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Understanding Democracy in the Elementary Grades

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Introduction

As a primary-level teacher, I am responsible for creating a classroom that operates as a community, where everyone's voice included in the day-to-day environment and provides opportunities for students to learn through literature, science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics. Key components of our school theme include problem solving and the understanding that social-emotional learning is integral to academic learning. This six-week unit will provide my students the opportunity to build a classroom community and to develop their vision of the responsibilities of each citizen within that community.

Edgewood Magnet School is a Kindergarten through eighth grade school in New Haven where I teach in a self-contained classroom. I find the neighborhood/magnet setting a rewarding environment, with students coming to school each day from a variety of home circumstances and with differences in academic levels. As a result of these variables, the children have differing levels of background knowledge and life experiences. The classroom is a mixture of varied ethnicities, economic strata and social and emotional strengths and weaknesses. The use of collaboration allows all students at all levels to learn in an inherently differentiated environment, learning new concepts and experiencing the hands-on practices and demonstrations in this curriculum unit on understanding how we will all work together. Throughout the school year, the Kindergarten curriculum focuses heavily on social development. Our school staff is currently mandated to develop rich curriculum that supports our new S.T.E.A.M. focus, with support through social/emotional programs. This unit will be in direct alignment with my responsibility to design curriculum that helps our students learn social and community responsibility.

Young children often have a natural inclination to problem-solve through fairness. But the question arises, what is fairness? How is equity determined and by whom? This unit introduces a variety of governmental structures with the plan for students to role-play each as we organize and determine the rules of classroom. They will explore monarchy, anarchy, dictatorship, communism and finally, democracy with the hope that they will discover the advantages of governing through a core set of values, combining individual choice and equal opportunity, and striving for the common good.

Within the set of compelling questions in the Connecticut Social Studies Framework for young learners are: How do we learn about people from the past? How do past actions of people in our community still influence our community today? What historical sources can we study from the past? (1) Teaching younger students

about our nation's history and how the United States government works is quite challenging, explaining the big ideas of freedom, justice and civil rights. The essential questions, *What makes a good citizen? What makes a good leader? How do members of a community help each other? Why do we need rules?* provide some specific context as we explore these grand ideas.

The unit begins with the reading of two foundation-setting picture books: *Let's Chat about Democracy: Exploring Forms of Government in a Treehouse* by Michelle A. Balconi and *We the Kids: The Preamble of the Constitution of the United States* by David Catrow. The first text tells the story of a group of friends sharing a giant treehouse recently built in a new town park and their need to find a fair and just way for everyone to enjoy access to and activities in the treehouse. With subtle guidance and suggestions from an ever-present park gardener and caretaker, Mrs. Quinn, the children explore experiences with monarchy, anarchy, dictatorship and communism only to find that these options lack freedom and choice. Through their own experiences the children decide that democracy is the best form of governing the treehouse. The second book is as the title describes, an approachable look at the Preamble that helps students with the difficult language and introduces an awareness of our Constitution.

This unit provides knowledge about the democratic system along with an opportunity for my students to decide how our classroom might run like a democracy. They will work like the founding fathers to create an age-appropriate, student-designed constitution that will guide our classroom throughout the year.

Introduction to forms of government

The five forms of government students learn about during the introduction to the unit are discussed here to provide some basic, general understanding. Throughout the following descriptions are the connecting storylines of *Let's Chat about Democracy: Exploring Forms of Government in a Treehouse,* summarizing how the children are working to determine the type of government that will work best in their new city park treehouse.

Monarchy

A monarchy, (from the Greek *monos*, "one," and *archein*, "to rule") is a form of government that has a monarch as Head of State. The distinguishing characteristic of monarchies is that the Head of State holds their office for life, unlike in a republic, where a president is normally elected for a certain amount of time.

The term monarchy is also used to refer to the people and institutions that make up the royal establishment, or to the realm in which the monarchy functions. Elective monarchies, distinguished by the monarchs being appointed for life, have in most cases been succeeded by hereditary monarchies. In the hereditary system, the position of monarch involves inheritance according to an order of succession, usually within one royal family tracing its origin back to a historical dynasty or bloodline. In some cases, the royal family may claim to hold authority by virtue of God's choosing, or other religious-based authority.

