



YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2012 Volume III: The American Presidency

Behind the Scenes of the Constitutional Convention

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by Nicole Fraser

History is often a topic that makes many students yawn. This unit attempts to overcome the wall of indifference students have built towards history. The main topics of the unit are the Constitutional Convention and the Presidency. Students use the primary sources of the Federalist and Anti-Federalist essays to explore 3 main ideas debated during the Constitutional Convention: Number of Executives and Term Length, Election and Reelection, and Executive Veto. The activities use a variety of resources to examine the founding of our government including text, video, comics, and paintings. The unit includes extensive background information on the Convention, the debates of the executive branch during the Conventions, and summarizes several of the Federalist and Anti-Federalist essays. The students are led through several activities that challenge them to critically think through the ideas of our Constitution. Students are briefly introduced to the background of the Convention. They are then challenged with the task of analyzing the ideas in Article II of the Constitution and various sections from the Federalist and Anti-Federalist essays. The culminating task in this unit is a mock debate in which students must take on the view of either a Federalist or Anti-Federalist while defending their view on the Presidency.

(Developed for Social Studies and Literacy, grade 5; recommended for Social Studies and Literacy, grade 5)

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