New York State Constitutional Convention

**2 Lesson Plans** to Initiate Informed Action in 8th-12th grade New York students

Fall 2017
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ABOUT THE NEW YORK STATE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

Every twenty years New Yorkers have the chance to determine whether their current state constitution is meeting their needs and expectations. This opportunity came from a meeting of constitutional delegates in 1846. Believing the people needed more of a say in their state government, the delegates wrote this automatic ballot referral procedure into the New York State Constitution (“NY Constitution”). On November 7, 2017, New Yorkers statewide will have the chance, yet again, to vote on whether they would like to convene a Constitutional Convention to modify the current NY Constitution. If a majority of voters approve, a Constitutional Convention will be convened on April 2, 2019, which will be led by elected state delegates. Proposed constitutional amendments drafted during this Constitutional Convention will have to be approved by the voters after the Constitutional Convention is adjourned. There have been 9 previous Constitutional Conventions in New York State history since 1846. If the voters vote against holding a Constitutional Convention, state legislature can pass legislatively referred referendum, which is the method most used for amending the constitution.

ABOUT OUR CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION LESSON PLANS

A large portion of New York voters do not understand, or even know, about the Constitutional Convention ballot measure and the potential consequences of the vote. To both ensure a more informed electorate, and to also engage young people in this important state political procedure, Generation Citizen has created a 2 Lesson Package for teachers to implement in their classrooms.

This lesson package is nonpartisan, approaching the upcoming vote from a historical perspective, while also providing the pro and con perspectives for students. The goal of these lessons is for students to: 1) become informed about this process; 2) make a personal decision on the matter; and 3) be motivated and able to inform their communities about the process.

ABOUT GENERATION CITIZEN

Generation Citizen is a nonprofit organization that works to ensure that every student in the United States receives an Action Civics education, which provides them with the knowledge and skills necessary to participate in our 21st democracy as active citizens.

Generation Citizen’s published and award-winning semester-long Action Civics curriculum is at the heart of our work. It is action-based, state standards-aligned, and academically rigorous. Over the course of the semester, program, students meet twice weekly during in class time to choose an issue, develop a focused, strategic plan to address the issue, take meaningful action, and then reflect on their successes and challenges. Currently Generation Citizen operates in New York City; Massachusetts; Rhode Island; Central Texas; Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and the San Francisco Bay Area. For more information about our New York City program visit generationcitizen.org or contact New York Executive Director DeNora Getachew at dgetachew@generationcitizen.org or New York Program Director Brooke Wallace at bwallace@generationcitizen.org.
Lesson 1: Becoming Experts

OVERVIEW
This first lesson serves to introduce the NY Constitution and the process of amending it. Students will learn a brief history of the Constitution and the past Constitutional Conventions. They’ll also learn about the pros and cons of holding the Constitutional Convention. This lesson prepares them for the second lesson where they will work to make sure others are knowledgeable, too.

OBJECTIVES
By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:
• Explain the history of the NY Constitution
• List and explain the steps of a Constitutional Convention
• Analyze the pros and cons of holding a Constitutional Convention
• Evaluate the Constitutional Convention and determine whether they feel it should be held or not

AGENDA (for a 50-minute lesson)
• Activating Strategy/Do Now: Issues at Stake (10 minutes)
• History of NY State Constitution: Video and Notes (10 minutes)
• Brainstorm Pros/Cons (5 minutes)
• Research Pros/Cons and Share out (20 minutes)
• Exit Ticket (5 minutes)

MATERIALS
• Do Now Handout (see Appendix A)
• Video Clip (see Appendix B)
• Video Clip Notes Sheets (see Appendix C)
• Pro/Con Charts (see Appendix D)
• Pro/Con excerpts (see Appendix E)
• Exit Tickets (see Appendix F)

PREPARATION BEFORE CLASS
☐ Download video clip to your computer to avoid internet connection problems during the lesson. *Note: you can also stream the YouTube video if you feel confident about your internet access.
☐ Make copies of student handouts (see Appendices).
☐ Read through pros/cons article excerpts and completed Pro/Con Chart so as to be prepared to facilitate pro/con discussion.
☐ Assign students to 14 groups for the pro/con research.

RESOURCES/REFERENCES
• Below is a non-exhaustive list of sites that can be contacted for more information/additional reading on the Constitutional Convention:
NY Constitutional Convention: Lesson 1 – Becoming Experts

- New Yorkers Against Corruption: [http://politi.co/2xvEQTO](http://politi.co/2xvEQTO)
GETTING STARTED (10 minutes)

DO NOW: Issues at Stake (3-5 minutes)
Show students Do Now questions (see Appendix A) – project it or make copies for students to view it. Ask students to think about what they already know about laws and constitutions and to use any prior knowledge to help them answer the following questions.