In most countries with monarchies, the monarch serves as a symbol of continuity and statehood. Many states have a strong convention against the monarch becoming involved in partisan politics. In some cases, the symbolism of monarchy alongside the symbolism of democracy can lead to division over the apparently contradictory principles. (2)

In the treehouse story, the character Allie feels she is entitled to rule over the treehouse and make of the decisions because her family donated the land to the town for the new community park. The neighborhood children wonder, “who made her queen?” As Allie goes about making plans about just how the treehouse will be used, she outwardly disregards any suggestions from the others. Her response is that her family had the land for hundreds of years so why shouldn’t she be in charge. Mrs. Quinn, overhearing the discussion, helps the children understand that Allie’s family was the benefactor that had donated their private property to the town, making it now public property. Some of the students remembered learning about some kings and queens in school who made all the decisions and the people had no choice. They made a group decision to do whatever they wanted!

Anarchy

The children all arrive in the morning, each with their own ideas and sports equipment, games, toy, backpacks and wagons filled stuffed with supplies and each ready to use the space as they had individually decided. This situation quickly becomes uncomfortable and the disagreements ensue. Belongings get damaged and lost and all seems to be in chaos. One again, their neighbor Mrs. Quinn steps in to help the children realize that this approach to governing their space looks like anarchy.

Anarchy refers to a society, entity, group of people, or a single person that rejects hierarchy. The word originally meant leaderlessness, but Pierre-Joseph Proudhon adopted the term in his 1840 treatise *What Is Property?* to refer to anarchism, a new political philosophy which advocates stateless societies based on voluntary associations.(3)

In practical terms, anarchy can refer to the limitation or elimination of traditional forms of government and institutions. It can also describe a nation that has no system of government or central rule. Anarchy is primarily advocated by individual anarchists who propose replacing government with voluntary institutions.

This political philosophy advocates self-governed societies based on voluntary institutions; individual freedom, voluntary association, and opposition to the state are important beliefs of anarchism. (4)

Dictatorship

A dictatorship is a government headed by a dictator or more generally any authoritarian or totalitarian government. Although a dictatorship is often seen as equivalent to a police state, the term *dictatorship* refers to the way the leaders gain and hold power, not the watch kept on the citizens. Some dictators have been popular enough not to have to employ many oppressive measures. The term generally has a pejorative meaning in reference to a government that does not allow a nation to determine its own political direction by popular election. (5)

Originally a legitimate military office in the Roman Republic, a "dictator" was an official given emergency powers by the Senate. The dictator had absolute power, but for a limited time. This was initially intended to deal with some state of emergency. In modern times, claims of such states of emergency are often used to justify seizures of power and suspensions of civil rights. In the 20th and 21st centuries, the term *dictatorship* has come to mean a form of government in which absolute power is concentrated in the hands of a dictator and sometimes his supporters; it can also refer to the consolidation of power by a single-party, military, head of state, or head of government.

Many dictators have held the formal title of "President," but wield extraordinary, often non-constitutional or de facto powers. In the case of many African or Asian former colonies, after achieving their independence, the presidential regime was gradually transformed into a dictatorship, but the title nominally remained. Dictators rarely hold titles like "prime minister" because that position suggests a secondary status to a Head of State. Communist dictators, by contrast, often held different titles, such as "General Secretary." Some dictators that have come to power by a military coup gain or continue to hold a military post - this is the common case in the Latin American dictatorial regimes. (6)

As the children continue to work toward an agreeable government, out of the chaos of anarchy, Mikey begins to run the treehouse and area around it like a dictator. He, and his “staff” all wearing white t-shirts tell the others where they may go, what they may do and for how long. His rationale to the others is that he knows best and if everyone just listens to him, it will all work out. Over the next several weeks, fewer and fewer children were coming to the park which left the treehouse to Mikey and his dictates for their sole use.

Communism

Back at home, the children are working on a new plan to somehow begin to enjoy the park and treehouse again. Jack shares his idea that everyone can use the park equally. Hour by hour the children will move around the park, shifting around in small groups to play soccer, basketball, kickball, and of course, have some time in the treehouse…once a day, every day. This certainly seemed better than have someone tell you what to do like in a monarchy or dictatorship or the chaos they experienced during the day of no plans. Now everyone can cooperate and be equal.

