

**From a Student’s Perspective**

On Thursday, November 20, 2008 an unprecedented event took place. The first female Supreme Court Justice (now retired Associate Justice of the US Supreme Court), Sandra Day O’Connor stepped into the classroom of the fledgling Constitution High School. Accompanying her were two important Philadelphians, the honorable Judge Marjorie O. Rendell (Third Circuit Court of Appeals Judge) and our very own mayor Michael Nutter.

To my surprise, I received the once in a lifetime opportunity to perform in front of these three important people. When it was first brought to my attention that I would have an opportunity to perform I felt indifferent, that is until I found out that I would be presenting my case and not just presenting it to anyone, but to Justice Sandra Day O’Connor.

At that moment I couldn’t believe it. It felt as if someone was pulling my leg (and that’s not hard because I am gullible). Right then and right there I knew I had to go for such a great fortuitous event. Still, to this day I will cherish the event as a true blessing. I have overcome a lot of obstacles in my life and I never thought I would reach such a pinnacle moment. I count this as one of the many events that have given me more faith and ambition to follow my dreams. Justice Sandra Day O’Connor truly is a role model and it has been a pleasure meeting her and performing in front of her. I too some day hope to be a great success.

Reneé Jackson  
Junior, Constitution High School



## Featured Civic Teaching Program



**The Muse Project** is based on a theory of instruction that recognizes that primary documents and difficult texts can be more easily comprehended by readers of any skill level if put to music. Many teachers already know this. With the youngest students, music is used as the most effective tool for teaching the ABCs.

Social studies teachers know that teaching with primary documents challenges students to decode and comprehend texts written in a style and syntax to which they have generally had little previous exposure. The Muse Project has composed music for the following documents:

*The Constitution*  
*The Declaration of Independence*  
*You Will Go (The Indian Removal Act of 1830)*  
*Letter from Chief Seattle*

The Penn Literacy Network (PLN) at the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania has developed instructional guide books for these pieces. PLN faculty and middle and high school Social Studies, English and Music educators have collaborated on developing lesson plans. To view a sample lesson plan, visit [http://mysite.verizon.net/lyndaroth/Indian\\_Removal\\_Act\\_lesson\\_plan.htm](http://mysite.verizon.net/lyndaroth/Indian_Removal_Act_lesson_plan.htm)

PLN/Muse Project lessons require students to utilize a spectrum of skills that include listening, singing, writing and interpreting historical documents, allowing for multiple learning perspectives. To view an informational video about PLN/Muse and for audio samples of each document, visit [www.themuseproject.org](http://www.themuseproject.org).

For more information contact:

Lynda Roth  
Creative Director  
The Muse Project  
949-497-1061

Dr. Bonnie Botel-Sheppard  
Executive Director  
Penn Literacy Network  
215-898-1984  
<http://www.gse.upenn.edu/pln/>

## Featured Lesson Plan

*A More Perfect Union: Barack Obama's Race Speech at the National Constitution Center* [http://www.constitutioncenter.org/Files/race\\_lesson.pdf](http://www.constitutioncenter.org/Files/race_lesson.pdf)

President-elect Barack Obama delivered his landmark speech on race, entitled *A More Perfect Union*, from the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia in March 2008. In his now-famous remarks, Obama entreated citizens to overcome racial barriers between them in order to address the challenges before our country.

The Center's Education Department designed a lesson that highlights changes made to the Constitution and through powers delegated to each branch of government by the Constitution that chart a historic progression towards "a more perfect union." The lesson encourages student deliberation on race in America by familiarizing students with Senator Obama's speech. Students are asked to read the speech for homework, guided by essential questions. In class, students work in groups to analyze parts of the Constitution, legislation and a Supreme Court opinion. They are then asked to consider them in the context of race relations in American history and President-elect Obama's call to perfect the union. The deliberation culminates with students creating an action plan detailing how they will play a part in perfecting the union.

The text and video recording of the speech are included with the lesson. The original copy of the speech was autographed by Mr. Obama and is on display in the National Constitution Center.

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### New PennCORD School

PennCORD would like to welcome Garnet Valley High School as its newest partner in reinvigorating civic learning in Pennsylvania. GVHS, located in Delaware County, recently took advantage of the support PennCORD extends to its schools by staging a mock presidential debate in which students posed as both Republican and Democratic presidential and vice presidential candidates. They familiarized themselves with both parties' platforms and applied their knowledge by debating extemporaneously issues that featured in actual debates throughout the election

season, presented by a student moderator.

