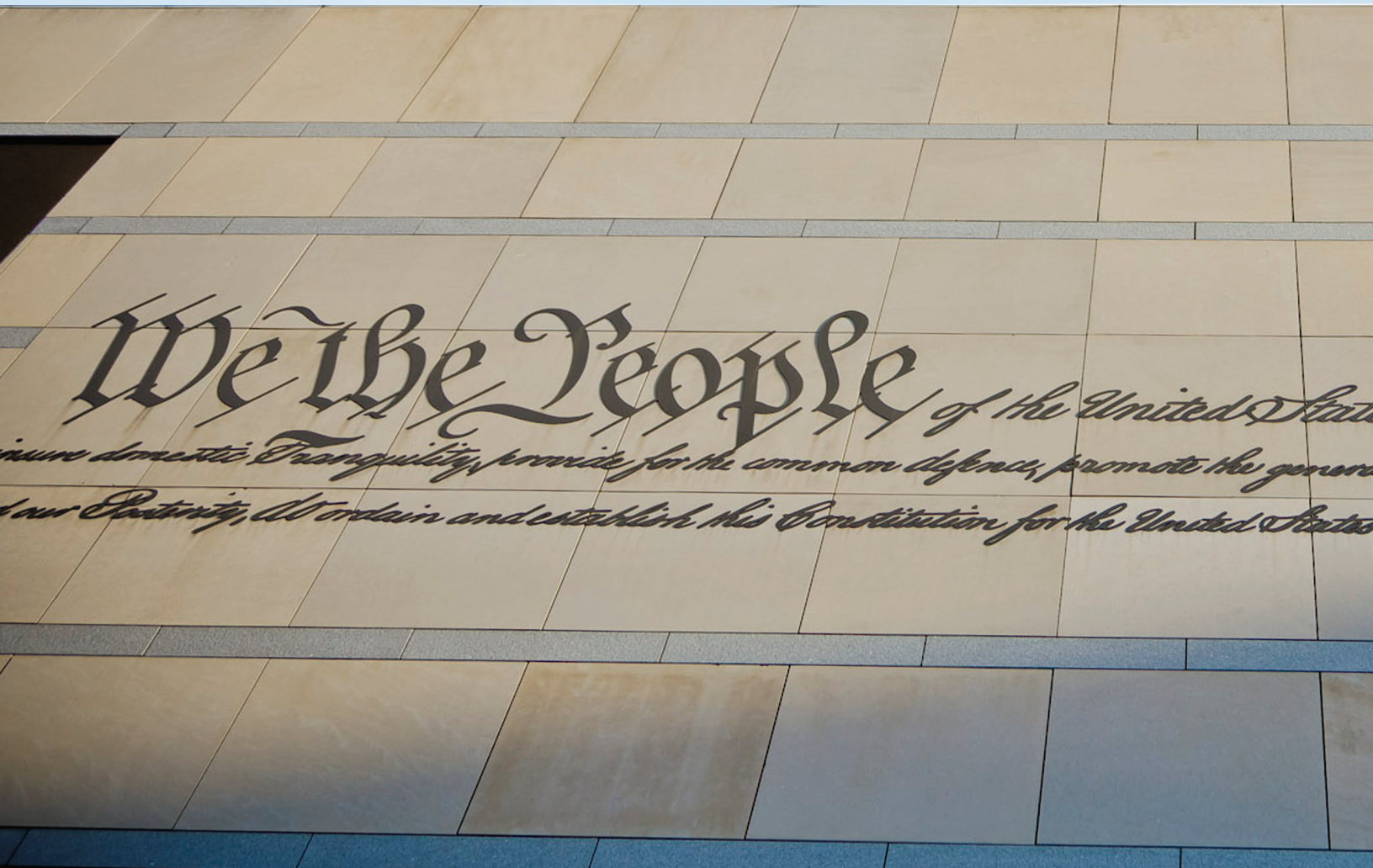


CREATING YOUR OWN TOWN HALL POSTER

★★ Lesson Plan ★★



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ABOUT THIS LESSON

The National Constitution Center's Town Hall posters and lessons are engaging ways to facilitate dialogue around important constitutional issues with students. This lesson provides the steps and resources to help teachers and students develop their own town hall posters and activities. It begins with identifying the key parts of the Town Hall posters and lessons. Next, students will identify a key constitutional issue that is impacting society, learn how to formulate an engaging essential question, and build resources and activities to support the deliberation of that issue.

