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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2006 Volume II: The Supreme Court in American Political History

Obedience and Defiance: The Rule of Law in American History

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This unit will be useful for both an American history class and an American government class. It is also useful for Advanced Placement classes of the same variety. The unit is meant for students on the high school level. The unit itself deals with the obedience and defiance of Americans to the rule of law over the course of our history. Specifically, it is designed to require students to absorb the arguments presented in our history through research about pinnacle moments that have centered on the conflict between those with the willingness to abide to the law and those who seek to make drastic changes to the law as it exists. The unit will culminate in a role-play exercise. The long and the short of my rationale for this particular exercise is that it provokes students, who clearly have the penchant for adolescent rebellion, into inquiring about prominent figures in our nation's history while concurrently tapping into characteristics many of them may possess. My hope is that students will not only gather important information important to our understanding of American history but also connect themselves to it through dramatic presentation. Adjunct to this educational exercise is a voyage into the field of social psychology. Students will use theories of prominent theorists to evaluate our history and the people who have worked to profoundly reshape it. The unit ends when students have completed a series of seven role play reenactments and subsequently used the information gathered from them to answer this question: Over the course of American History have the people of this nation been a defiant rebellious sort or a compliant and conformist group: express the validity of your position with historical evidence.

(Developed for AP U.S History, grade 11; recommended for AP U.S. History, AP Government, and U.S. History, grades 11-12)

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