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**Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness:
The History of Democracy in America**

Title: New England Town Meeting Newspaper Project

Possible Subject Area(s); History; Humanities; Civics.

Overview This project relates to a debate that was prevalent in 1830's New England relating to the care of the poor. While most towns had used a vendue system for 200 years, many towns were now switching over to a poor farm system. In these activities, students will study both systems and decide which was preferable. The topic will then be debated in a classroom "Town Meeting." Finally, students will work in groups to create a newspaper article based on the Town Meeting.

Essential Understanding: What is direct democracy? How was New England town government unique? How do newspapers distill events for the public's understanding?

Essential Questions: Which traditional system for the care of the poor was most fair, just and fiscally responsible?

CT Standards: 1.7-8.1 Formulate historical questions based on secondary sources including real or simulated historical sites and written texts.

1.9-10.1 Gather, analyze and reconcile historical information, including contradictory data, from primary and secondary sources to support or reject hypotheses.

2.9-10.1 Demonstrate an understanding of major events and trends in United States and local history.

4.9-10.4 Display empathy for people who have lived in the past.

6.9-10.1 Identify and explain characteristics needed for effective participation in public life.

6.9-10.2 Monitor and influence the formation and implementation of policy through various forms of participation.

13.9-10.3 Analyze how market forces and government regulation impact the use of resources.

Objectives:

- The student will develop an opinion on a historical problem.
- The student will gather information on two sides of a debate.
- The student will present their opinion in front of their peers in a town meeting debate format.
- The student will work in a group to create a newspaper article about a New England town meeting.

Materials Needed: Townspeople Opinions (Town Meeting Lesson.doc),
Town Meeting Character Worksheet (Town Meeting Character Worksheet.doc),
New England Government Handout

(http://oldsturbridgevillage.org/school/lesson_plans/ShowLessons.php?PageID=R&LessonID=25&DocID=2026&UnitID=),

Newspaper Article Information Handout

(http://quest.arc.nasa.gov/aero/wright/teachers/pdf/language/Newspaper_Article.pdf),

Newspaper article outline sheet (Outline Sheet for Your Group's Article.doc),

Newspaper Article Rubric

(http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php?screen=ShowRubric&module=Rubistar&rubric_id=1750944&).

Suggested Activities/Procedures:

NOTE: This unit plan was designed for three 70-minute block periods with classes of 14-18 students.

Day 1

DO NOW:

- **DO NOW:** Students copy down these terms: Direct Democracy, Representative Democracy, New England Town Meeting, Vendue System, Poor Farm. Teacher defines Direct and Indirect Democracy, but not the last three terms. 10 minutes.
- **INTRODUCTION:** Explain that this project will be a group written newspaper article based on a Town Meeting that we will have in class over the subject of what to do with the poor in an 1830's New England town. Explain that each group will need a good fast note taker. Each group will also need someone who's good at getting everyone's ideas together into a written piece (if the class has had debates previously, this type of person may be described as the person who compiles opening statements). Explain why these types will become necessary in the groups (for gathering town meeting arguments and for assembling those arguments into the outline of a newspaper article). Also explain the roles of state and local governments in 1830's New England towns. 10 minutes.
- **READING:** Have students read the **New England Government Handout**, seeking to define the last three terms listed above and to determine whether Town Meeting exemplify Direct or Representative Democracy. 20 minutes.
- **BRIEF DISCUSSION OF TERMS, FINDINGS AND QUESTIONS.** 5-10 minutes.
- **ACTIVITY:** This activity is a "gallery walk" in which students walk around the room in groups responding to wall displays on the **Town Meeting Character Worksheet**. Each "station" includes one pro-poor farm opinion and one pro-vendue system opinion (from the **Town Meeting Lesson** document). Give students five minutes at each "station," for a total of twenty minutes. Collect student worksheets. 20 minutes.

Day 2

DO NOW: Look at your notes from yesterday (and re-look at the pieces on the wall if necessary) and write out a ½ page opinion on why the town should have a poor farm or a vendue system. You can use some of the points made by the characters if you translate them into your own words.

- **DO NOW:** From their worksheets from the previous day (and re-looking at the stations displays if necessary), students must write out a ½ page opinion on why the town should have a poor farm or a vendue system. Students may use some of the points made by the characters if you translate them into your own words, or use them as quotes followed by original reasoning. Completely original ideas on this issue are also encouraged. 15 minutes.
- **INTRODUCTION:** Determine who supports which system (groups do not need to be of one mind, since they are not operating as a group at this point). Separate groups into reporters and townspeople. **Make sure every group has one reporter.** Reporters will sit in the back and act like court reporters, writing down the arguments being made. Everyone else is seated in the "pews." Explain how to raise hand, how to speak to the full group, etc. Explain that all townspeople must speak at least once to get credit (keep a tally on the board). Speaking should be in the form of a response to, or support of, another opinion. Allow students to give the "town" for their town meeting a name. 10 minutes.

- **TOWN MEETING:** The teacher facilitates, calling on speakers, but expresses no opinion. Announce the business of the day. Ask for opinions. At first, try to take turns between pro-poor farm speakers and pro-vendue speakers. After everyone has spoken at least once, continue the debate until everyone feels they have had their say. Then, vote for what system the town will adopt by a show of hands. 35 minutes.
- **CLOSURE:** Discuss the various merits and drawbacks of the decision the town has made with the class. For instance, a poor farm means a heavy one-time upfront cost that will be paid for by a big tax increase. On the other hand, a vendue system means a continual cost (though small) every year, and a lot of reliance on the good graces of the low-bidders to feed, respect and not overwork their lodgers. 10 minutes.

