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

**Title: Nineteenth Century Local Governance in New England**

**Possible Subject Area(s); US History, Civics**

**Overview: Using information from Old Sturbridge Village, a replica of an Early Nineteenth Century community in New England, students will be analyzing primary documents in order to conduct a class town meeting as representatives of the citizens of the town. Students will be required to participate in an oral presentation (town meeting) as well as produce a written final analysis of their research.**

**Essential Understanding: Students will make informed arguments based upon a critical analysis of primary documents**

**Essential Questions:**

- 1) How does perspective impact decision making?**
- 2) How might it feel to make decisions that affect the lives of others?**

**CT Standards:**

- 1.1- Demonstrate an understanding of significant events and themes in United States History**
- 1.7- Explain the purpose, structures, and functions of government at the local, state, and national levels**
- 1.8- Describe the interaction between citizens and their government in the making and implementation of laws**
- 1.9- Understand the rights and responsibilities of citizens**
- 2.2- Interpret information from a variety of primary and secondary sources**
- 2.4- Demonstrate ability to participate in social studies discourse through informed discussion, debate, and effective oral presentation**

**Objectives:**

- The students will define various social aspects of 19<sup>th</sup> century rural New England society
- The students will define various economic aspects of 19<sup>th</sup> century rural New England society
- The students will create character analysis information for typical residents of a 19<sup>th</sup> century rural New England town
- The students will be able to clearly articulate which form of poor relief they support, and why they support it.
- The students will be able to clearly distinguish between the various methods of poor relief in 19<sup>th</sup> century rural New England

**Materials Needed:** access to computer lab, documents using the following sites:

<http://www.osv.org/school/resources.html> (Old Sturbridge Village site)

<http://www.teachushistory.org/> (DeTocqueville Visit to the United States)

**Suggested Activities/Procedures:**

**Day 1**

- The initiation of the lesson begins in the computer lab, or in the classroom if the teacher has the documents on the 19<sup>th</sup> century printed. Students will be given a poor relief-analysis chart in order to gain insight into the concepts of outside relief (OR), the poor farm (PF), or vendue system (VS). Students will then research the various pros and cons of each system specifically using the primary documents from Old Sturbridge Village (using website) entitled “Poor Relief in the Town of Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, 1826” and “The Quincy Report on Poor Relief, Public Record.” Students will then create a chart (example attached) on the three forms of poor relief and their functions based on their readings. The last part of class should be used to have the students compare their findings in small groups.
- Homework Assignment #1  
Students are to be given a chart that has the various occupations of the people in the town (example attached) and are to fill out the pre-research assumption column for discussion in class the next day.

**Day 2**

- In groups of 2-3, students are to be assigned a role of a member of the town community. They are to then research (computer lab) the type of role that person would have in the town community, and which form of poor relief that person would support. It is important that those students that have a female community member examine the teachushistory.org site in order to gain insight into the role of women in 19<sup>th</sup> century New England. Make sure that the students not only have filled out their arguments in support of their stance, but the possible counterarguments.
- Homework Assignment #2  
From the Old Sturbridge Village site, students are to be given the handout “Historical Background on Town Government in Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century New England” to read and be prepared to discuss how the class town meeting will be structured.

**Day 3**

- For the actual class town meeting, there should be several guidelines for the debate depending on class size. Each group should be able to present their argument for poor relief, and have at least one opportunity to respond to a counter-argument. Students should also have a note chart to write down the important points of each group, whether they agree or not
- Homework Assignment #3  
Essay on effectiveness of governance in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in terms of dealing with poor relief (1-2 pages)

## Suggested Assessment/Evaluation

Rubrics for class debates and final essay (examples attached)

## Possible Extensions/Resources:

19<sup>th</sup> century documents also available on school databases such as EBSCO, ICONN. Lesson can also be extended to modern-day examples of poor relief programs set up within cities such as affordable housing, homeless shelters, soup kitchens, etc.

## Day 1 charts (examples)

System	Function	Negatives	Positives
Outside Relief (OR)			
Poor Farm (PF)			
Vendue System (VS)			

Town Member	Pre-Research Position	Justification	Post-research Position	Justification
Blacksmith				
Constable				
Widow				
Tavern Keeper's Daughter				
Justice of the Peace				
Lead Farmer				
Farm Worker				

\* There are a number of figures you can add/omit based on your class demographics

## Day 3 chart for class debates

Group Town Member	System Supported	Justification	Systems Rejected	Justification
Blacksmith				
Constable				
Widow				
Tavern Keeper's Daughter				
Justice of the Peace				
Lead Farmer				
Farm Worker				

## CLASSROOM DEBATE RUBRIC (Example)

Criteria	Levels of Performance			
	1	2	3	4
<p><b>1. Organization and Clarity:</b></p> <p>Viewpoints and responses are outlined both clearly and orderly.</p>	Unclear in most parts	Clear in some parts but not over all	Most clear and orderly in all parts	Completely clear and orderly presentation
<p><b>2. Use of Arguments:</b></p> <p>Reasons are given to support viewpoint.</p>	Few or no relevant reasons given	Some relevant reasons given	Most reasons given: most relevant	Most relevant reasons given in support
<p><b>3. Use of Examples and Facts:</b></p> <p>Examples and facts are given to support reasons.</p>	Few or no relevant supporting examples/facts	Some relevant examples/facts given	Many examples/facts given: most relevant	Many relevant supporting examples and facts given
<p><b>4. Use of Rebuttal:</b></p> <p>Arguments made by the other teams are responded to and dealt with effectively.</p>	No effective counter-arguments made	Few effective counter-arguments made	Some effective counter-arguments made	Many effective counter-arguments made
<p><b>5. Presentation Style:</b></p> <p>Tone of voice, use of gestures, and level of enthusiasm are convincing to audience.</p>	Few style features were used; not convincingly	Few style features were used convincingly	All style features were used, most convincingly	All style features were used convincingly

**Final Essay Rubric (example)**

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Thesis Statement</b>	<b>Weak or unstated</b>	<b>Stated but unclear</b>	<b>Stated and partially supported</b>	<b>Stated clearly and supported throughout essay</b>
<b>Use of Resources</b>	<b>No use of class documents</b>	<b>Minimal use of class documents</b>	<b>Good use of class documents</b>	<b>Extensive use of documents</b>
<b>Strength of Argument</b>	<b>No side selected</b>	<b>Unclear about side selection</b>	<b>Selection clear, but argument is basic</b>	<b>Clear selection with extensive justification supported by thesis</b>
<b>Counterargument</b>	<b>No side selected</b>	<b>Unclear about side selection</b>	<b>Selection clear, but argument is basic</b>	<b>Clear selection with extensive justification supported by thesis</b>
<b>Cohesiveness</b>	<b>No flow whatsoever</b>	<b>Some flow, but not consistent</b>	<b>Consistent flow, but not fully consistent with thesis</b>	<b>Consistent flow with all arguments connected to thesis</b>

The final essay should really be just a final analysis of everything you have done in the unit. Students should be able to reference their notes as to which form of poor relief they supported, and also look at the notes from the debate to write about the counterarguments, or arguments that further supported their position.