

Let History Speak

Canvas Unit and Lesson Overview

Let History Speak is a Canvas-housed collection of activities, lessons, and resources structured around the North Carolina State Constitution at three critical periods in our state's and nation's past: 1868, 1901, and 1956. Of the over thirty activities, two dozen are designed to be delivered in one-day block classes, with a half dozen options for extended two-day block lessons. The slide shows, timeline/fact sheets, and biography research assignments all provide teachers with the resources needed to scaffold and support the document analysis and evaluation in each period. Additionally, through grouping, selection of documents, and final student product options, teachers have multiple opportunities to effectively differentiate the materials for their students.

Teachers are encouraged to use the Canvas materials as best suits their course and student needs. Flexibility is key, for both the supporting resources and the featured lessons - teachers can dip into, modify and develop lessons, pick and choose resources and documents as they see fit. Although these materials can be used in a variety of courses and grade levels, the periods, themes, and objectives included in the collection are directly connected to the North Carolina Standard Course of Study for 11th grade American History.

While each of the three periods are designed as stand-alone units and stand-alone activities, the North Carolina State Constitution serves as a connecting thread binding together the important historical issues that continue to shape our state and nation. North Carolina's Constitution is a particularly effective vehicle for revealing the challenges of our past as it serves as both a reflection of and driver of significant changes over time. Again and again, the themes of governmental authority, race, education, progress, and democracy are revealed in a close examination of the people and documents that form the basis of the decisions at these critical points of time.

Why 1868, 1901, and 1956? These dates serve as anchors for students to explore the dramatic changes that animate our state's and nation's past in three critical periods. They also represent three of the most significant periods of change in the North Carolina Constitution, especially as the Constitution relates to political rights, race, and education in our state.

1868 focuses on the Reconstruction Era North Carolina Constitutional Convention. In the wake of the Civil War and the initial Presidential Reconstruction under Andrew Johnson, Congress gained control of Reconstruction policy and required

North Carolina and the former Confederate states to ratify the 14th Amendment and rewrite their state Constitutions as conditions for readmittance to the Union. The state convention was the first in North Carolina's history to include African American as well as white delegates and thus provides students with a wide spectrum of viewpoints to contend with as they examine the period.

1901 focuses on the disenfranchisement of African American male voters in the New South and Jim Crow Era through state Constitutional amendments implementing literacy tests and the grandfather clause. The highlighted figures and the documents reveal not only a dramatic shift in North Carolina politics, but also provides students with an opportunity to examine the contending forces at play in a period that gave rise to Populism, Progressivism, and Jim Crow as various people attempted to create their own vision of a "New South". Of particular importance, how did individuals and groups respond to the restrictions on freedom and equality imposed by Jim Crow?

1956 focuses on North Carolina's response to the Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court decision of 1954. Documents, historical figures, and now audio and video recordings allow students to examine the period and explore the issues and debates that gave rise to the Pearsall Plan and the "Save Our Schools" North Carolina Constitutional Amendment. In all of the time periods, students can be challenged to consider alternative viewpoints and courses of action, but perhaps no period can so readily be connected to present day challenges related to education, race, and the process of political advocacy.

Materials and Resources

The centerpiece of each unit is a selection of primary documents. The documents represent a variety of perspectives and formats, are briefly contextualized, and confined to a page or less each to facilitate practical instructional use. These documents can be printed and distributed in class or posted online. They can be used in a variety of suggested activities and lessons, but can also form the basis for the development of your own activities and lessons. The suggested lessons range from document analysis and evaluation, poster making, jigsaw and gallery walks, to Advanced Placement United States History Document-Based Questions (DBQs). For all of the lessons and activities, supporting graphic organizers for note-taking and document analysis, as well as evaluation rubrics are provided.

For contextualization, each period has a slide show and a Timeline/Fact Sheet. The slide shows, which have a North Carolina focus, can be presented either in whole or in part as an introduction to an activity and can be used in conjunction with your coverage of the larger American History unit. Slideshows can also be posted online as

supplementary resources. The Timeline/Fact Sheet can be used as an online resource or a one page front-back handout.

Each period also has an online biography assignment that has students (either individually or with partners/small groups) create slideshows of a key figure from the period. Each figure has a link to online resources about that person and an overall template/rubric to follow. These slideshows can be simply submitted online or presented to class.

Finally, each period has an activity focusing on how we publicly remember the past. For example, 1868 and 1901 include lesson plans utilizing the NC Highway Historical Marker Program and 1901 and 1956 have lesson plans that have students creating podcasts based on documents, biographies, and for 1956 the audio clip file.

Throughout the units, lessons, and activities, our approach has been to face these oftentimes contentious historical periods by providing teachers and students with documents and resources that represent a wide variety of viewpoints and perspectives. Rather than presenting students with superficial and predetermined evaluations of the past, Let History Speak supports students as they engage in the process of analysis and critical thinking, encouraging them to develop their own understanding and evaluation of our past. By doing so, teachers and students can make meaningful connections to our shared present and future.