1. What are some laws that you think New York should have? List at least 2.
2. How are laws passed? Who passes laws?
3. What role do voters and citizens play in passing laws?
4. What is the difference between a law and a constitutional amendment?
5. What role do the voters and citizens play in passing constitutional amendments?
6. Circle any of the issues listed below that are import to you:
   Reproductive rights, the environment, worker’s rights, free public education, freedom of speech, same sex marriage, privacy rights, public assistance, aid for the elderly

Give students 3-5 minutes to answer these questions. If students finish early, have them turn to a partner and share their answers and brainstorm on any of the ones they didn’t know the answer to.

Discussion (5 minutes)
Debrief: When finished, ask students to share out what they wrote down. Go over the answers with them (KEY included in Appendix A). After question 5 has been answered and discussed, share with students that the state of New York has a constitution that is separate from the United States. Constitution. Let them know that there is a question on the November 7th ballot about whether to consider changes to NY’s Constitution and that as citizens of New York they have a role in determining whether the NY Constitution should be changed.

Ask students which issues from number 6 were the most important to them and why. Explain that the issues listed are all at stake with the possibility of the constitution changing. Be sure to use this time to build student buy in by establishing that the potential Constitutional Convention will cover issues of interest or relevance to them as young people. Emphasize to students that voters will be the ones to determine the outcome of these issues based on their vote for a Constitutional Convention, and any proposals to amend the NY Constitution that are recommended for the ballot.

Framing: Transition to explain to students what they’ll be working on for the rest of the first lesson and during the second lesson – learning about the NY Constitution, the issues at stake if a Constitutional Convention is convened, and then educating others on these things so that New Yorkers can make an informed decision when they vote in the fall. It’s okay if some of this still feels obtuse to them at this point. Explain that the next step is learning about the constitution and how it has changed in the past and could again soon.

DURING CLASS (40 minutes)

The History of the NY State Constitution (10 minutes)
Pull up the video clip (Appendix B) and distribute to students the Video Notes Handout (Appendix C) and ask them to answer the questions while they watch the video clip. Show students the video clip. When they are done watching it, go over the questions and answers with students (KEY included in Appendix C).
**Framing:** Use this time to establish a firm history of the NY Constitution and the Constitutional Convention process. Take the time to answer any questions students may still have about the process after having watched and taken notes.

**Brainstorm Pros/Cons (5 minutes)**

Now that students have a working knowledge of the NY Constitution and the process of the Constitutional Convention, invite them to brainstorm about what might be the pros and cons of holding another Constitutional Convention.

Begin by asking students to brainstorm individually and jot down a few ideas. Then have students share these ideas with a partner. After a couple minutes, have students share their ideas. Write (or have students write) their responses on the board on a t-chart with pros on one side and cons on the other. Have students explain their ideas.

Explain to students that we are going to be doing research to determine more pros and cons and then using this knowledge to inform our communities about these so that voters can make the most informed decision on whether to call for the Constitutional Convention or not.

**Research and Share Outs (20 minutes)**

Split students into 14 groups – seven “pro” and seven “con”, but don’t tell them whether they are “pro” or “con” – let them figure it out when doing their reading. Provide each student with a copy of the Pro/Con Chart (Appendix D) in which they’ll record the reasons for/against the Constitutional Convention that they find during their research. Provide each of the groups with a copy of a piece of research (Appendix E). Explain to students that each group has received a piece of research which makes an argument about the Constitutional Convention. Students should work together with their groups to record any pertinent information from their research in their charts. They’ll have to determine whether it is a pro or con piece of information and then how best to summarize it for their charts. Before students begin working with their groups, explaining the example at the top of the Pro/Con chart together as a class. Use the example to ensure everyone understands and then let groups begin their assignment.

When everyone is finished collecting their research, each group will share out what they’ve learned and everyone will record this remaining information into their charts (KEY included in Appendix D). The goal is to have multiple arguments and details to use for tomorrow when we inform our communities. Emphasize that this is an important decision and one that needs to be analyzed from all points of view and arguments.

Depending on your students and your class time, provide no more than 10 minutes for students to read and record. After the time has elapsed, ask each group to share what they read and have other students record the information in their Pro/Con Charts.

Once students are finished sharing out, ask them if there were any ideas that they’d already come up with earlier. If so, place a check mark next to these on the t-chart and congratulate students on being so perceptive. Then ask students which arguments were new ones. Check for any remaining questions regarding the pros and cons. Let them know that this research is going to be so valuable tomorrow when we work to create resources to educate our community on the Constitutional Convention.

**TIP:** You may want to brainstorm some Pros/Cons prior to this activity to help stimulate their conversation. You could even offer one as an example if students have a hard time at first.

**TIP:** You could split students into heterogeneous groups ensuring that each group has some students with higher reading tars or you could split students into levelized groups, providing groups with lower reading levels with the shorter reading excerpts.