The children had come upon a communist structure. Communism is a term that can refer to one of several things: a social and economic system, an ideology which supports that system, or a political movement that wishes to implement that system. (7)

As a social and economic system, communism would be a type of egalitarian society with no state, no privately-owned means of production, and no social classes. All property is owned cooperatively and collectively, by the community as a whole, and all people have equal social and economic status and rights. Human need or advancement is not left unsatisfied because of poverty and is rather solved through distribution of resources as needed. (8)

Once again, the children find that this approach was not as comfortable as Jack had hoped. Many wanted to spend more time in one location, for example, practicing soccer instead of having to leave that area at the sound of the bell and be required to do something else. They were following a schedule and a set of rules but there was no opportunity to choise where they spent their time.

History of Democracy

Democracy in ancient Greece served as one of the first forms of self-rule government in the ancient world. The system and ideas employed by the ancient Greeks had great influences on how democracy developed, and its impact on the formation of the United States government.

The ancient Greeks were the first to create a democracy. The word “democracy” comes from two Greek words

that mean people (*demos*) and rule (*kratos*). Democracy is the idea that the citizens of a country should take an active role in the government of their country and manage it directly or through elected representatives. In addition, it supports the idea that the people can replace their government through peaceful transfers of power rather than violent uprising or revolution. Thus, a key part of democracy is that the people have a voice. (9)

The first known democracy in the world was in Athens. Athenian democracy developed around the fifth century B.C.E. The Greek idea of democracy was different from present-day democracy because, in Athens, all adult citizens were required to take an active part in the government. If they did not fulfill their duty they would be fined and sometimes marked with red paint. The Athenian definition of "citizens" was also different from what we view of as modern-day citizens: only free men were considered citizens in Athens. Women, children, and slaves were not considered citizens and therefore could not vote.

Each year 500 names were chosen from all the citizens of ancient Athens. Those 500 citizens had to actively serve in the government for one year. During that year, they were responsible for making new laws and controlled all parts of the political process. When a new law was proposed, all the citizens of Athens had the opportunity to vote on it. To vote, citizens had to attend the assembly on the day the vote took place. This form of government is called direct democracy. (10)

The Roman Republic describes the period in which the city-state of Rome existed as a republican government (from 509 B.C. to 27 B.C.), one of the earliest examples of representative democracy in the world. Prior to the republic, Etruscan kings who lived nearby in central Italy ruled Rome. (11) Once the last of these kings was overthrown in 509 B.C., Rome's wealthiest citizens established a republican government by creating various assemblies of Roman citizens. These assemblies decided important matters for the city on behalf of its population. The early republican Senate clearly held a bias towards the interests of the wealthiest citizens. After all, only members of the patrician class could hold office. Therefore, the plebeians, who made up the majority of the soldiers in the Roman army, staged protests outside the city walls. (12)

This conflict led to the establishment of other legislative bodies, such as the *Concilium Plebis* or Council of Plebs, the *Comitia Centuriata*, and the *Comita Tributa* or the tribal assemblies. In the Council of Plebs and tribal assemblies, laws would be passed based on the discussion of important issues that took place in the Senate. There, senators recommended which policies to implement. (13)

The Senate and assemblies worked together to appoint executive officials called magistrates, enacted laws, and sought to increase Rome's territorial holdings throughout the Italian peninsula. The Republic began to engage in wars with its neighboring rivals, slowly eliminating threats to its superiority in the Mediterranean. By the first century B.C., the Roman Republic stood alone as the dominant power in the Mediterranean region. (14)

The United States has a representative democracy. Representative democracy is a government in which citizens vote for representatives who create and change laws that govern the people rather than getting to vote directly on the laws themselves.

Characteristics of a Democracy

Direct - A direct democracy is one in which every citizen votes on all important decisions. One of the first direct democracies was in Athens, Greece. All the citizens would gather to vote in the main square on major issues. A direct democracy becomes difficult when the population grows.

Representative – Also called a democratic republic, people elect representatives to run the government. The United States is a representative democracy. The citizens elect representatives such as the president, members of congress, and senators to run the government. Parliamentary (Britain) prime minister

Citizens rule - The power of the government must rest in the hands of the citizens either directly or through elected representatives.