AUTHOR

Marc Brasof, Education Fellow

BACKGROUND

Walter Parker (2003) argues that in order for students to learn how to thrive in a pluralistic democracy, they must learn how to play “moral musical chairs.” This act entails students taking on various perspectives when confronted with controversial issues—often different from the position they are most comfortable with—in order to gain a deeper appreciation of diverse views. Classroom deliberation on pressing and controversial constitutional issues is a promising approach to address Parker’s argument and an important strategy for developing a healthy civic disposition. The National Constitution Center has produced many resources to help facilitate such dialogue, one being the Town Hall poster and lesson. These resources supported a larger initiative called *The Exchange*. This was a series of nationwide conversation on current constitutional issues with students from around the United States and its territories. Students, teachers, and scholars discussed constitutional issues such as: students rights in school, immigration and health care reform, evolution, intersection of race and law, and much more. The goal of such conversations was for students to gain a deeper understanding of a controversial issue and its relevance to their lives and the constitution. Students’ deliberations were not meant necessarily to facilitate agreement but more so to understand the roots of the issue, why people hold divergent views on the matter, and how law is impacting the conversation.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Examine various perspectives of a controversial issue in American society.
- Deliberate on the causes and consequences of a controversial issue.
- Identify, apply, and synthesize how to frame controversial issue in order to gain a deeper understanding of the diverse views surrounding it.

STANDARDS

NCSS Civic Ideals and Practices

An understanding of civic ideals and practices of citizenship is critical to full participation in society and is a central purpose of the social studies.

Students confront questions such as:

- What is civic participation and how can I be involved?
- How has the meaning of citizenship evolved?
- What is the balance between rights and responsibilities?
- What is the role of the citizen in the community and the nation and as a member of the world community?
- How can I make a positive difference?

ACTIVITY

1. Download and have students examine the Town Hall poster on *Cyber Speech and the First Amendment*. Ask students the following questions about the poster part of the document and then record their answers on the board:

- How is the poster organized?
- What type of information is presented?
- Does the image present a particular point of view or is it neutral? How do you know?
- How does the poster present a balanced summary of students' cyber speech rights?
- What conflicting values (liberty, justice, equality, freedom, etc.) are presented to help frame the issue?
- How do questions in the summary help readers hone in on the core problems that need to be addressed?
- What are some ways in which the poster invites readers into the conversation?

2. Identifying a Controversial Issue and Writing an Essential Question. There are a couple of ways into this.

- Have students select an issue with constitutional relevancy. There are multiple approaches that can be employed:
 - i. Recent court case—what constitutional question did the court address? Use *The Oyez Project* to help identify the question.
 - ii. Issue in the news—*Constitution Daily* is the Museum's blog that reports on current events, giving them a constitutional spin. *Constitution Daily* also leverages social media to discuss current events and the constitution. Twitter: @ConDailyBlog.
 - iii. New or controversial school rule or policy—While the main source of information can be communication channels within your school district, *Education Week* is a national news outlet for pertinent educational issues around the country. Also, the *Marshall-Brennan Curriculum* uses textbooks that address how constitutional issues directly impact students' lives.
 - iv. Look at a constitutional amendment and determine a phrase or word that needs more defining. For example, what is an "unreasonable" search and seizure? Is capital punishment "cruel?" Students can also use Cornell University Law School's *Legal Information Institute* to search for cases by subject. Here students can connect a topic to a series of court cases. If the language is too difficult for students, search a selected case on *The Oyez Project* instead.

- If students are not sure what issues they are interested in, investigating the values that undergird controversial issues is another promising approach. Controversial issues in American society tend to take on certain ethical paradoxes, which create difficult dilemmas to resolve; that is, there are conflicting values and ideas that undergird public policy conversation such as individual freedom, censorship, privacy, security, equality equity, and efficiency. Take for example students' cyber speech rights in schools. When considering how much freedom of expression and speech students should have, deliberators need to resolve the following dilemma: What is more important, a students individual freedom of expression or censorship for the benefit of the community? Undergirding this example are values that sometimes clash such as freedom vs. security. What does each value mean, and how does our definition impact the ways in which we view an issue?
- Write the essential question that will drive the dialog. Select a central question that will give purpose and direction to the Town Hall Poster. Here are some examples: www.constitutioncenter.org/the-exchange/past-topics.