**TIP:** If you have time, you can facilitate a discussion with students about how they’d vote based on this information.
WRAPPING UP (5 minutes)

Exit Ticket – What do you think? (5 minutes)
Provide students with the exit ticket (Appendix F) or project the answer on the board: Which pro do you find the most convincing? Why? Which con do you find most convincing? Why? How would you vote and/or suggest that other people vote? Why?
Lesson 2: Taking Action and Educating Others

OVERVIEW
This second lesson could take more than 1 day depending on the teacher/class choice of projects. Essentially, this lesson serves to empower students to take the information they’ve learned and share it with others so that people are informed to make a decision about the Constitutional Convention. All action is purposeful and valuable, but some takes longer than others so teachers can choose from a variety of options. Regardless, students will take the information they’ve learned and put it together to teach others.

OBJECTIVES
By the end of this lesson, students will be able to...
- Analyze and apply statistics on voter knowledge of the Constitutional Convention.
- Collaborate with peers to educate their community on the Constitutional Convention.

AGENDA (for a 50-minute lesson)
- Activating Strategy/Do Now: NY CC Statistics (10 minutes)
- Outreach Creation and Action (30 minutes allotted for this class; may need more time in future classes)
- Project Share Outs (5 minutes)
- Exit Ticket: Individual Commitments (5 minutes)

MATERIALS
- Do Now CC Statistics Handouts (Appendix G)
- Outreach Option Pages relevant to your class project (Appendix I- N)
- Exit Ticket Individual Commitment (Appendix H)

PREPARATION BEFORE CLASS
☐ Print Student Handouts (see Appendix).
☐ Choose which project students will engage in and print the relevant Outreach Option pages. *Note: you could have students choose the project, but then you would have to print the relevant Outreach Option pages during class or on another day and students could start the work after that point.

RESOURCES/REFERENCES
- All resources from Lesson 1 will also be relevant for this lesson and subsequent student action work.
GETTING STARTED (10 minutes)

DO NOW: Analyzing NY Constitutional Convention Statistics (5 minutes)
Provide students with a copy of today’s Do Now (Appendix G) or project it on the board. Ask students to study the graph and then answer the accompanying questions.
1. According to polls, how many Americans actually know they have a state constitution in addition to a national one?
2. Why is this fact important?
3. According to polls, how many New Yorkers haven’t heard anything at all about the possibility of a Constitutional Convention?
4. Why is this fact important?
5. According to polls, how many New Yorkers support having a Constitutional Convention? How many do not support it?
6. What do you notice when you compare whether people have heard of the Constitutional Convention and whether they want it or not?

Debrief: Go over the answers to these questions with students (KEY included in Appendix G). Discuss with them the lack of knowledge voters have about their state constitutions and the Constitutional Convention. Ask students what could be problematic or concerning about the lack of knowledge and how could that problem be corrected? Allow time for some brainstorming. You can write students’ ideas on the board.

Framing: Thank students for their great ideas about how to combat New Yorkers lack of knowledge on the Constitutional Convention. Explain to students that as a class today, we are going to take their great ideas and work on educating our community members. We are going to try to change the statistics! Remind students that before we can do that we need to review what we know about the Constitutional Convention from yesterday. Ask students to share out what they remember. Ensure that students review 1) the process, 2) the role of citizens, 3) the Pros and Cons, and 4) the issues at stake.

**Note: Depending on time allotted, facilitators can choose one or more of the following activities for students to work on.
1. Writing letters/emails to legislators asking them to ensure voters are well informed about the Constitutional Convention (see Appendix I)
   - Note: Can be extended to a letter writing campaign. See Appendix I for instructions.
   - Note: You could also ask legislators to come to a community meeting if you choose to hold an assembly (see Appendix M).
2. Making visuals to display in their school and/or neighborhood (see Appendix J)
3. Make a video clip to share with parents and community members; could be shared in a digital newsletter (if your school does this) sent to parents via email (see Appendix K)
4. Create a presentation that can be given at the next PTA meeting or at an assembly (see Appendix M); could also show the video clip at this meeting (see Appendix L). The presentation could also include visuals created by students (see Appendix J).
5. Hold an informational assembly on the Constitutional Convention for community members where students present on the Constitutional Convention, too and/or legislators attend to help educate (see Appendix M)
6. Utilize the Press by attracting press attention and/or writing editorials (see Appendix N)

A NOTE ABOUT THIS SIDEBAR: Throughout the lesson plan, this sidebar is a place where you can find lesson modification suggestions other tips for enacting each lesson.

TIP: You may want to leave up the Pro/Con chart on the board from yesterday or have students take out theirs from yesterday.

TIP: Some of these options are individual activities (like letter writing) but most of them could be done as group activities. You may want to use standard group roles like leader, time keeper, etc. if you split students into groups.

TIP: Keep in mind that some of these project choices will take more than the rest of the class period to complete.
DURING CLASS (35 minutes)

Outreach Creation and Action (*Time depends on project chosen*)
Depending on what project you and your students choose, use the tactic toolkit pages in the Appendix I-N for specific instructions and handouts.