Free elections - Democracies conduct free and fair elections where all citizens are entitled to vote how they want.

Majority rule with individual rights - In a democracy, the majority of the people will rule, but the rights of the individual are protected. While the majority may make the decisions, each individual has certain rights such as free speech, freedom of religion, and protection under the law.

Limitations on Lawmakers - In a democracy there are limits placed on the elected officials, such as limited power and term limits.

Citizen participation - The citizens of a democracy must participate for it to work. They must understand the issues and vote. Also, in most democracies today, all citizens are allowed to vote, with no restrictions because of, for example, race, gender, or wealth as there was in the past.

Democracy in America

The founding fathers of the United States were tasked with the responsibility of creating a brand-new government. The Constitution of the United States established America's national government and fundamental laws and guaranteed certain basic rights for its citizens. It was signed on September 17, 1787, by delegates to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia. Under America's first governing document, the Articles of Confederation, the national government was weak, and states operated like independent countries. At the 1787 convention, delegates devised a plan for a stronger federal government with three branches—executive, legislative and judicial—along with a system of checks and balances to ensure no single branch would have too much power. The Bill of Rights were 10 amendments guaranteeing basic individual protections, such as freedom of speech and religion, that became part of the Constitution in 1791. To date, there are 27 constitutional amendments. (15)(16)

America's first constitution, the Articles of Confederation, was ratified in 1781, a time when the nation was a loose confederation of states, each operating like independent countries. The national government was comprised of a single legislature, the Congress of the Confederation; there was no president or judicial branch. The Articles of Confederation gave Congress the power to govern foreign affairs, conduct war and regulate currency; however, in reality these powers were sharply limited because Congress had no authority to enforce its requests to the states for money or troops.

Soon after America won its independence from Great Britain with its 1783 victory in the American Revolution, it became increasingly evident that the young republic needed a stronger central government in order to remain stable. (17)

In 1786, Alexander Hamilton, a lawyer and politician from New York, called for a constitutional convention to discuss the matter. The Confederation Congress, which in February 1787 endorsed the idea, invited all 13 states to send delegates to a meeting in Philadelphia.(18)

On May 25, 1787, the Constitutional Convention opened in Philadelphia at the Pennsylvania State House, now known as Independence Hall, where the Declaration of Independence had been adopted 11 years earlier. There were 55 delegates in attendance, representing all 13 states except Rhode Island, which refused to send representatives because it did not want a powerful central government interfering in its economic business. George Washington, who'd become a national hero after leading the Continental Army to victory during the American Revolution, was selected as president of the convention by unanimous vote. (19)

The delegates (who also became known as the "framers" of the Constitution) were a well-educated group that included merchants, farmers, bankers and lawyers. Many had served in the Continental Army, colonial legislatures or the Continental Congress (known as the Congress of the Confederation as of 1781). In terms of religious affiliation, most were Protestants. Eight delegates were signers of the Declaration of Independence, while six had signed the Articles of Confederation. (20)

At age 81, Pennsylvania's Benjamin Franklin (1706-90) was the oldest delegate, while the majority of the delegates were in their 30s and 40s. Political leaders not in attendance at the convention included Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) and John Adams (1735-1826), who were serving as U.S. ambassadors in Europe. John Jay (1745-1829), Samuel Adams (1722-1803) and John Hancock (1737-93) were also absent from the convention. Virginia's Patrick Henry (1736-99) was chosen to be a delegate but refused to attend the convention because he didn't want to give the central government more power, fearing it would endanger the rights of states and individuals. (21)

Reporters and other visitors were barred from the convention sessions, which were held in secret to avoid outside pressures. However, Virginia's James Madison (1751-1836) kept a detailed account of what transpired behind closed doors. (In 1837, Madison's widow Dolley sold some of his papers, including his notes from the convention debates, to the federal government for $30,000.) (22)

The delegates had been tasked by Congress with amending the Articles of Confederation; however, they soon began deliberating proposals for an entirely new form of government. After intensive debate, which continued throughout the summer of 1787 and at times threatened to upset the proceedings, they developed a plan that established three branches of national government–executive, legislative and judicial. A system of checks and balances was put into place so that no single branch would have too much authority. The specific powers and responsibilities of each branch were also laid out. (23)