Day 3

- **DO NOW:** Pass out the **Newspaper Article Information Handout**, and read through it with the class, elaborating on it and checking for understanding. Use pages 1 and 2 only. Also, pass out the newspaper **Rubric** and go over the details of what makes a good article. 15-20 minutes.
- **ACTIVITY:** Assemble groups and set up work-stations in separate corners of the room. Pass out the **Newspaper Article Outline Sheet**. Groups must work with their reporter's notes to outline an article. When the outline is complete, they must transfer that information into the article itself (if computers are readily available in the classroom, students should type their articles and put them into newsletter format in Microsoft Publisher, creating not just an article, but a newspaper "front page." 40-55 minutes.
- **HOMEWORK:** All groups must have a completed newspaper article draft to present and read from on the following day.

Suggested Assessment/Evaluation

- Activity Participation (completed worksheet).
- Participation in Town Meeting (either reporting on, or presenting, arguments).
- Contribution to Group Article (see article rubric).

Possible Extensions/Resources

- When groups are presenting articles on day four, students in the "audience" should have peer feedback response forms when reading and/or hearing articles. Presenting teams should collect feedback and use it to help them create a more polished draft of their pieces that is suitable for display.
- Primary sources pertaining to these two systems (particularly from 1830's newspaper sources) would enhance both the stations activity and the newspaper activity in this unit.

A. Old Lady Hibbard, the parson's mother

It seems to me that the poor farm is a fairer system than the vendue because it is not based on money. In our vendue system, the lowest bidder gets to take care of the person. But how well are you going to take care of someone when you are only being paid a small amount for them? You'd be liable to pocket the money and no one's the wiser. At a poor farm, the poor get a chance to pay back the money being paid on their behalf by growing vegetables and making butter and cheese for the whole town and beyond. And no one's being paid off for these people's care.

A. Bill Suggs, printer

If it isn't broke, don't fix it. The vendue system works fine in this town. For a poor farm, you've got to buy the land, hire a manager, et cetera, et cetera... it's a drain on the financial system is what it is. And, really... if they're poor to start with, and not successful, what makes you think they'll be successful with this farm? Better to have them taken care of at the house of someone who *is* successful.

B. Oliver Waddell, tinsmith

We've had the vendue system here since the 1600's, and it's always worked well. Why change it now? We'd have to raise \$2,500 to pay for the construction of this poor farm. That's a huge tax burden on this town. It's so much simpler to get volunteers with low bids. That costs the

town very little. Also, in the vendue system, there is an overseer who periodically visits the houses where the poor are taken care of. He never hears any complaints.

B. George Taylor, saw mill worker

The poor farm provides a central location for the poor, so it's easy to manage, and there's less chance of abuse. These overseers in the vendue system can't possibly really know what's going on in the houses of these low-bidders. Personally, I'm suspicious of anyone who bid low to take on an extra mouth to feed. There's a story I've heard about a man who was bidding on all the orphans, feeding them once a day, and having them do all his

work. That sounds like indentured servitude to me, not Christian charity.

C. Amos Goodie, blacksmith

The poor are part of our community; they walk among us. A poor farm separates them by putting them all away in one place, outside of town. It takes away their dignity. They're labeled as outsiders, rather than accepted into the houses as one of our own. Do you want them to feel like they're away at a madhouse or sitting in the comfort of a home?

C. William Hibbard, parson

A poor farm would give the poor more dignity, not less, because they'd be working for a living. You can't hold your head high when you're living in someone's house because they've put a low bid on you, feeling in debt to them for the whole year that you're under their roof, and never knowing if you're contributing enough to the household to repay.

D. Jed Doyle, farmer

Families should take care of their own. I don't like the vendue and I don't like the poor farm either. The vendue puts pressure on our townsfolk to take in the poor for next to nothing, and the poor farm

is giving away my tax money to a farm that'll be in competition with me. Where are my subsidies from this government? I really don't like either one of these ideas, but I especially hate the poor farm idea.

D. Roger Merchant, banker

I don't like either system, but the poor farm is the lesser of two evils. If you're old and infirm, then no one's going to bid for you in the vendue system, because you can't be of any help at all around their house. You won't be much help at the poor farm either, but at least there you have strength in numbers. There'll always be someone for every job, and if one is infirm, well, there's another that can pick up the slack. With the poor farm, I'm just worried about where the land and money for the farm itself will be coming from. It's crowded enough here already and we've also got the highest taxes in the county as it is.

Name _____

Vendue System or a Poor Farm?

For each character, evaluate their argument and give your opinion.

STATION A

Old Lady Hibbard favors:

Her main point is:

I agree with her because:

I disagree with her because:

Bill Suggs favors:

His main point is:

I agree with him because:

I disagree with him because:

STATION B

George Taylor favors:

His main point is:

I agree with him because:

I disagree with him because:

Oliver Waddell favors:

His main point is:

I agree with him because:

I disagree with him because:

STATION C

Amos Goodie favors:

His main point is:

I agree with him because:

I disagree with him because:

William Hibbard favors:

His main point is:

I agree with him because:

I disagree with him because:

STATION D

Roger Merchant favors: **Outline Sheet for Your Group's Article**

Headline:

Byline: By:

Lead Paragraph:

Who:

What:

When:

Where:

Why:

How:

Explanation:

Additional Information:

His main point is:

I agree with him because:

I disagree with him because:

Jed Doyle favors:

His main point is:

I agree with him because:

I disagree with him because:

