

Using Important Documents in United States History

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Winter Haven Senior High

1. Lesson Summary

Summary:

Throughout our nation's history documents have been written to help shape and define our form of government. Individuals have played key roles in developing the ideas that have been used in these documents and have shaped our nation's history. In this lesson the students will use original documents to understand how our concept of democracy changed over the period from 1776 through 1791. The people that will be used include: Thomas Jefferson, Samuel Adams, John Adams, George Washington, James Madison, and Alexander Hamilton. They can also study the role played by John Locke and Adam Smith in shaping the views of the preceding men. Each of these men played a role in the development one or more of the following documents. The documents used will be "The Declaration of Independence, Articles of Confederation, Land Ordinance of 1785, Northwest Ordinance 1787, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights".

Objectives:

1. To use original documents to understand the development and shaping of our system of government.
2. To understand how our concept of democracy changed from the period of the Articles of Confederation to the ratification of our present Constitution and the Bill of Rights.
3. To see how the Land Ordinance of 1785 provided for the orderly development of vast new territory.
4. To see how the Northwest Ordinance 1787 provided for the addition of additional states and how it addressed the issue of slavery in this territory.
5. To explain the difference between a constitutional monarchy, a confederacy, and a federal republic form of government.
6. To recognize the strengths and weaknesses our country encountered operating under the Articles of Confederation.
7. To understand the differences between the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution of 1787.
8. To understand why some people wanted to have a new form of government and others did not.
9. To understand the differences found in the two documents.
10. To understand why it became necessary to add a Bill of Rights and how this document protects our freedoms.

United States History Event or Era:

The time frame used was from the signing of the Declaration of Independence through the ratification of the Bill of Rights.

Grade Level:

This lesson can be used at the high school level and with modifications the middle school level.

Materials:

An excellent resource for this lesson is available from the Center for Civic Education. Classroom sets of materials for high school, middle school and elementary students are free for the asking by contacting the Center for Civic Education, 5146 Douglas Fir Road, Calabasas, CA 91302-1467. American history and government texts can be used in this lesson as well. Additional information can be found on the web using the Google search.

Lesson Time:

The length of time used for this lesson can be adjusted according to your needs. It is suggested that you spend between 45 minutes and an hour for both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Research and discussion of the Articles of Confederation, the Land Ordinance of 1785 and the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 can be combined and should require an hour class period.

Procedure:

A great deal of information can be acquired from “We the People” materials, American history and government textbooks and the Internet. Each of the documents will be discussed to see how they illustrate the nation’s changing attitudes toward government and democracy. Discussion of the individuals that verbalized and worked toward the ratification of these documents is an important part of the lesson. In addition a discussion of men like John Locke and Adam Smith is necessary to see how their writings and views influenced our founding fathers and their work. A partial list of questions to introduce the documents could include the following.

- a. How did men like John Locke and Adam Smith affect the attitudes and thinking of the times?
- b. Why did some colonists wish to break away from English rule?
- c. Why did the colonists see the necessity of verbalizing their displeasure in the Declaration of Independence?
- d. Why did the writers of the Articles of Confederation choose to keep the central government weak and insure that the states would retain most of the power?
- e. What were some of the weaknesses found in the government established by the Articles of Confederation?
- f. Why was it necessary to change or replace the Articles of Confederation?
- g. How was the government set up by the Constitution unique compared to other forms of government?
- h. Why was it necessary to add a Bill of Rights to the Constitution?
- i. How does the Bill of Rights show that many citizens still did not trust a strong central government?
- j. When and how did our nation realize that the power of the states needed to be limited as well in order to safe guard our individual rights?

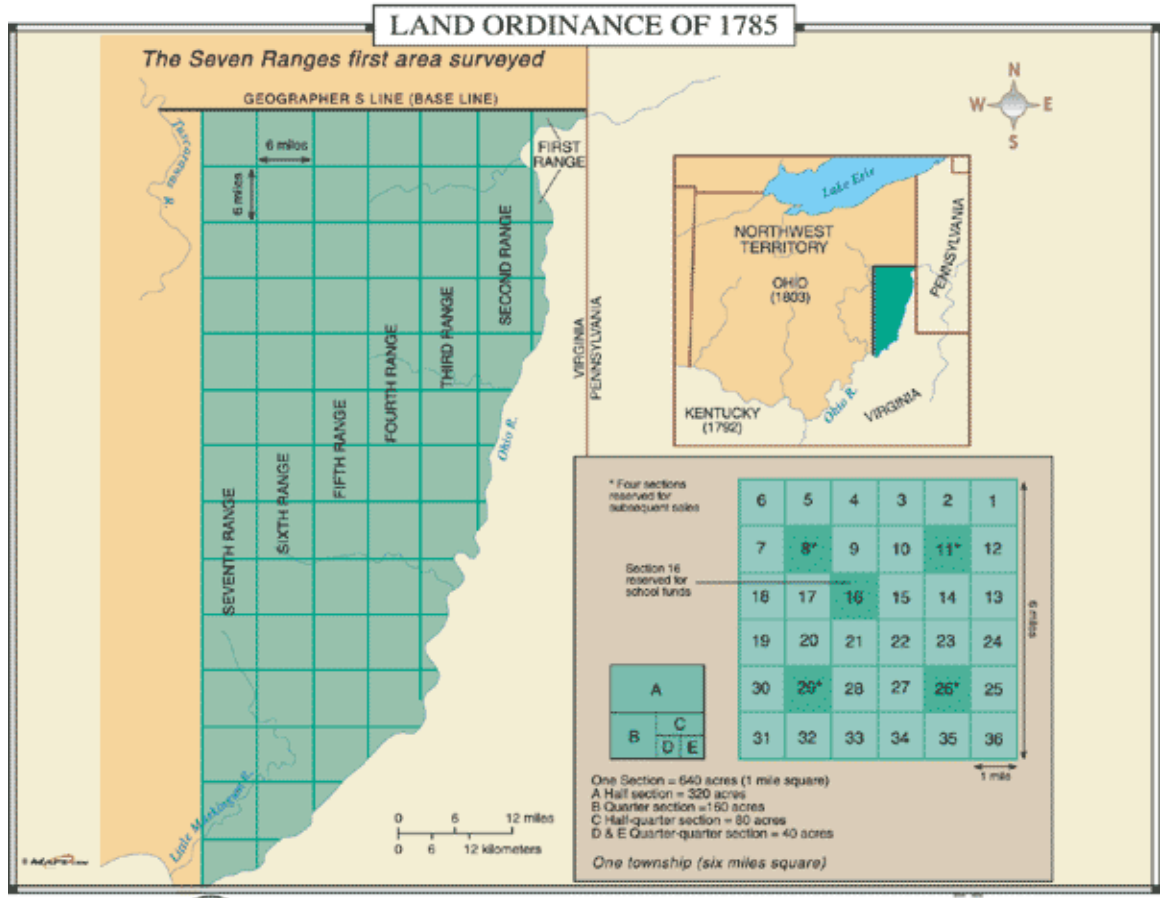
Resources:

1. We the People “The Citizen and the Constitution”, (High School) Center for Civic Education, 5146 Douglas Fir Road, Calabasas, CA 91302-1467, 2001.
2. We the People (Middle School) same as above
3. Magruder’s American Government, McClenaghan, William A., Prentice Hall, 2004.
4. United States Government, Remy, Richard C., Glencoe, 2006.
5. The Americans, Danzer, Klorde de Alua, Krieger, and Wilson, McDougal Lettell 2005.
6. American History
7. <http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/>
8. <http://www.usconstitution.net/articles.htm>
9. <http://www.statelib.lib.in.us/www/ihb/resources/docldord.html>
10. <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=8&page=transcript>
11. <http://www.statelib.lib.in.us/www/ihb/resources/docnword.html>
12. <http://www.usconstitution.net/const.html>
13. http://www.usconstitution.net/consttop_pre.html
14. <http://www.usconstitution.net/glossary.html>

Use the documents in the following handouts to answer these questions!

1. What was the name of the government that existed in the US when each of these Ordinances were passed?
2. What were some of the important provisions in each of these documents?
3. Identify what you consider to be the most important provisions for each of the documents.
4. How does the handout #2 relate to handouts 1 and 3?

Student Handout #1



Student Handout #2

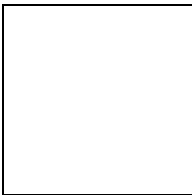


Student Handout #3

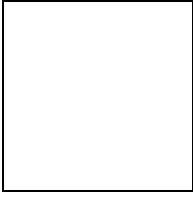


Assessment:

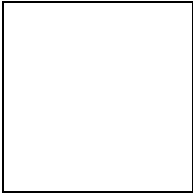
1. Use DBQ: Developing Democracy in the United States 1776-1791 - A link is provided to find the DBQ
2. The following pictures are of men that had an influence on the writing of documents that helped to shape and define our idea of democracy. Discuss the role that each had on defining these ideas and how they influenced the thinking of each other.



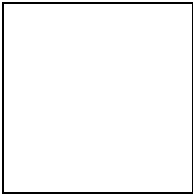
John Locke



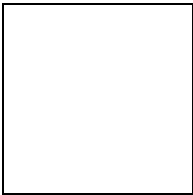
Adam Smith



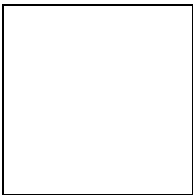
Thomas Jefferson



George Washington



James Madison



Benjamin Franklin