

★ What Is An American? ★

Purpose

The purpose of this lesson is for students to develop an understanding of what it means **to be an American** and to stress the idea of individual responsibility. The idea of responsibility was a central concept of the Founding Fathers as they discussed the formation of the United States. Students will evaluate their role as students to uphold, protect, and demonstrate to the world the American idea of individual responsibility.

Objective

The student will define responsibility in terms of the acts of individuals and, collectively, of the people of a nation.

Theme-Responsibility

Americans are responsible for communicating a blueprint to future generations the ideas of how the country was formed, how it gained freedom, and how its citizens unite and progress toward a better life for ALL people.

NCSS Standards

Ib. explain how information and

experiences may be interpreted by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference.

IVb. describe personal connections to place—as associated with community, nation, and world.

IVc. describe the ways family, gender, ethnicity, nationality, and institutional affiliations contribute to personal identity.

IVh. work independently and cooperatively to accomplish goals.

Xb. identify and interpret sources and examples of the rights and responsibilities of citizens.

Time

2 class periods

Materials

- ★ Rolls of butcher paper
- ★ Contemporary magazines, newspapers, and copies of historical documents (to be cut up)
- ★ Poster paper, tape, and glue

Preparation

- ★ Gather art supplies
- ★ Find a location in the community where students can hang their posters.

Focus

Write “What is an American?” on the board. Have students think about/reflect on what they have learned about America and its history and heritage, democratic ideals, philosophy, etc.. Discuss American themes (freedom, unity, progress, and responsibility) and ideals and possible brainstorming about what it means to be “American.” Consider reasons why various groups have come to America. Discuss with the students the fact that while there is much diversity among Americans, there are important things that we share.

Activity

Teachers may select one or more of these activities for their students:

1. Have students compare the “American family” of 281,000,000 citizens to their own families. They can do a T-chart, vend diagram, collage of all members in their families, or other activity to brainstorm and note unique as well as American traits of their families. Students can brainstorm answers in two columns labeled “Different” and “Similar.” Remind students that just as each of them is a vital member of their own families, so also is each citizen a vital member of the American family. Furthermore, just as individual family members can draw strength from one another, so can American citizens of one nation draw strength from all other citizens to enjoy and improve each of their lives.
2. Students may work in groups to create collages titled “What is an American?” Remind students to include images and symbols that represent the diversity of individuals living together as a united “American family” in one nation. Students may present their collages to the class when they are finished.
3. A. Group the students into cooperative work groups. Each student, with the help of others in the group, uses butcher paper to draw a full-size outline of his or her body. Using magazines, articles, documents, illustrations, or their own drawing skills, students create or cut out concepts that represent themselves and paste them on the inside of their body outline. They then draw a line from each article to a space outside of the body outline and label articles as one of the four themes it represents: Freedom, Unity, Progress, or Responsibility. Students should also label characteristics of other articles that demonstrate their individuality. Students can title the poster “What is an American?” Display the posters around the school and area businesses.
4. B. The goal of this activity is for students to be able to see how they are interconnected with others and to show how, even as individuals, they possess characteristics similar to those of others. Students place their posters in front of themselves on the ground and sit in a large circle. A student holds a ball of yarn and, while taking a thread of the yarn, passes the ball to another student across the circle with an identical characteristic. That student in turn passes the yarn to yet another student. When all of the students with that characteristic are holding the string, select another characteristic and repeat the process. The activity will result in a web of people holding string and showing they are connected or unified in many different ways. Ask the students to state how a responsible person demonstrates one of the characteristics they have on their posters. For example, a driver is responsible for obeying traffic laws.
5. Ask the students to write a poem titled or themed “What is an American?” Poem format:
Line 1 One of the four themes
Line 2 Two adjectives
Line 3 Three action verbs
Line 4 Write a sentence about the theme
Line 5 A synonym for the theme

Closure

1. Review the brainstorming and list made in the Focus as well as the other activities to find things Americans have in common. Discuss.
2. Think about and discuss what was learned about America and its heritage and history. Students should consider American Heritage themes and what they learned through lessons and activities about America and its history and heritage including its democratic ideals, philosophy, founding and important documents, national symbols, significant events, important individuals and leaders, citizenship, national identity, etc.

Assessment

To answer the question, “What is an American?,” students will write an essay defining an American, describing both differences and similarities among Americans. Students should consider American Heritage themes and what they learned through lessons and activities about America and its history and heritage including its democratic ideals, philosophy, founding and important documents, national symbols, significant events, important individuals and leaders, citizenship, national identity, etc.

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