

LESSON PLAN – SHOULD WASHINGTON, D.C., BE A STATE?

Subject: Civics and Government

Grade Level: 9–12

Standards:

Indiana DOE

Academic (4)

USG.1 The Nature of Politics and Government

Students identify, define, compare and contrast ideas regarding the nature of government, politics and civic life, and explain how these ideas have influenced contemporary political and legal systems. Students also explain the importance of government, politics and civic engagement in a democratic republic, and demonstrate how citizens participate in civic and political life in their own communities.

USG.3.3 Purposes, Principles and Institutions of Government in the United States

Identify and describe provisions of the United States Constitution and the Indiana Constitution that define and distribute powers and authority of the federal or state government.

USG.5 Roles of Citizens in the United States

Students explain the idea of citizenship in the United States, describe the roles of United States citizens, and identify and explain the rights and responsibilities of United States citizens. They also examine how citizens can participate responsibly and effectively in the civic and political life of the United States.

USG.5.8

Describe opportunities available to individuals to contribute to the well-being of their communities and participate responsibly in the political process at local, state and national levels of government.

Nationwide

National Standards for Civics and Government (7)

III.C.1 How are state and local governments organized and what do they do?

LESSON PLAN – SHOULD WASHINGTON, D.C., BE A STATE?

Students should be able to evaluate, take, and defend positions on issues regarding the proper relationship between the national government and the state and local governments.

III.A.2.3.a How are power and responsibility distributed, shared, and limited in the government established by the United States Constitution?

To achieve this standard, students should be able to explain how the federal system provides numerous opportunities for citizens to participate through its dispersal of power among and between national, state, and local governments.

III.B.3.3 How is the national government organized and what does it do?

Students should be able to evaluate, take, and defend positions on issues regarding how government should raise money to pay for its operations and services. To achieve this standard, students should be able to identify major sources of revenue for the national government, e.g., individual income taxes, social insurance receipts (Social Security and Medicare), borrowing, taxes on corporations and businesses, estate and excise taxes.

III.C.1 How are state and local governments organized and what do they do?

Students should be able to evaluate, take, and defend positions on issues regarding the proper relationship between the national government and the state and local governments.

III.E.6.1 How does the American political system provide for choice and opportunities for participation?

To achieve this standard, students should be able to describe a current issue of public policy at local, state, or national level. Grades: 9-12 V.A What is citizenship?

V.A.1.1.b Students should be able to explain the meaning of citizenship in the United States.

To achieve this standard, students should be able to explain the idea that citizenship confers full membership in a self-governing community; no degrees of citizenship or legally recognized states of inferior citizenship are tolerated.

V.E.3.1 How can citizens take part in civic life?

To achieve this standard, students should be able to describe the many ways citizens can participate in the political process at local, state, and national levels.

Materials Needed:

Students will need access to:

A computer or laptop or a way to show video in class

Students may need headphones

Access to PBS Learning Media

Access to the internet

Learning Objectives:

- Review the decisions that formed the present-day District of Columbia.
- Consider how residents of the District of Columbia perceive the unfairness of their status.
- Discuss the pro's and con's of making the District of Columbia a new state.

Introduction/Anticipatory Set

American citizens believe they should have a voice in how their taxes are spent and in other national decisions. Many residents of the District of Columbia feel deprived of these rights. They live in an area specially designated by the founders of the republic as neither a state nor a territory, so they have many duties of other citizens but not all of the privileges. For that reason, many feel that the District of Columbia should become another state, but the idea has a fair amount of opposition.

Body of Lesson:

1. Show the video, “Should Washington, D.C., Be a State?”
2. Review the decisions that formed the present-day District of Columbia.
 - a. Dr. Jett describes this sequence of events:
 - i. When it took effect in 1789, the U.S. Constitution provided that the U.S. capital would be located in a special district.
 - ii. The Residents Act of 1790 declared that the district would be located on the Potomac River, comprised of land donated by Maryland and Virginia, governed by the U.S. Congress.
 - iii. In 1847, Virginia voted to take back the land it had ceded from the city of Alexandria to the capital. This was done to assure that Alexandria would not have to ban slavery.
 - iv. The 23rd Amendment was adopted in 1961, giving residents of Washington the right to vote in Presidential elections and three

LESSON PLAN – SHOULD WASHINGTON, D.C., BE A STATE?

- electors in the Electoral College, However, they did not obtain a voting member in Congress.
- v. In 2020, the House of Representatives voted to make the Mall in Washington a federal district and the rest of the current district would become a state named the State of Washington, Commonwealth of Douglass.
- b. Learning Activity
 - i. Have students research recent news stories to complete the decision timeline. Have them answer the following questions:
 1. What is the current status of the bill to make the District of Columbia a state?
 2. Does Congress need to take any additional steps to reach a final decision on this bill?
 3. If so, why have these steps not been taken?
3. Consider how residents of the District of Columbia perceive the unfairness of their status.
 - a. Dr. Jett identifies one objection to the current situation: “Taxation without Representation.”
 - b. Learning Activity:
 - i. Have students research the Opinion section of the *Washington Post* (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/>) and *Washington Times* (<https://www.washingtontimes.com/opinion/>) for editorials, columns, and letters to the editor about D.C. statehood.
 - ii. Have students write a three-page paper (approximately 750 words) summarizing the opinions they find about issues of fairness related to this question.
4. Discuss the pro’s and con’s of making the District of Columbia a new state.
 - a. Dr. Jett points out that adding a new state would entail several relatively minor changes (flag design, number of senators and congressional reps, etc.).
 - b. Legislators are more concerned about the partisan balance of Congress and the Electoral College.
 - c. Learning Activity:
 - i. Refer students to “Why Statehood for DC” (<https://statehood.dc.gov/page/why-statehood-dc>) and “District of Columbia Statehood Movement” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/District_of_Columbia_statehood_movement).
 - ii. Divide students into three groups (Pro team, Con team, Judges team) to debate whether the District of Columbia should be made a state.

Summary/Closure

Some of our most influential government employees live in the District of Columbia, so it's ironic that they are not allowed to participate in making the decisions that guide their work. Statehood could resolve that problem, but legislators would need to clear some difficult hurdles to make that possible.

Extension Activities

Observers often discuss the relative merits of making the District of Columbia or Puerto Rico a state. You could reframe the debate under Section 4 above to discuss this question instead. In addition to the D.C. statehood articles, refer students to the article, "Puerto Rico Statehood Movement" (<http://alturl.com/ob9sg>).

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