3. Writing a Balanced Summary. In order to facilitate open and productive dialogue about a controversial issue, the way in which the text frames the argument must be balanced. In any constitutional dilemma, there are always at least two sides, often equal in their arguments. It is important that when summarizing the issue, facts and not opinion are presented. Here are some guiding questions and resources to help with this stage:

- What is the issue?
- Why is the issue controversial? What value(s) undergird the conversation and how does each side interpret them?
- What constitutional phrase or clause applies?
- What are some key questions that help readers focus in on the issue?
- Discuss various perspectives people have of the issue. Such a dialog can be organized in “agree” and “disagree” or “pros” and “cons.” See *Town Hall Poster* examples.
- Is there an image that highlights the issue without creating bias towards one side?
See *Town Hall Posters* for examples.

Resources that might help:

- The National Constitution Center's online constitution has not only the text but Linda Monk's analysis of what each part means. After selecting a section of the Constitution to examine, there is a link towards the bottom, “Linda Monk,” which provides analysis of the basic controversy surrounding that section. This might be a great starting point for describing the issue.
- *Procon.org* is a non-profit charity that provides unbiased educational resources on controversial issues. Research-based pros and cons of many controversial issues are laid out as well as summaries that are very accessible to a wide range of students.

4. Design your poster. After examining the *Town Hall Poster* examples students should have a good idea of what their posters should include. However, there are great resources on-line that can also help students think through this process.

- Cain Project: A Guide to Designing a Poster: www.owl.net.rice.edu/~cainproj/designing.html
- Poster Design Computer Programs: www.techvyom.com/8-best-poster-design-apps.html

ASSESSMENT OPTIONS

- 1.** Students can work in groups of three and present their issue in a debate format. One student can represent the pro side and the other con. A third student can act as moderator, presenting the basic facts of the issue and driving essential questions, and facilitating dialogue between presenters and audience. See project checklist below.
- 2.** Each Town Hall Poster can be posted and students can engage in a gallery walk with post-it notes in which they post their thoughts on the issue on posters.
- 3.** Have students engage in a conversation about the issue presented on the Town Hall Poster, which can be graded using the scored discussion technique.

PROJECT CHECKLIST

WORK HABITS—XX points

- ___ Worked well with partners and actions of group did not inhibit ability to achieve goal
(did your part on time, came prepared, helped each other)
- ___ Utilized given research time in class
- ___ Group/Individual was not asked to remained focus during any part of study

PRESENTATION—XX points

- ___ Moderator accurately describes facts of the case, past cases, and constitutional question
- ___ Important court case name is presented
- ___ Impact of court decision
- ___ Pro side of the argument presented
- ___ Pro side connected arguments to appropriate amendment in Bill of Rights or constitutional provision
- ___ Con side of the argument presented
- ___ Con side connected arguments to appropriate amendment in Bill of Rights or constitutional provision
- ___ Students were given time to discuss the question
- ___ Eye contact with entire class during speeches
- ___ All members projected voice
- ___ Time restraints were respected
- ___ Came to podium with a prepared speech in form of outline and/or flash cards
- ___ Minus 10 points for reading off of speech for most of the presentation

POSTER—XX points

- ___ Name of issue written largely
- ___ Neat, does not look thrown together
- ___ Pros/cons listed
- ___ Image related to issue
- ___ 2-5 sentences summarizing issue and connects to the Constitution
- ___ Space provided for post-it notes
- ___ Creative poster (colorful, displays effort)

FURTHER RESOURCES

Active Listening is a strategy to increase participants' abilities to engage in dialogue with each other.

www.studygs.net/listening.htm

The Dialogue Game has some helpful resources on rules, roles, and procedures for engaging in group dialogue.

www.theinvisibleschool.org/books/rules-of-the-dialogue-game

The IRAC method is used in law schools as a framework for understanding written court opinions.

www.lawschoolsurvival.org/index.php/legal-writing/the-irac-method

A legal term encyclopedia.

www.law.cornell.edu/wex

***Public Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making* by Deborah Stone is a wonderful textbook that highlights how to define values that undergird public policy.**

ISSUE

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WHAT DO YOU THINK?

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Whether planning a field trip, looking for innovative ways to enhance classroom instruction or seeking a deeper understanding of American history and active citizenship, the National Constitution Center is an educator's ultimate civic learning resource.

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