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Lynn Classical High School
Teaching American History
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Final Project

Purchasing Louisiana: Was it constitutional? A look at Past History

Typical portrayal of Louisiana Purchase includes about 5 facts and a map. The teacher editorializes on Jefferson's ingenious and forward thinking. Perhaps he even implies that the American President hoodwinked Napoleon into giving the US enough land to double the country's size, a land full of resources that would become the heart land, full of resources to make the US the great land of resource and opportunity.

In this unit, I would like to engage the students in a process of inquiry to develop their comprehension of the federal system of government, and how representative democracy in the US works. It is my hope that they will draw practical conclusions that will have lifelong implications for them.

Objectives for Students

1. To examine a constitutional process, specifically, acquiring new territory.
2. To evaluate the implications for American rights in a civic democracy.
3. To experience a debate between the legislative and executive branch of the government.

Time Frame

About 5 - 7 class periods

Background

An astute observer of international affairs, President Thomas Jefferson approached France in 1802 about the possible sale of New Orleans. Because of its location at the mouth of the Mississippi River, he saw it as a city vital to the transportation of American goods for trade to the rest of the world.

He sent trusted representatives—Secretary of State James Madison and minister to France Robert Livingston to France to transact the deal. A price was set, and then negotiated. First, Jefferson offered \$10 million for New Orleans. French leader Napoleon, countered with a deal for the entire Louisiana Territory for \$15 million. President Jefferson, foreseeing the idea of Manifest Destiny, took him up on the offer. He had to act fast to cut the deal.

But how would he get Congressional approval for this acquisition? What was Congress's role in the decision process? As an executive, did Jefferson have the authority to make this decision himself? What did the Constitution say? Could he use his presidential power to make the purchase?

I intend to lead students into aspects of these questions, and guide them into how government acts to achieve results for the good of the country.

Prior Knowledge

Constitutional authority and, responsibility of President and Congress.

Procedures

Part 1: Establishing Context .Teacher will divide students into four groups. Three groups will represent the legislative bodies of government. The fourth will represent the President's point of view.

A. Teacher-Student Review:

1. Constitution, especially responsibility and power of Congress and the responsibility and authority of the executive branch, the Presidency.
2. Bill of Rights and Declaration of Independence.
3. Responsibilities of Legislature and Executive branches of Government
4. Summary of contemporary international affairs

B.: Using documents

A. Packets 1-3 Legislative Focus

1. Article V, Provisions for Amendment
2. Jefferson's Confidential Letter to Congress (Monticello website)
3. The Louisiana Purchase (Monticello website)
4. US with Louisiana Territory (Dayton, Burns)

C. Packet 4, Executive Focus

1. US Maps:
 - a. 13 colonies
 - b. Pre-French and Indian War
 - c. Northwest Territory
 - d. US with Louisiana Territory (Dayton, Burns)
2. Jefferson's Confidential Letter to Congress
3. Louisiana Purchase (Department of State document)
4. Constitution, Article V, Provisions for Amendment

Methods and Tasks

1. Four groups of students will research and discuss issues relevant to the topic, answering guiding questions. Individually: Map work and Time Line.

2. Groups 1 – 3, Legislative branch

Discuss and summarize TimeLine, Article V of Constitution

3. Group 4, Executive branch.

Develop arguments for purchase based on Timeline, maps, and summary.

Final Presentation and Exercise

PowerPoint with oral commentary.

1. Students will vote ye or nay to authorize Louisiana Purchase.
2. Follow-up discussion by teacher and students. Uses and limits of the Constitution.

Student Evaluation Requirements

60%: PowerPoint presentation of the conclusion of their study.

30%: Neatness, cohesiveness, and presentation

10%: Daily narrative journal on their progress- individual.

Massachusetts Curriculum Standards

Strand: U.S. History I: The Revolution through Reconstruction 1763-1877

USI.22

Political Democratization, Westward Expansion, and Diplomatic Developments, 1790-1860

Summarize the major policies and political developments that took place during the presidencies of George Washington (1789-1797), John Adams (1797-1801), and Thomas Jefferson (1801-1809). (H, C)

- The Louisiana Purchase

Focus for each group

Packets 1-3, three groups

1. **Article V, Provisions for Amendment:** What power does the Constitution give for government action regarding the purchase of Louisiana? How does this affect the acquisition of the Louisiana Territory? Does it give power to the president or to Congress?
2. **Jefferson's Confidential Letter to Congress (excerpts, Monticello):** What impact does Jefferson want to make with the Indians who already live in that territory? Are his intentions good for the US? For the Indians? Describe the benefits for both parties. Is this supported by the Constitution?
3. **The Louisiana Purchase (Monticello):** Students in each group will discuss and then make a timeline for the Louisiana Purchase, selecting 10 relevant events/facts. This will be incorporated into their PowerPoint presentation.

Packet 4, one group

1. **Maps:** Make timeline for the stages of growth of the US prior to The Louisiana Purchase, with 10 relevant events/facts. Name the states acquired in each stage. This will be incorporated into PowerPoint presentation.
2. **Letter:** Underline 3 points relevant to Purchase. Summarize in Journal as Homework.
3. **Article V, Provisions for Amendment:** Analyze and summarize this as a way to "sell" the Louisiana Territory to Congress.

Bibliography

Bernstein, R.B., Thomas Jefferson. New York: Oxford University Press: 2003.

Clayton, Andrew, et al. *America: Pathways to the Present*. Needham, MA: Prentice Hall, 2002.

Duncan, Dayton and Burns, Ken, *Lewis and Clark: The Journey of the Corps of Discovery*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997, p.17

Websites

Jefferson's Confidential Letter to Congress,

<<http://www.monticello.org/jefferson/lewisandclark/louisianatimeline.html>>

Timeline of Louisiana Purchase'

<http://www.monticello.org/jefferson/lewisandclark/congress_letter.html>

The Louisiana Purchase,

<<http://www.monticello.org/jefferson/lewisandclark/louisiana.html>>

Louisiana Purchase,

<future.state.gov/future/when/timeline/1801_timeline/louisiana_purchase.html>