

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

Subject: Should Washington, D.C. be a State?

Grade Level: 6-8

Standards:

USG.1.7 Define and provide examples of constitutionalism, rule of law, limited government, and popular sovereignty in the United States Constitution and explain the relationship of these constitutional principles to the protection of the rights of individuals.

USG.1.9 Evaluate how the United States Constitution establishes majority rule while protecting minority rights and balances the common good with individual liberties.

USG.2.4 Explain the history and provide examples of foundational ideas of American government embedded in the Founding-Era documents such as: natural rights philosophy, social contract, popular sovereignty, constitutionalism, representative democracy, political factions, federalism, and individual rights.

USG.2.8 Explain the history and provide historical and contemporary examples of fundamental principles and values of American political and civic life, including liberty, security, the common good, justice, equality, law and order, rights of individuals, diversity, popular sovereignty, and representative democracy.

USG.3.18 Identify the role of special interest groups in politics and explain their impact on federal, state, and local public policy.

USG.5.1 Define the legal meaning of citizenship in the United States; identify the requirements for citizenship in the United States and residency in Indiana; and differentiate between the criteria used for attaining both.

USG.5.2 Analyze the roles and responsibilities of citizens in Indiana and the United States.

USG.5.3 Discuss the individual's legal obligation to obey the law, serve as a juror, and pay taxes.

USG.5.7 Explain how citizens in the United States participate in public elections as office.

Materials Needed:

Students will need access to:

- Computer, laptop, tablet, or smartphone
- Paper, pen/pencil

Learning Objectives:

- Students will be able to explain how Washington, D.C. became the capital of the United States.
- Students will be able to describe reasons why Washington, D.C. should become a state.
- Students will be able to describe reasons why statehood for Washington, D.C. is difficult to achieve.

Introduction/Anticipatory Set:

Did you know that Washington, D.C. has not always been the Capital of the United States? In fact, the city did not exist when the Constitution was written.

Washington, D.C. is not a state, even though it has a population larger than Wyoming or Vermont.

We are going to learn about why Washington, D.C. is not a state. Should it be a state?

Watch video by Dr. Terri Jett: *Should Washington, D.C. Be a State?*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rFp_8iCoJLs

Body of Lesson:

Some Historical Background Information

The First Continental Congress of the United States met in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1774.

The Second Continental Congress met in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Baltimore, Maryland; Lancaster, Pennsylvania; and York, Pennsylvania.

Between 1781 and 1788, Congress met in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Princeton, New Jersey; Annapolis, Maryland; Trenton, New Jersey; and New York City.

Washington, D.C. is a city that was created after the Constitution was written. The Constitution provides for a “district” that is no larger than ten square miles to be the seat (center) of the United States Government.

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The Residents Act of 1790 declared that the seat of government should be built on the Potomac River. George Washington selected the location of the new city. A man from France, Pierre Charles L'Enfant, was chosen to design the city. The city was named in honor of George Washington and Christopher Columbus (Washington, D.C. District of Columbia).

To accomplish this, Maryland donated 68 square miles of land and Virginia donated 32 square miles of land. The land donated by Virginia included the city of Alexandria, Virginia. These lands made up an area of ten square miles.

In 1847, the citizens of Alexandria decided to leave D.C. They were concerned that D.C. was going to make slavery illegal, and they felt that the more northern parts of D.C. were more economically developed. Virginia voted to retrocede from Washington, D.C. After Virginia retroceded the land, the Capital was then 68 square miles in size.

As Washington, D.C. was built, the National Mall became the focal point of the city. The National Mall is a long strip of land that includes the Capital Building, the White House, the Lincoln Memorial, the Jefferson Memorial, the Washington Monument, the Vietnam Memorial, the World War II Memorial, the Korean War Memorial, the Smithsonian Institutes, and various other Federal buildings.

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This is a drawing of the early plans for the city of Washington, D.C.

This drawing is from the website listed here:

<https://washington.org/DC-information/washington-dc-history#:~:text=President%20George%20Washington%20chose%20the,the%20rest%20of%20the%20states.>

Should Washington, D.C. Be a State?

There are arguments for and against the District of Columbia becoming a state. First, we will discuss the arguments in favor of statehood.