Among the more difficult issues was the question of state representation in the national legislature. Delegates from larger states wanted population to determine how many representatives a state could send to Congress, while small states called for equal representation. The issue was resolved by the Connecticut Compromise, which proposed a bicameral legislature with proportional representation of the states in the lower house (House of Representatives) and equal representation in the upper house (Senate). (24)

Another controversial topic was slavery. Although some northern states had already started to outlaw the practice, they went along with the southern states' insistence that slavery was an issue for individual states to decide and should be kept out of the Constitution. Many northern delegates believed that without agreeing to this, the South wouldn't join the Union. For the purposes of taxation and determining how many representatives a state could send to Congress, it was decided that slaves would be counted as three-fifths of

a person. Additionally, it was agreed that Congress wouldn't be allowed to prohibit the slave trade before 1808, and states were required to return fugitive slaves to their owners. (25)

The children became excited to learn that their guide in the park, Mrs. Quinn, is a retired federal judge who just happens to love to garden and volunteers to manage the flower beds. She led them along a path to learn an appreciation for the democratic system by letting them "live" the experience. They had now reached a point that they understood that what they were missing was liberty, one of our "inalienable rights to the pursuit of happiness," she tells them. "When we have equal opportunities to choose from instead of guaranteeing equal results like communism, we are seeking the same freedoms as the founder of this great country." (26)

Preamble of the Constitution

The children had reached a consensus and found a better way to share the park - the freedom to choose what is best for each. Their plan reflected their core values, combining individual choice with equal opportunity, striving for the common good and choosing representatives to guide the process. Mrs. Quinn shared that she had learned from the experience in the park with the children that, like gardening, democracy has to be chosen and nurtured for it flourish and thrive. (27)

"We the People of the United States in order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America." (28)

Preamble: The first part of something; an introduction

We the people of the United States: All the people in our country including kids

In order to form a more perfect union: To come together and make things better for everyone who lives in our country

Establish justice: To make things fair and honest for everyone

Insure domestic tranquility: To make sure we can all have a nice life and get along with one another

Provide for the common defense: To protect us from other people or countries who might try to harm us, as in a war and to help us if we have been harmed

Promote the general welfare: To help make life good for everybody. Having enough to eat, a place to live, being safe, and having friends and fun times are some of the things that make our lives good.

And secure the blessings of liberty: To protect our rights and freedoms and not let anyone take them away. Being able to choose our religion, to say what we think, and to get together with friends, family and other people are some of the freedoms we have.

To ourselves and our posterity: For kids, parents other grown-ups and all the people born in our country after we are

Do ordain and establish this constitution: To write down, and then to live by a list of rules and promise for our

government to keep and our people to obey

For the United States of America: Our country – where we live

Teaching Strategies

The core idea of project-based learning is that real-world concerns capture students' interest and provoke serious thinking as the students acquire and apply new knowledge in a problem-solving context. The teacher plays the role of facilitator, working with students to frame worthwhile questions, structuring meaningful tasks, coaching both knowledge development and social skills, and carefully assessing what students have learned from the experience. Project-based learning helps prepare students for the thinking and collaboration skills.

Organized around an open-ended questioning, project-based learning helps focus the students' work and deepen their learning by centering on significant issues or problems. Projects begin by presenting students with knowledge and concepts and then, once learned, give them the opportunity to apply them. It requires inquiry to learn and/or create something new - an idea, an interpretation, or a new way of displaying what they have learned.

Most importantly, it requires critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, and various forms of communication. Students need to do much more than remember information—they need to use higher-order thinking skills. They also must learn to work as a team and contribute to a group effort. They must listen to others and make their own ideas clear when speaking, be able to read a variety of material, write or otherwise express themselves in various modes, and make effective presentations. The format of this approach allows for student voice and choice. Students learn to work independently and take responsibility when they are asked to make choices. The opportunity to make choices, and to express their learning in their own voice, also helps to increase students' educational engagement.

