



Lesson Plans and Steps to Prepare for the Essay Contest

Objective: Students will be able to identify key aspects, research, evaluate, and form an opinion about a Constitutional question or issue that faces our democracy. Students will write a well-supported paper that clearly states and defends an opinion.

Teacher Notes: These lessons line up with both the Social Studies and English Language Arts Pennsylvania State curriculum. Using a portion of time from both classes in your schedule will allow you to complete the contest essay in 1-2 weeks.

Lesson 1 - Introduction

1. Introduce the contest and show the video of the last Citizenship Challenge finals
<https://rendellcenter.org/citizenship-challenge-2023/>
2. Read and explain the Citizenship Challenge question. Provide students with a general understanding and overview of what the question is asking.
3. Show a short video clip that highlights the key concepts of the question:
 - a. Example: BrainPOP - Electoral College
 - b. National Constitution Center Classroom Resources Library -
<https://constitutioncenter.org/education/videos/electoral-college-overview>
 - c. USA.gov – Electoral College
4. Discuss the benefits of participating in the contest and the work that needs to be done. Take a class vote to participate.
5. Homework: Discuss the question with an adult or someone at home. Be prepared to discuss your opinion. You may want to communicate with parents about the question and provide some guiding questions.

Lesson 2 – Analyzing the Question & Forming an Opinion

1. Discuss the question and come to a consensus about the class position.
2. Discuss with students how you might organize a paper that answers the question. What needs to be addressed in the paper?
3. Post large blank poster paper around your classroom or divide your white board/black board into sections (take a picture of thoughts, if using the board). On each paper pose a question that needs to be discussed as part of the paper. For example:
 - a. Why did the Founders want to have an Electoral College system?
 - b. What are the advantages of the current Electoral College system?
 - c. What are the disadvantages of the current Electoral College system?
 - d. How would the country benefit from having a popular vote?
 - e. What would be a disadvantage of having a popular vote?
 - f. What is our position on Electoral College vs. Popular Vote?
4. Break students into small groups. Have small groups discuss the questions and record their thoughts. Set a timer to rotate groups to each of the questions so that students can think about each aspect of the question and their response.
5. Once thoughts are recorded. Divide students into small groups for writing. These questions and responses will become paragraphs in the final paper. You will also need a group for the introduction and conclusion of the paper.

Lesson 3 & 4 - Writing

1. Over two class sessions, small groups will write their paragraph(s).
2. Remind students about the effective steps of research. Students will meet in small groups to begin writing a paragraph or two that answers their question. Students may need to do some research to properly answer their question. Rotate between groups to provide guidance.
3. At the end of the lesson, ask each group to provide a 1-minute summary to the class of what they accomplished.

Lesson 5 – Revising & Editing

1. Note: This step can be completed as a whole class or with a small group of strong writers.

2. Pull each of the paragraphs together in an order that works. If possible, project the paragraphs one at a time and read these aloud to students.
3. Discuss the structure of opinion papers and the need for a strong statement of opinion in the introduction, include counterclaims, state a clear, concise conclusion. Encourage students to make editing suggestions.
4. As a class, go through the paper looking for areas that need to be modified and strengthened. You may have some repetitive parts that need to be rewritten or removed.

Lesson 6 – Final Edit

1. Note: Prior to submission, you may wish to share your class paper with a high school social studies teacher in your district or social studies curriculum supervisor for feedback.
2. Read the paper aloud with the class. Make final edits. Submit your completed essay!