

Lesson Plan for the Month: The Exchange

On January 14th young people from Delaware, Kentucky, New York State, North Dakota, Puerto Rico, and Texas deliberated with Pennsylvania students on the question: **Is the Constitution Color-blind?**

Jenay Smith from Constitution High School and Bobby Trotman from Cheltenham High School came to the National Constitution Center to take part in the Center's tri-annual series of conversations among high school students that promotes deliberation on current constitutional issues, which also teaches students about the mechanics of our nation's democratic process: understanding the Constitution, researching the issues, voicing one's opinions and finding consensus with other citizens. These Pennsylvania students offered excellent insights as well as historical and contemporary context to the deliberation.

The high level of the conversation impressed both professor Cornell West of Princeton University and Tavis Smiley the mind behind the new exhibit at the National Constitution Center, *America I AM: The African American Imprint*. Both spoke to the students who participated in this installment of The Exchange and expressed their feelings about the quality of the day's conversation, the exhibit as well as answering the question, "Is the Constitution color-blind?"

Teachers and students can watch the video conference, download the lesson plan and readings, start conversations about constitutional issues at *The Exchange* [online](http://www.constitutionscenter.org/exchange).

THE EXCHANGE
 A CONVERSATION ON CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES

Is the Constitution Color-Blind?

"No state shall...deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."
 —Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment

Since the ratification of the Constitution, the 14th Amendment has always been a constitutional dilemma. The Constitution of 1787 prohibited slavery—our nation's original sin. In the centuries past—through Civil War, Jim Crow segregation, the Civil Rights era and beyond—constitutional scholars, judges and notably have shaped the nation and changed our Constitution.

Writing in 1886, Justice John Marshall Harlan observed: "Our Constitution is color-blind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens." Today, Justice's own affirmative action and equal opportunity still center on whether the Constitution tolerates distinctions on the basis of color. Believers in a color-blind Constitution say it does not. They say affirmative action is wrong because it treats people unequally. Believers in color-conscious Constitution support affirmative action. They say that will ensure disparities from our society government may still exist into distant future to guarantee equal access to education and employment.

Now it's your turn to answer the question: Is the U.S. Constitution color-blind?

YES	NO
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Constitution demands that government treat people on the basis of individual merit, not as members of racial groups. The 14th Amendment should be interpreted to prohibit any and all discrimination, against racial minorities and whites alike. It is not fair to penalize people who themselves have committed no racial discrimination for the past discrimination of others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Constitution demands that all people have a fair chance to compete that means government must make race a factor. The 14th Amendment should be interpreted to give special protection to African-Americans and other racial minorities that has sponsored discrimination. In a color-conscious society, taking account of race is necessary to promote diversity.

www.constitutionscenter.org/exchange

School Spotlight *continued from page 1*

Students are given the responsibility of planning, implementing, and leading the program's culminating Model Legislature Conference and must learn parliamentary procedure and the duties of elected Pennsylvania officials. They stay up to date on current events, to learn to voice their opinions on those events, learn how to write a bill, vote on a bill, run for office and vote for office. Other roles include Supreme Court Justices who hear oral arguments from teams of attorneys and lobbyists who learn to influence legislation.

The program strives to develop competent and responsible citizens by providing instruction in government, history, law, and democracy all contributing to an increase in civic knowledge. The goal is ultimately being able to teach students to be informed and active members of their government and their communities.

To see how your school can get involved in the program, go to www.ymcapa.org/YouthAndGovernment.html.

The Arlin M. Adams Center
 FOR LAW AND SOCIETY
 Susquehanna University

The Arlin M. Adams Center for Law and Society at Susquehanna University, in collaboration with the Education Department of the university, is pleased to offer a **three-day summer institute for selected Pennsylvania social studies teachers**. The purpose of this institute is to provide attending teachers with an enhanced understanding of the **American Justice System**, and to assist them with the development of a unit of study on the judicial branch of government for implementation during the 2009-2010 school year. The units of study will be developed by teacher "teams" in accordance with state and national academic standards. Apply [here](#).

Civic Engagement Drives Consortium Agenda

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“When kids can see a connection between academics and the work people do every day, whether occupationally or for their communities, their learning takes on more meaning and they become more deeply engaged with school,” said Stephen Seliy, who oversees TFIM as the Consortium’s Associate Executive Director. “TFIM projects require students to learn or practice social and technical skills they’ll need in almost any work or civic setting.”

From a pilot program in four districts eight years ago, TFIM has expanded to 25 districts, making the Consortium a leading partner to PennCORD in promoting civic engagement among students and others in the Western half of the state. It’s a role the Consortium welcomes because civic responsibility is at the heart of the organization’s advocacy for public schools. Founded in 1987 to support education in communities hard hit by steel industry retrenchment, the Consortium now works with more than 50 Western Pennsylvania districts to involve all stakeholders in their schools in the belief that public education is fundamental to a democratic society.

In addition to TFIM, the Consortium creates other authentic learning experiences for students and offers an array of initia-

tives to help educators make schools more effective. Among them are:

- *Leadership Design Teams*, which bring together administrators, teachers, other school personnel, community members and sometimes students to inform critical decisions affecting districts and schools
- *Middle-High Forum*, which supports teams of educators in designing, implementing and evaluating ways of improving major transitions students make, particularly between the middle grades and high school, as a means of increasing academic performance and graduation rates
- *Journey to Learn*, a multi-district in-service experience that ranks as the largest in the state, with some 2,500 educators from 16 districts participating
- *Skills for Life*, which helps equip students to make healthy choices, develop healthy relationships, manage anger and stress and develop self-esteem
- *Great Idea Grants*, which encourage classroom innovation
- *Literacy for Life*, which uses a variety of programs to promote literacy from birth

Workshop: Presidents & the Constitution, Three Fifths of All Other Persons

Date: April 1, 2009
Time: 7:30 am to 2:30 pm
Where: Carnegie Mellon University, 5000 Forbes Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15213
Cost: FREE
Who: Grade 9-12 teachers who want to increase their knowledge of America’s Presidents and their effect on our nation.

REGISTER BY MARCH 6 at www.BillofRightsInstitute.org/ApplyOnline

We want to publish your stories! Recognize a school, teacher or student, share a lesson, publicize an event. The key ingredient is that your story promote civic teaching and learning in Pennsylvania. Send submissions to PennCORD by clicking here.