Classroom Activities

Activity One: Introduce the unit with mentor texts

Part One

Materials: *Let's Chat about Democracy: Exploring Forms of Government in a Treehouse,* t-chart on chart paper with question, chart to track content from text (examples below), student journals

To introduce the unit on the understanding of our democracy, students will learn about the various systems of government discussed in throughout the text. Students will listen to *Let's Chat about Democracy: Exploring Forms of Government in a Treehouse* by Michelle A. Balconi and begin to collect some facts.

Begin by asking some questions to activate background knowledge: *What makes a good citizen? What makes*

a good leader? How do members of a community help each other? Why do we need rules?

Ask students the question posted on the chart, “What rules will help us all get along?” Record any answers and ideas on the left side titled “What We Know.” Read aloud

Prepare T-Chart

What rules will help us all get along?
What We Know What We Have Learned

Prepare text content chart

Exploring Government in a Treehouse
Monachy Anarchy Dictatorship Communism Democracy

On the 2nd chart, track the learning that occurs during the reading, recording any thoughts and ideas the students might generate as they think about the text.

Return to the t-chart of responses and on the right-side section titled “What We Have Learned.” In their journals, students should transfer the information from each completed chart.

Part Two

A second introductory resource is the picture book, *We the Kids: The Preamble of the Constitution of the United States* by David Catrow. This book will help students learn the structure of our set of understandings that we live by and help them recognize that they can understand and explain these understandings to others.

Questions to ask before reading:

Why do we need to have a government?

How could we make sure that everyone understands the rules of our government?

Questions to ask after reading:

How do you think the Preamble helps us?

What happens if we don’t agree?

How do you think we can fix any problems we have with each other?

What do you think make sure everyone is included?

Does our government help you every day? How?

What could we do as leaders to help people in our democracy?

What kinds of information can you share with others that explain the way we live in a democracy?

At the end of the book, use the Preamble, written in kid-friendly language, to reinforce the learning. Students will refer to the model for a number of activities throughout the unit so returning to it and making it available for inquiry will enhance the students' understanding.

From these two resources, my students will develop fundamental vocabulary and conceptual understanding to begin the activities and games that will come later in the unit.

Activity Two: Government/Democracy Terminology

Students will be using a new set of vocabulary to discuss the concepts within this unit and it is important to have this available through anchor charts. Prepare a chart (or word wall) to ensure the students will have access to these Tier III words they discover throughout the unit. This will be an ongoing, interactive process.

Anarchy, choice, civilization, civil rights, common good, communism, community, conflict, consensus, constitution, country, Declaration of Independence, democracy, dictatorship, due process, equal opportunity, equal rights, equality, federal, Fourth of July, freedom, government, inalienable rights, Independence Day, justice, liberty, monarchy, nation, patriotism, Preamble, property, public service, Pursuit of Happiness, reform, unity, values, welfare

Activity Three: Democracy Awareness Games

Fairness game

Before the lesson, consider two groups by the month they were born or first letters of first names. (e.g. January-June and July-December or A-M, N-Z). Then do the following:

- Place the students into the two groups (without explaining why they are being separated) and direct students in each group to sit in different areas of the room.
- One group will be the "favored group." Then without explaining why, give each student in the favored group a new pencil. Mention that only one group will get new pencils, and that group also will be getting other special privileges (such as extra recess time, being first in line, etc.) Students in the other group likely will protest.
- After a few minutes (or until someone in the other group says, "That's not fair!") stop the exercise.
- Explain the exercise to students. Which group were you in, the favored group or the non-favored group? How do you know? Encourage and discuss all responses.

Ask: Do you think that giving pencils to one group was fair or unfair? How did you feel about getting the pencils? How did you feel about not getting them? Why did you feel that way? Write the word, "fair" on an easel or white board. Ask students to think about what the word, "fair" means to them. Students work in pairs and share their ideas about the definition of fair.

Have them share their ideas aloud and record the responses on the easel. Come up with one definition as a class.

Ask: How might the exercise be done in a fair way? Would it be fair to give the pencils to students who earned them? Would it be fair if all students got them? Would it be fair if you picked 10 students names out of a hat to get the pencils?