Share Outs (5 minutes)
If students have finished their projects by the end of class, have student volunteers share out their finished products. For example, if students chose to write letters to legislators they could share those aloud. If they haven’t finished their projects, you can still have students share out what progress they made today and what work they have left do. Congratulate students on their activism! If you will have more days in class to work on the projects, then go over next steps with students based on the steps from the tactic you chose.

WRAPPING UP (5 minutes)

Exit Ticket: What will YOU do? (5 minutes)
Ask students to each think about what they’ll do as an individual with their new knowledge on the Constitutional Convention. Provide them with a copy of the Lesson 2 Exit Ticket (Appendix H) and have them each write a commitment down and submit them. Encourage students to follow through on these commitments. You could also post them up in class. Congratulate students on addressing a need in their community and being active citizens. Thank them for being thoughtful change makers.

TIP: Encourage students to use their Video notes, Pro/Con charts, and statistics handouts when creating their outreach materials – their emails, videos, presentations, etc.

TIP: You can also have students do additional research if you have time.

TIP: After students are done, a great way to continue educating community members could be sharing your students’ effort with the press or posting online to social media.

TIP: Generation Citizen would love to hear about your students’ efforts! Email us or tag us on social media!
APPENDIX

OVERVIEW
This appendix includes all referenced handouts and examples from the lessons. All materials are labeled as “Appendix Letter” (Ex. Appendix B). You’ll notice that facilitator’s notes are in red. There are multiple options for Taking Action in Lesson 2. Those options begin in Appendix I and run through Appendix N. Some of these options can be used together. For example, students could create a presentation that they then present at an assembly, utilizing Options L and M.

At the end of the materials portion, there is a “Lesson Extension” section which includes ideas for ways to extend the lessons for additional days, use for different times in the year, and/or to provide additional, more challenging activities for students.
LESSON 1: DO NOW – Issues at Stake

The following questions are about laws and the roles citizens play in getting laws passed. Read and answer the following questions and be prepared to share with a partner and then with the class.

1. What are some laws that you think New York should have? List at least 2.

2. How are laws passed? Who passes laws?

3. What role do voters and citizens play in passing laws?

4. What is the difference between a law and an amendment?

5. What role do voters and citizens play in passing amendments?

6. Circle any of the issues below that are important to you. Be prepared to explain why.
   - Reproductive rights
   - The environment
   - Worker’s rights
   - Free public education
   - Freedom of speech
   - Same sex marriage
   - Privacy rights
   - Welfare
   - Aid for the elderly
LESSON 1: DO NOW – Issues at Stake – Facilitator’s KEY

The following questions are about laws and the roles citizens play in getting laws passed. Read and answer the following questions and be prepared to share with a partner and then with the class.

1. What are some laws that you think New York should have? List at least 2.
   STUDENT INDIVIDUAL ANSWERS

2. How are laws passed? Who passes laws?
   ANSWERS INCLUDING THE ROLES OF LEGISLATIVE AND EXECUTIVE BRANCHES; SPECIFICITY UP TO FACILITATOR

3. What role do voters and citizens play in passing laws?
   EMPHASIS ON LACK OF DIRECT ROLE VOTERS/CITIZENS PLAY; CAN INFLUENCE THE PROCESS AT VARIOUS POINTS BUT STILL UP TO ELECTED OFFICIALS

4. What is the difference between a law and an amendment?
   AN AMENDMENT IS ADDED TO THE CONSTITUTION AND MUCH MORE Difficult TO ACHIEVE THAN A LAW; AMENDMENTS ALSO INCLUDE VOTER/CITIZEN PARTICIPATION – SEE QUESTION 5

5. What role do voters and citizens play in passing amendments?
   IN NEW YORK, VOTERS GET TO VOTE ON AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION EITHER THROUGH THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION PROCESS OR CITIZENS CAN ADVOCATE FOR THE STATE LEGISLATURE TO PASS AN AMENDMENT TO THE NY CONSTITUTION.

6. Circle any of the issues below that are important to you. Be prepared to explain why.
   - Reproductive rights
   - The environment
   - Worker’s rights
   - Free public education
   - Freedom of speech
   - Same sex marriage
   - Privacy rights
   - Public assistance
   - Aid for the elderly

   ANSWERS WILL VARY BY STUDENT
Constitutional Convention History Video

Facilitators can access the video by downloading it with the lesson package or by using this online link: https://youtu.be/M49Z-eqMgD0

For accompanying questions, see Appendix C.
Constitutional Convention History Video

The following questions accompany a short video about the New York State Constitution. While watching the video answer these questions. The questions are in order with the video.

1. What two constitutions do you, as a resident of New York, have to follow?

2. When was the NY Constitution first written?

3. How many times has the NY Constitution been amended?

4. Name the two ways to amend the NY Constitution. Circle the more commonly used method.

5. How often is a vote required on whether a Constitutional Convention be held in New York?

6. Does the governor play a role in amending the NY Constitution?

7. If the people vote yes to convene a Constitutional Convention, what happens next?

8. What two options Constitutional Convention delegates have?

9. How long does the Constitutional Convention usually last?
10. When the delegates are finished, what role do the voters play?