There are 712,000 Americans living in Washington, D.C. This is more than live in Wyoming or Vermont.

Residents of D.C. pay federal taxes; however, they do not have any voting representatives in Congress. This is taxation without representation. Taxation without representation was one of the primary reasons for the Revolutionary War to gain

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independence from Great Britain. Just as an interesting bit of trivia: the license plates for Washington, D.C. citizens have the following slogan – “End Taxation Without Representation”.

Residents of D.C. also have no vote on any federal laws, even though they must abide by those laws. They are allowed to vote for the President of the United States.

Congress controls the local laws and government.

D.C. is the only capital of a democratic country where the citizens have little voice in the government.

Now we will discuss the problems facing statehood for Washington, D.C.

The Constitution stated that the capital of the United States should be on an area of land not exceeding ten square miles. This was the original size of D.C. In 1847, that size shrank to 68 square miles. The constitution does not specify that the capital has to be of a certain minimal size. It only specifies a maximum size.

Puerto Rico should also be included in this discussion. Puerto Rico is a territory of the United States. There are three million American citizens living there. Citizens of Puerto Rico do not have any voting members of Congress. They do not get to vote for the President of the United States. Should Puerto Rico be a state?

Where are we with the issue of statehood?

One proposed solution to statehood for Washington, D.C., is to “shrink” D.C. to the area around the National Mall and make the rest of the District a state. The proposed new area would include the White House, the Capital, the Supreme court, major monuments, and the National Mall. This would meet the requirements of the Constitution. The size of D.C. has been decreased in the past, so this would not be setting a new precedent.

Another possible solution would be for Maryland to retrocede most of the land given to D.C. The citizens of D.C. are opposed to this. They do not want to be a part of Maryland. They want to be a part of their own individual state.

Statehood for Puerto Rico is discussed periodically. The arguments for statehood increased after the hurricane disaster a few years ago; however, the discussions have not been brought to any action.

One reason for a lack of action toward making D.C. a state is about political representation. Many of the citizens in the district lean toward the Democratic party. The Republican party is not excited about the idea of providing a way for more Democrats to be a part of Congress.

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A survey was conducted of Americans across the country. About 2/3 of the people are against D.C. becoming a state. Interestingly, about 2/3 of the people are in favor of Puerto Rico becoming a state.

Class Activity: This can be done as an in-class discussion, or a written assignment within or outside of class.

Students can participate individually or in groups.

Hold a discussion or require a written assignment. Divide students into groups with some supporting statehood for D.C. and some opposing statehood for D.C. The students should argue their case effectively. Students should provide factual arguments (verbal or in writing) to support their side of the argument.

Class Activity: This activity is best done in a group setting. Have students discuss their thoughts about statehood for D.C. Why do they support it? Why are they opposed? Do they think it will occur in the next ten years? Why or why not.

Summary/Closure

It is an ongoing discussion about statehood for Washington, D.C. The arguments on both sides are strong. And the emotions around the topic are also strong.

One last item to think about – how would you redesign the flag to include an additional star?

Class Activity: present designs of a new flag.

Extension Activities

This article explores further the reasons why D.C. is not a state. It can lead to more in depth discussions.

Why Isn't Washington, D.C. a State?

<https://www.history.com/news/washington-dc-statehood-reconstruction>

These maps can be used to guide a discussion about how the city could be made smaller to allow the rest to become a state.

This is a link to a current map of Washington, D.C.:

<https://www.nps.gov/nama/planyourvisit/maps.htm>

This link could also be used to allow students the opportunity to plan a trip (real or virtual) to Washington, D.C.

This is a link to information about the National Mall and Memorial Parks:

<https://www.nps.gov/nama/index.htm>

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<https://indiana.pbslearningmedia.org/signup/>

References

D.C. statehood: Why it should (and should not) happen

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/04/23/politics/washington-dc-statehood-101/index.html>

D.C. Statehood

<https://norton.house.gov/issues/why-dc-should-be-a-state>

The History of Washington, D.C.

<https://washington.org/DC-information/washington-dc-history>

Why Isn't Washington, D.C. a State?

<https://www.history.com/news/washington-dc-statehood-reconstruction>