Give each student two small paper circles and markers. Ask students to draw a happy face on one circle and a

sad face on the other. Read different situations being fair and unfair. Ask students think about each situation and to hold up the happy face if they think the situation is fair, and to the sad face if they think the situation is unfair. Record their responses. Use the following scenarios (and others) as examples:

- Your older sister gets to stay up later than you.
- Your brother got money for his birthday and you didn't.
- Your friend brings her ball to school but won't let you play with it.
- Nick always gets to be the line leader.
- You save a seat for someone in the cafeteria.
- Your friend lets you cut in line in front of him at the drinking fountain.

Discuss the responses to the situation that were *unfair*. "Why are they unfair? Which do you think is the most unfair? Why?" Tell students to pick one of the unfair situations and talk with a classmate about how they could turn it into a fair situation. Share answers with the class.

Ask the class: "Do you think the rules in a classroom are fair?" Invite students to share examples, then pose the following questions:

- Why do you think it is important that the rules in the classroom are fair?
- How would you feel if only certain kids got special privileges based on what they were wearing or whether they were a boy or girl?
- What does *treating people fairly* mean?
- Have you ever seen anyone being treated unfairly or treated someone unfairly yourself? (students can discuss this or draw/write about in their journals)
- What might you do if you think someone is being treated unfairly?

On the left side of their journal page, students will draw a picture of something they think would be unfair or that has happened to them that was unfair. It can be unfair in class, in their family, on a team or in the community. Below the picture describe the event. On the right side, draw a picture of how that same situation could change to become fair and describe how the event would change to become fair.

Activity Four: Writing Our Own Constitution

Review the importance of having rules. Introduce the book *Shh! We're Writing the Constitution* by Jean Fritz and share that it will help them understand how and why the U.S. Constitution was written. Write the following heading on the board or on chart paper: "What kinds of rules do we need in our classroom to maintain order and fairness?" Review, if needed, the meaning of the words "order" and "fairness." Brainstorm with the class what their thoughts were about rules they need in their classroom this school year to maintain order and fairness. Write their responses underneath the heading on the board or chart paper. Then place students in groups of 2–4. Have them choose three rules from the list they brainstormed and generate three Classroom Standards. Each standard should be stated in the positive. For example, if one of their rules was "Don't yell in the classroom," then a positively stated Classroom Standard would be "We use our inside voices in the classroom."

Each group then shares their positively stated Standards with the class. Record Standards on chart paper. Help students revise the list to total of six standards.

Discuss the following questions with the class:

Will the posted Standards help us work together?

Will the Standards help each student do his/her best work?

Are the Standards stated in the positive?

Are the standards realistic?

Remind the students that a *Classroom Standard* is stated positively for all to follow. Referring to the process of the Constitutional Convention written in Jean Fritz' book, ask the students to decide as class on whether these should be their *Classroom Standards* for the school year by voting "yea" or "nay."

Once all students have agreed upon the *Classroom Standards*, with support, have each student copy and illustrate the current list of *Standards* to be shared at home with their parents or guardians.

The six *Classroom Standards* on a poster now entitled "*Our Classroom Constitution*." All students and teachers should read the standards aloud together and then all must sign in agreement.

Activity Five: Field Trip to City Hall

We are fortunate to have access to free field trips within the city limits. A trip to City Hall located on the New Haven Green would offer the students an opportunity to see where our local government happens. Students will prepare questions to ask leaders of our city and share their experience through their journals and through “sharing” with their peers in the classroom.

Resources

Balconi, Michelle A., Arthur B. Laffer, and Mary A. Cindrich. *Let’s Chat about Democracy!: Exploring Forms of Government in a Treehouse*. Detroit, MI: Gichigami Press, 2018. The book is one of the mentor texts used throughout the teaching of the unit.

Catrow, David. *We the Kids the Preamble to the Constitution of the United States*. New York: Puffin, 2005. The picture book explains, in child-friendly terms, the phrases of the Preamble.

Cheney, Lynne V., and Greg Harlin. *We the People: The Story of Our Constitution*. New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2012. A factual and beautifully illustrated book about how and why our Constitution was created, including the compromises that had to be made for all the states to accept and ratify it.

Feldman, Noah. *Three Lives of James Madison: Genius, Partisan, President*. S.l.: Picador, 2020.

Fritz, Jean, and Tomie DePaola. *Shh! We’re Writing the Constitution*. New York: Puffin Books, an Imprint of Penguin Group (USA), 2015. Used as the basis for activity four.