11. How many Constitutional Conventions have there been?

12. Give three examples of topics addressed by past Constitutional Conventions:

13. When was the most recent Constitutional Convention held?

14. Name two examples of issues at stake with the possible Constitutional Convention this year:

15. What date do voters get to decide if we’ll have a Constitutional Convention?
Constitutional Convention History Video - Facilitator’s KEY

The following questions accompany a short video about the New York State Constitution. While watching the video answer these questions. The questions are in order with the video.

1. What two constitutions do you, as a resident of New York, must follow?
   THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION AND THE NY CONSTITUTION

2. When was the NY Constitution first written?
   1777

3. How many times has the NY Constitution been amended?
   THE NY CONSTITUTION HAS BEEN AMENDED OVER 200 TIMES SINCE THE CURRENT NY CONSTITUTION WAS ADOPTED IN 1894

4. Name the two ways to amend the NY Constitution. Circle the more commonly used method.
   LEGISLATIVE ACTION AND CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

5. How often is a vote required on whether a Constitutional Convention be held in New York?
   EVERY 20 YEARS

6. Does the governor play a role in amending the NY Constitution?
   NO

7. If the people vote yes to the Constitutional Convention, what happens next?
   THE VOTERS MUST ELECT DELEGATES TO PARTICIPATE IN THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION.

8. What two options Constitutional Convention delegates have?
   THEY CAN EITHER WRITE AN ENTIRELY NEW CONSTITUTION, OR ADD, DELETE, OR MODIFY AMENDMENTS TO THE CURRENT NY CONSTITUTION.
9. How long does the Constitutional Convention usually last?
HISTORICALLY, THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION HAS LASTED APPROXIMATELY 6 MONTHS.

10. When the delegates are finished, what role do the voters play?
VOTERS GET TO DECIDE AND VOTE ON THE DELEGATES’ FINISHED PRODUCT – BE IT A NEW CONSTITUTION OR JUST AMENDMENTS.

11. How many Constitutional Conventions have there been?

12. Give three examples of topics addressed by past Constitutional Conventions:
COULD INCLUDE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING: APPEALS COURTS, FOREVER WILD, FUNDING FOR RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS, PUBLIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS, LABOR LAWS, WORKERS’ RIGHTS

13. When was the most recent Constitutional Convention held?

14. Name two examples of issues at stake with the possible Constitutional Convention this year:
COULD INCLUDE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING: SAME SEX MARRIAGE, REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS, THE ENVIRONMENT, PRIVACY RIGHTS, FREE PUBLIC EDUCATION, WORKERS’ RIGHTS, PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

15. What date do voters get to decide if we’ll have a Constitutional Convention?
NOVEMBER 7, 2017
The New York State Constitutional Convention: Pro/Con Chart

After reading your research excerpt determine with your group whether your research is a Pro or a Con for holding the Constitutional Convention. Then work together to summarize the information from your research. Record it in the proper column in the chart and be prepared to share with the class. Before beginning do the example below together as a class.

**EXAMPLE**

Research Excerpt: The staging of a Constitutional Convention would be a highly expensive enterprise. The 1967 Constitutional Convention cost taxpayers as much as $15 million. The cost of a convention in 2019 would likely dwarf that figure, with the largest expense being salaries for delegates and staff.

Is this a PRO or a CON?

Summarize the research:

Record your summary in the proper column in the chart below.

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<th>PRO 😊</th>
<th>CON 😞</th>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>PRO 😊</td>
<td>CON 😞</td>
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</table>
After reading your research excerpt determine with your group whether your research is a Pro or a Con for holding the Constitutional Convention. Then work together to summarize the information from your research. Record it in the proper column in the chart and be prepared to share with the class. **Before beginning do the example below together as a class.**

### EXAMPLE

Research Excerpt: The staging of a Constitutional Convention would be a highly expensive enterprise. The 1967 Constitutional Convention cost taxpayers as much as $15 million. The cost of a convention in 2019 would likely dwarf that figure, with the largest expense being salaries for delegates and staff.

Is this a PRO or a CON?

