



We the People ... The Citizen and the Constitution

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Content

- critical thinking skills
- problem-solving skills
- instructional strategies
- U.S. Constitution
- Bill of Rights
- constitutional democracy

We the People ... The Citizen and the Constitution enhances students' understanding of the American constitutional democracy and the contemporary relevance of the Bill of Rights. The middle school version is intended for use by students in grades 6-9. The student textbooks may be used with students of all ability levels and may be used either as supplemental material or as a replacement to the social studies curriculum. Students demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of constitutional principles and evaluate, take, and defend positions on relevant historical and contemporary issues.

The staff development program focuses on developing teachers' knowledge about the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights. In addition, teachers learn instructional strategies for teaching key concepts and thinking skills. The program includes critical thinking skills, problem-solving activities, and cooperative learning, all designed to develop students' intellectual and participatory skills in addition to increasing their understanding of the institutions of U.S. constitutional democracy. In the culminating activity, a simulated congressional hearing, students "testify" before a panel of judges.

PROGRAM CONTEXT

Context

- wide range of U.S. territories, states, districts, and schools
- students of diverse abilities

The program has been widely replicated throughout the U.S. and four of the U.S. territories. With money set aside by Congress, each congressional district is entitled to a certain number of classroom sets of *We the People ... The Citizen and the Constitution* without charge. Additional materials are available at a limited cost. The intention is to keep the costs low so that more schools will be able to implement the program.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM



Program designers acknowledge the importance of the staff development program in easing the implementation of the program in the classroom. Well-developed curriculum materials for students are combined with staff development for teachers to increase students' understanding of constitutional democracy. Teacher training is intended to familiarize teachers with the rationale, goals, objectives, content, and methods of the instructional program. The teacher training for this program has four components: (1) building familiarity with the instructional materials and implementation processes of the program; 2) conducting the culminating activity, which is the competitive or non-competitive congressional hearings; (3) informing educators about substantive changes in perception of and knowledge about the U.S. Constitution; and (4) reviewing instructional methods needed to implement We the People ... The Citizen and the Constitution.

Staff development for teachers who wish to implement the program occurs in several ways. Summer week-long institutes are taught by constitutional scholars from several fields, social studies teacher educators, and teachers. Institutes are held on university campuses in several locations. In addition to summer institutes, state coordinators provide training and assistance to support implementation in classrooms throughout the state. Training varies according to the needs of participants. A training manual for state coordinators adds consistency to the dissemination of the program throughout the 50 states and several U. S. territories.

Process

- week-long summer institutes
- training
- discussions
- demonstrations
- conferences
- ongoing support

Intended Audience

- entire department or team
- individual volunteer teachers

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

We the People ... the Citizen and the Constitution depends on well-designed instructional materials, curriculum, and staff development for its success in increasing student achievement.

EVIDENCE OF INCREASED STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT



Success Indicators

- tests of knowledge of constitutional history
- test of principles of the U.S. Constitution
- simulated congressional hearing



In a 1991 Educational Testing Service evaluation of *We the People ... The Citizen and the Constitution*, middle school students who participated in the program scored significantly better ($p < .01$) on a test of knowledge of the history and principles of the U. S. Constitution than did students who participated in a regular constitutional instruction program. These results were consistent with results achieved in prior studies in 1988 and 1990 of a matched group post-test-only study of 420 participating eighth-grade students and 424 non-participating eighth-grade students in one school district in Texas. The test was developed by the Center for Civic Education to align with the content of *We the People ... The Citizen and the Constitution*. Students in this program scored significantly better ($p < .01$) on each of six curricular unit tests than did comparison groups studying similar topics. Units included political philosophy; history and experience; issues and debates at Philadelphia; establishment of the government; and basic rights and responsibilities of the citizen.

Evidence from this assessment of middle grade students is consistent with assessments done of students participating in the elementary and high school versions of *We the People ... The Citizen and the Constitution*. In a 1994 study, the Council for Basic Education concluded that the culminating activity of a simulated congressional hearing was a model of performance assessment. *We the People ... The Citizen and the Constitution* was approved for dissemination by the Program Effectiveness Panel of the National Diffusion Network.

We the People ... *The Citizen and the Constitution* has a positive impact on students' civic knowledge and attitudes. It is primarily a curriculum program that supports increased student learning about the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights. However, program developers and state coordinators realize the importance of staff development to support the implementation of this social studies program. Teachers report that staff development has given them skills to be excited and renewed, and that students are enthusiastic about what they have accomplished, especially in terms of their ability to carry out a reasoned argument.

**THE
BOTTOM
LINE**



SAMPLE SITES



- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <p>✓ Campus Middle School
Jackie Johnson
Social Studies Teacher
4785 South Dayton Street
Englewood, CO 80111
phone:303-770-1150
fax:303-486-2744
e-mail:
jjohnson@mail.ccsd.k12.co.us
web site:www.cms.ccsd.k12.co.us</p> | <p>✓ Oak Grove Middle School
Janet Mulder
Mentor Teacher
14344 Olive Vista Drive
Jamul, CA 91935
phone:619-669-1400,
ext.3010
fax:619-669-7632
e-mail:
jmulder@sdcoe.k12.ca.us
web site:unavailable</p> | <p>✓ Akron Public Schools
Cynthia A. Ponos
Learning Specialist,
Social Studies K-12
Ott Staff Development Center
65 Steiner Avenue
Akron, OH 44301
phone:330-761-3034
fax:330-761-3252
e-mail:cponos@akron.ohio.gov
web site:unavailable</p> |
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KEY CONTACT PERSON . . .

Robert Leming
Center for Civic Education
5146 Douglas Fir Road
Calabasas, CA 91302



Phone:818-591-9321



Fax: 818-591-9330



E-mail:center4civ@aol.com



Web site:www.civiced.org

DOCUMENTATION

Council for Basic Education.(1994). *A Report on the Impact of We the People ...The Citizen and the Constitution*. Washington, D.C.: Author.

Educational Testing Service. (1991). *An Evaluation of the Instructional Impact of the Elementary and Middle School Curricular Materials Developed for the National Bicentennial Competition on the Constitution and Bill of Rights*. Pasadena, CA: Author.