Embodying the PennCORD mission, Garnet Valley involved their entire school and community in this civic endeavor by inviting members of local government to participate as well as by allowing the juniors and seniors to view the debate live in the auditorium, while the underclassmen watched on closed circuit televisions in their classrooms. All students, however, had the opportunity to cast their vote for the mock President and Vice President of their choice.

We applaud the successful efforts of Garnet Valley High School and are proud to call them our newest partner school.



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### Featured Staff Member

Sayeh Hormozi, a recent Philadelphia transplant, is the newest addition to the PennCORD staff. She has traveled all the way from Dallas, Texas to join our team. Despite her love for the Cowboys, Sayeh is enjoying converting to the Philly lifestyle and its departure from southern living. Instead of driving, she loves not having a car and instead riding her bike to work or walking to grab a bite to eat. She has also made a smooth transition from her years as an English teacher to being the PennCORD Program Coordinator for Eastern Pennsylvania. She most enjoys using her past experience in the classroom to work with students and teachers to help them cultivate original civic initiatives in their schools.

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### School of the Month: Fox Chapel Area High School

PennCORD had the pleasure of hosting five Fox Chapel seniors and their teacher, Jennifer Klein, in Philadelphia on December 9 and 10 as part of the Grand Prize for winning the *Voting: the Power of Your Voice* video contest. The winning entry was produced and submitted by Thanh Doan, Alexander Radkoff and Charles Wei of Ohara Township; Akansh Murthy of Aspinwall Township; and Anders Bergren of Fox Chapel Township.

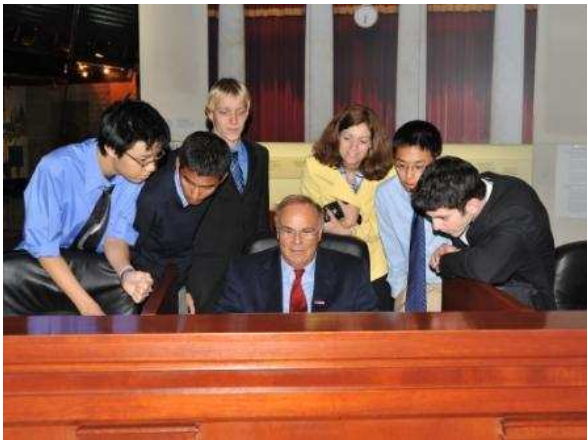
The winning video, “Voter vs. Non-Voter,” is a spoof of the Apple vs. PC

commercials. It depicts two high school-aged students discussing the important issues facing the nation and the convenient access to answers on voting questions through the Department of State’s [VotesPA.com](http://VotesPA.com) Web site.

“These students are to be commended for their creativity in taking a concept that is widely recognized and using it to convey the opportunity before young voters to help shape the future of this country at a time when there are so many pressing issues,” said Judge Rendell.

The Fox Chapel students had a

whirlwind visit to Philadelphia; fitting in an interview on Comcast Newsmakers, a tour of Independence Hall, a campus visit to the University of Pennsylvania and lunch at historic Reading Terminal all on their first day! Day two began with a visit to the National Constitution Center. Governor Rendell joined the group there and gave them a personal tour of the exhibit. Judge Rendell presented the students with their prize money and then took the boys for real Philadelphia cheese steaks.



*Governor Rendell gives the students a tour of the National Constitution Center*

The First Lady also recognized Michael Wolfe as the runner-up in the contest. Wolfe, of Shickshinny, is a senior at Northwest Area High School in Luzerne County. His video, “An Honest Opinion,” is a silent 40-second spot that depicts how one person’s opinion cannot have an impact unless it is voiced by going to the polls. Judge Rendell presented Michael and his school with their prize money in a school wide assembly on Veteran’s Day.

“I want to congratulate all of the students who participated in this

competition,” said Judge Rendell. “The response and number of entries we received tell us that young, eligible voters are aware of the issues we face and are excited about participating in the upcoming election.”

The winning videos are viewable at [www.pennCORD.org/news/student-videos-on-demand/](http://www.pennCORD.org/news/student-videos-on-demand/). All top twenty videos are available at **Comcast On Demand** through January 12. You can find the videos in the PennCORD folder located under the **Get Local** section.



*Governor and Judge Rendell present the check to Fox Chapel winners*