CON

Summarize the research:

**WOULD BE VERY EXPENSIVE; A LOT OF MONEY SPENT ON SALARIES AND STAFF**

Record your summary in the proper column in the chart below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRO 😊</th>
<th>CON 😞</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Excerpt # 1: Opportunity to add certain rights – some have already been added federally (like same sex marriage) and others could be added that New Yorkers care about (like environmental rights or voting reform).</td>
<td>1. Excerpt # 6: Could lose cherished rights – anything in the Constitution can be changed or removed (like the forever wild act or freedom of speech) and if the federal Constitution doesn’t have that in it then it could no longer be protected</td>
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<td>2. Excerpt # 2: Opportunity to fix basic problems – complicated and ineffective court system that wastes money; curbing extensive corruption and the influence of money in politics; and unenforced Local Government Article which is supposed to protect cities from having laws passed without their consent.</td>
<td>2. Excerpt # 7: Could end up with less desirable or more controversial additions – anything can be added to the Constitution during this time and we could end up with additions that we don’t like</td>
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<td>3. Excerpt # 3: Needs to be updated- portions that are no longer useful, some portions unconstitutional according to new federal laws, no longer in line with needs of the state, which has made the document outdated.</td>
<td>3. Excerpt # 8: It isn’t the only option for amending the Constitution. The legislature can do it and has done so in the past - over 200 times. So, holding a Constitutional Convention is unnecessary.</td>
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<td>4. Excerpt # 4: It is the only practical way to amend the Constitution. The legislature could do it, but it is timely and they haven’t done nearly as much as they could.</td>
<td>4. Excerpt # 9: Potential for unfair representation – We could end up with current legislators and office holders as delegates.</td>
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<td>5. Excerpt #5: The beauty and necessity of a Constitutional Convention lies in its ability</td>
<td>5. Excerpt # 10: Double Dipping – Delegates get paid and so if they are also current legislators or office holders then they’ll get double pay. This could end up motivating legislators for the wrong</td>
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</table>
to reform the system and empower the people of New York to [bring about] needed change. Voter empowerment is part of the very fabric of who we are as a nation. There is no more effective way to engage the public than a Constitutional Convention, and there is no place that needs it more than Albany...

6. Excerpt #12: A Constitutional Convention provides a once in a generation opportunity to “open” the New York State Constitution and make much-needed reforms to improve the performance of our State government, strengthen the integrity of our political institutions and reform our broken 20th-century voting and electoral systems.

7. Excerpt #14: Though an unlimited Constitutional Convention does present some risk to currently codified protections, we believe that this risk is worth taking, as it provides the opportunity to construct governmental systems that improve representative democracy through increased accountability, transparency, effectiveness, and ethical conduct.

reasons – to make extra money. It could also lead to a decrease in trust by the public.

6. Excerpt # 11: Over the years, there have been numerous attempts to alter these words and water down Forest Preserve protections. Although these proved unsuccessful, the environmental groups don’t want to put Article 14 at risk again.

7. Excerpt #13: A constitutional convention is unlimited in the scope of what it could change. A constitutional convention could undermine the retirement security of public employees.
NOTE TO FACILITATORS: Cut out these excerpts to give to student groups. Ensure groups are heterogeneous in reading ability as some excerpts are more challenging than others. Though much of the difficult vocabulary has been replaced, you may want to 1) preview readings in advance and continue to modify for students, 2) provide students with a defined vocabulary handout, and/or 3) encourage students to look up challenging vocabulary while reading.

Excerpt # 1

The current Constitution does not include some rights that have been recognized by the United States Supreme Court (ex. Right to marriage for same-sex couples, reproductive rights) or potential new rights that New Yorkers may wish to [preserve] in their basic law (ex. Environmental bill of rights, Equal Rights Amendment, expanded privacy rights). Similarly, although the State Constitution [protects] certain voting rights, [there have been requests for] changes to [update] registration procedures to permit, for example, same-day registration and early voting. Such measures would increase overall voter participation, which remains at historically low levels in New York.

Thus, a Convention would provide an opportunity to enhance existing positive rights or propose new ones that the Constitution’s framers did not envision. Prior Constitutional Conventions proposed positive rights, approved by the voters, that are among the State’s most cherished. For example, the 1938 Convention established a requirement to care for the State’s needy...

*Adapted from the New York State Bar Association Report and Recommendations Concerning Whether New Yorkers Should Approve the 2017 Ballot Question Calling For a Constitutional Convention

Excerpt # 2

The workings of many institutions of New York State government are [closely] tied to, and impaired by, the State Constitution. Of concern is the Constitution’s Judiciary Article (Article VI), which promises a unified court system and then proceeds to establish the most... complex system in the nation. In painstaking detail, the Judiciary Article describes the composition of the State’s eleven trial-level courts, the most in the nation (California, a state with approximately double the population of New York, has one trial level court). Despite numerous [requests] for reform change has not occurred... [T]he New York State Special Commission on the Future of the New York State Courts has concluded that [this system] costs the State, litigants, employers and municipalities approximately $502 million in unnecessary spending [every year].

[Similarly], the State’s relationship with its [cities] is a source of ongoing tension and frustration for many local officials. The Local Government Article (Article IX) added to the State Constitution in 1963 remains un-amended since the time of its adoption. This article, which was intended to give local governments [more independence] over their own affairs, has not realized its potential. The article was intended to [keep the state from passing special laws that focused on local matters] without the consent of the impacted [city]. In practice, however, this [hasn’t happened].

