screen as shown below.

Issue	**Personalize as...**	
How many representatives would each state have in Congress?	Delegate from a small state	Delegate from a large state
How would each state's population be counted?	Delegate from a state with many slaves	Delegate from a state with few slaves
Did the national government have the power to end slavery?	Delegate from a Northern state (ending slavery)	Delegate from a Southern (slave-holding) state

Give students time to discuss the issues with their partners. Then ask several to express the way they personalized on each issue.

Practice Stage 3

Instruct students to continue to personalize as you read the section beginning at "The Philadelphia Convention was reaching an end" to the end of the story. Before reading, tell them, “Remember the ‘Portrait of the delegates?’ Most were already leaders in their states. They expected to be part of the new government. Yet most Americans at the time did not have much of a voice in government. They were small farmers who valued their new independence from the British king. Imagine you are a delegate going home after the convention. How do you explain the new Constitution to the people you represent? Will they be angry with you? Think about how you will respond as you read the last part of the story.”

List the complaints about the Constitution on the board or screen:

Complaint	**Delegate’s Possible Response**
It gives power to a central government.	*It also shares power with the states.*
It does not specify people’s rights.	*The Constitution says only what the government can do. It does not list the rights of people. It assumes they exist.*
The president will become just like a king. He will have too much power.	*Power will be divided among three branches of government. The other branches will limit the power of the president.*

Ask students to say how they would respond to each complaint. Write their responses on the right side of the chart.

Self-Evaluate

Remind students of the essential question: How do individuals best represent the group? Lead a discussion on what they can use from the reading to help them answer that question. List several answers on the board or shared screen.

Ask students to review their notes and think about their experience with *personalizing* in relation to this story. "Now I'd like to ask you a question. Did using the strategy of *personalizing* help you understand the story? Can you imagine yourself as a delegate at the Constitutional Convention? Write your answer on a piece of paper to hand in at the end of class today."

Answer the question for yourself, "What will I remember next week when I think about the making of the Constitution?"

Expand

Ask students to think of other times they can use the strategy of *personalizing*. List their responses on the board or shared screen. Give other examples, such as, "When I read a novel, I can personalize by thinking of what I would do in a character's place. If I hear a story about a person or event in the news, I can personalize by imagining what I might do if I had a similar experience. Personalizing helps us connect new information to what we already know, and helps us remember it better. Try using it when you read something for your homework and let me know how it goes for you."

Additional resources on delegates:

http://teachingamericanhistory.org/convention/delegates/

Project work assignment:

Assignment A: Choose a delegate. Learn all you can about him. Write a letter home from the Constitutional Convention. In the letter, express the delegate's view of the convention and the issues being discussed.

Assignment B:

Imagine you are a dissenter of the Constitution. Write a letter to the newspaper stating your objections. I suggest this angle both because it adds a more populist element to the lesson, and because it might give students a more 360 degree view of the situation. Admittedly, my article is written largely from the POV of the delegates. Really getting your head around the anti-federalist view is also a very helpful way to understand American politics!

Words in This Story

amend – *v*. to add to or to change (a proposal or law)

assembly - *n.* a group of people who make and change laws for a government or organization

confederation - *n.* a group of people, countries or organizations that are joined together in some activity or effort

constitution – *n*. the written general laws and ideas that form a nation's system of government

convention – *n*. a large meeting for a special purpose

delegate – *n*. one sent to act for another; one who represents another

democracy – *n*. the system of government in which citizens vote to choose leaders or to make other important decisions

document – *n*. an official piece of paper with facts written on it, used as proof or support of something

formula - *n. mathematics* **:** a general fact or rule expressed in letters and symbols

protest – *n*. an event at which people gather together to show strong disapproval about something

represent – *v*. to act in the place of someone else