Hamilton, Alexander, John Jay, James Madison, and Ian Shapiro. *The Federalist Papers Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, John Jay*. New Haven (Conn.): Yale University Press, 2009.

Klarman, Michael J. *Unfinished Business: Racial Equality in American History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Levy, Elizabeth, and Joan Holub. *If You Were There When They Signed the Constitution*. New York: Scholastic, 2006. This book has information on the Constitution as well as other parts of our early government. It is written in question and answer format.

Maestro, Betsy, and Giulio Maestro. *A More Perfect Union: The Story of Our Constitution*. New York: Collins, 2017. This book tells why and how the Constitution of the United States was created. Includes a map, a table of dates, and a summary of the Articles of the Constitution.

Russakoff, Dale. *The Prize: Who's in Charge of Americas Schools?* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2016.

Ryan, Alan. *On Tocqueville - Democracy and America*. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015.

Tocqueville, Alexis De. *Democracy in America*. New York: Random House, 2004.

Travis, Cathy. *Constitution Translated for Kids*. Washington, D.C.: We The Books, CT Bookshelf, LLC, 2016. This easy to comprehend book is a quite helpful if you are learning or teaching the constitution. The pages are split down the middle. On the left are the words of the Constitution, on the right is a reworded translation for children to easily understand the language without changing the meaning. It is very clear and concise.

"US Government." *Ducksters Educational Site*, https://www.ducksters.com/history/us_government/democracy.php.

White, E. B., Martha White, and Jon Meacham. *On Democracy*. New York, NY: Harper, 2019. A collection of essays, letters and poems from centered on the subject of freedom and democracy in America.

Appendix – Implementing District Standards

Connecticut Social Studies Framework: *Kindergarten – Me and My Community*

In Kindergarten, students engage in the study of themselves, their families, and their communities and learn how to participate and use effective citizenship skills. They explore their classrooms, schools, neighborhoods, and home communities through an interdisciplinary approach including history, civics, economics, and geography. The study of themselves, their families, and their communities requires that students generate and research questions such as:

What is my role in my community?

What is "history" and how is the past different from the present?

How are we connected to the past?

Common Core State Standards: *Kindergarten – Reading Informational Text*

CCSS ELA-Literacy RI K.1: With prompting and support, students will ask and answer questions about key details in a text.

There are several sessions of asking and answering questions throughout the unit. The opening lesson begins with these specific skills as they track the learning that occurs during the reading, recording any thoughts and

ideas the they might generate about the text.

CCSS ELA-Literacy RI K.2: With prompting and support, students can identify the main topic and retell key details of a text.

CCSS ELA-Literacy RI K.3: With prompting and support, students will be able to describe the connection between two individuals, events, ideas, or pieces of information in a text.

Students will be using the collection of mentor texts to discover components of democracy and the writing of the Constitution. They will be able to identify the connecting facts and information from each of the introductory informational texts.

Endnotes

1. http://www.ctsocialstudies.org
2. "US Government." *Ducksters Educational Site*
3. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anarchy
4. Ibid.
5. "US Government." *Ducksters Educational Site*
6. Ibid.
7. Michelle A. Balconi, Arthur B. Laffer, and Mary A. Cindrich. *Let's Chat about Democracy!: Exploring Forms of Government in a Treehouse*.
8. "US Government." *Ducksters Educational Site*
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. www.historyworld.net
14. Ibid.
15. "US Government." *Ducksters Educational Site*
16. Michelle A. Balconi, Arthur B. Laffer, and Mary A. Cindrich. *Let's Chat about Democracy!: Exploring Forms of Government in a Treehouse*.
17. www.historyworld.net
18. "US Government." *Ducksters Educational Site*
19. www.historyworld.net
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. "US Government." *Ducksters Educational Site*
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Michelle A. Balconi, Arthur B. Laffer, and Mary A. Cindrich. *Let's Chat about Democracy!: Exploring Forms of Government in a Treehouse*.
27. Michelle A. Balconi, Arthur B. Laffer, and Mary A. Cindrich. *Let's Chat about Democracy!: Exploring Forms of Government in a*

Treehouse.
28. David Catrow, *We the Kids the Preamble to the Constitution of the United States*.