Thus, a convention would provide the opportunity to consider fundamental reforms to New York’s court system, reinvigorate New York’s local governments, fix basic structural problems in the State, enhance the overall performance of government, and strengthen public ethics.

*Adapted from the New York State Bar Association Report and Recommendations Concerning Whether New Yorkers Should Approve the 2017 Ballot Question Calling For a Constitutional Convention
**Excerpt # 3**

Over the last two generations, civic reformers, scholars, the media, and politicians have called for [organized] and [practical] reform of the State Constitution. The current version of the document, adopted in 1894 and amended over 200 times since, including substantial changes by the Constitutional Convention of 1938, is in significant need of revision. Many of the provisions in the 52,500-word Constitution are (1) outdated or [no longer useful]; (2) unconstitutional in the wake of... decisions by the United States Supreme Court; (3) [more like laws than amendments]; and/or (4) inconsistent with the demands of the modern state.

In fact, the State Constitution has long been subject to neglect and ridicule... In contrast to the United States Constitution, our State’s fundamental document is not known or read by the public or most public servants, including many if not most government attorneys who have sworn to uphold it.

*Adapted from the New York State Bar Association Report and Recommendations Concerning Whether New Yorkers Should Approve the 2017 Ballot Question Calling For a Constitutional Convention*

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**Excerpt # 4**

A Constitutional Convention is the only practical way to make necessary major changes to the State Constitution. The Legislature could, if it wanted, propose Constitutional amendments. The Constitution provides that it may be amended through legislatively [introduced] amendments. In this process, an amendment must be adopted by two consecutively-elected legislatures, and then approved by a majority of the voters voting on the question. However, there is no reason to believe the Legislature is willing to address the State’s Constitutional [problems] in a comprehensive way, or will be able to resolve in the next 20 years the problems not fixed over the past several decades.

Thus, a Constitutional Convention presents a unique opportunity to [bring about wide-ranging] Constitutional reforms. If the state misses this opportunity in 2017, it will likely not have another chance until 2037.

*Adapted from the New York State Bar Association Report and Recommendations Concerning Whether New Yorkers Should Approve the 2017 Ballot Question Calling For a Constitutional Convention*

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**Excerpt # 5**

The beauty and necessity of a Constitutional Convention lies in its ability to reform the system and empower the people of New York to [bring about] needed change. Voter empowerment is part of the very fabric of who we are as a nation. There is no more effective way to engage the public than a Constitutional Convention, and there is no place that needs it more than Albany...

[There are no limits on the issues a convention might address. The public can have a direct say in how their tax dollars are spent, how the process by which Albany crafts [yearly] budgets becomes [clear], and how healthcare needs are being met and paid for...]

In his farewell address, George Washington said, “The basis of our political system is the right of the people to make and alter their constitutions of government.”

*Adapted from Assembly Minority Leader Brian Kolb’s editorial The Case For a Constitutional Convention*
Excerpt # 6

A Convention could open a Pandora’s Box of potential constitutional mischief [possibly leading to the removal or changing of] cherished fundamental rights. It is hard to imagine New York State without the right to a free education, the right to “freely speak, write and publish [one’s] sentiments on all subjects,” the “forever wild” protection for the Adirondack and Catskill Parks, the mandate for State provided “aid, care and support” for the needy [and others]. The current State Constitution, with its focus on individual liberty, social welfare, and the environment, in many cases [provides] greater protections for its citizens than the United States Constitution.

A Constitutional Convention has the potential to place at risk [well-known] protections and other longstanding provisions by opening up the entire Constitution, without limitation, for [major changes]. Should those rights that have no [similarity] in the United States Constitution, such as the [order] to aid the needy, be weakened or eliminated, they could be lost for at least the next twenty years, if not longer.

*Adapted from the New York State Bar Association Report and Recommendations Concerning Whether New Yorkers Should Approve the 2017 Ballot Question Calling For a Constitutional Convention

Excerpt # 7

Just as a Convention could propose eliminating established Constitutional rights, it could also propose new [changes] that would be highly controversial... and/or harmful to responsible [governing]. For example, while some argue that the Constitution should be amended to add limits on State debt, [adjust] the balance of power between the Governor and Legislature in the State budget process, and establish an environmental bill of rights, others warn that such amendments could lead to unintended and [harmful] consequences for the State. To be sure, reasonable minds can [disagree] on such controversial and complex issues, and often do. In any event, since a Convention opens up the entire Constitution for potential revisions, there is no way to control or limit the delegates’ ability to propose changes to the document.

*Adapted from the New York State Bar Association Report and Recommendations Concerning Whether New Yorkers Should Approve the 2017 Ballot Question Calling For a Constitutional Convention

Excerpt # 8

Some argue that a Convention should only be held if it [is the only way] to amend the Constitution. Because a Convention is [not the only way] to amend the Constitution, which can be amended through a legislatively [introduced] process, the risks associated with holding a Convention cannot be justified. In fact, the legislative process has been used to amend the Constitution over 200 times in the past 100 years. Accordingly, “there is virtually nothing that a Constitutional Convention would do that the Legislature couldn’t do” [so some people feel it is unnecessary].

*Adapted from the New York State Bar Association Report and Recommendations Concerning Whether New Yorkers Should Approve the 2017 Ballot Question Calling For a Constitutional Convention
Excerpt # 9

[Representatives known as delegates will be chosen by the voters to represent them at the convention.] Ensuring a fairly represented and balanced Constitutional Convention process requires a diverse [group] of delegates [unattached] to special interest group [money], with varied political [beliefs], [honesty] and sincere concern. Some [people] argue, however, that a Convention’s outcome will be [limited] by a delegate selection process that [favors political insiders]... Candidates for delegate must [participate] in political campaigns that may be financed by... [money] from special interests... [This could lead to special interest groups preventing the delegates from having the best interest of the people in mind.].

According to some [people], Conventions have historically been [a lot like a regular] legislative session, influenced by [government] insiders and special interests. They argue that because... many delegates will [also] be legislators, judges, and other politically-connected [people], the Convention [might] be controlled by those who are unlikely to propose [major] reforms or [be willing to change or update the current situation because they may benefit from the way things are now].

*Adapted from the New York State Bar Association Report and Recommendations Concerning Whether New Yorkers Should Approve the 2017 Ballot Question Calling For a Constitutional Convention

Excerpt # 10

There is no Constitutional [ban on current] legislators or judges [also] serving as delegates to a Constitutional Convention. The Constitution [commands] that a delegate [should get paid the same amount as a legislator in the Assembly would get paid] regardless of how long the Convention lasts. The Constitution also prevents the [lowering] of salaries for legislators or judges [while they are in office]. As a result... [if a current legislator or judge also serves as a delegate to the Convention then they] will be able to receive two public salaries, so-called “double dipping.”

Such “double dipping”... is problematic for a number of reasons. First, “... double dipping would significantly [reduce the] public confidence in the [honesty and fairness] of the process.” Second, “[i]t is wrong for an elected official or any person to be paid two [yearly] salaries for public service in the same year.” Third, the prospect of [double pay] will give [current] legislators and judges an inappropriate financial... motivation to serve as delegates... A convention should not become an opportunity for individuals who are already on the public payroll to enhance their salaries and pensions.

*Adapted from the New York State Bar Association Report and Recommendations Concerning Whether New Yorkers Should Approve the 2017 Ballot Question Calling For a Constitutional Convention

Excerpt # 11

Adirondack environmental groups oppose holding a convention, fearing that delegates will try to meddle with Article 14, the section of the constitution protecting the Forest Preserve in the Adirondacks and Catskills.

[The] language, which conservationists regard as sacrosanct, was added to the state’s constitution during the convention of 1894 and approved by voters. Over the years, there have been numerous attempts to alter these words and water down Forest Preserve protections. Although these proved unsuccessful, the environmental groups don’t want to put Article 14 at risk again.

*Adapted from The Adirondack Almanac article Constitutional Convention Vote Raises Article 14 Fears
Excerpt # 12

Citizens Union vigorously urges New Yorkers to vote YES. We firmly believe that New Yorkers must stand for a democracy worthy of its promise. A Constitutional Convention provides a once in a generation opportunity to “open” the New York State Constitution and make much-needed reforms to improve the performance of our State government, strengthen the integrity of our political institutions and reform our broken 20th-century voting and electoral systems.

Citizens Union wants a State government that is not corrupt and lacks the regrettably all too common “pay to play” culture in which campaign contributions unduly influence legislative outcomes and the awarding of contracts. New Yorkers have a right to that. New Yorkers also deserve fairer and more competitive elections, where candidates can get on the ballot easier, and more ways and days to cast ballots. Fairer and simpler elections would increase voter turnout, improve accountability, and decrease corruption. A “cleaner” democracy will result in better schools, better health care, a stronger economy, a cleaner environment, and a safer and freer state.

*Adapted from Citizens Union’s position paper Why Vote Yes

Excerpt # 13

Why is it a bad idea to hold a constitutional convention?
A constitutional convention is unlimited in the scope of what it could change. This would place New York State’s rights and protections at risk of alteration or elimination, including the guarantee of a free public education, a prohibition against aid to non-public schools and the right to Workers’ Compensation. The right to unionize and bargain collectively and state requirements regarding pensions and social welfare could also wind up on the chopping block.

Why does a constitutional convention pose a particular threat to UFT members and other public employees?
A constitutional convention could undermine the retirement security of public employees. The state constitution currently protects public employee pensions from being “diminished or impaired.”

*Adapted from the United Federation of Teachers’ Q&A Why voters should reject a constitutional convention

Excerpt # 14

Citizens Union recognizes that many advocates, special interests and even some of our allies may have significant concerns regarding opening up the constitution in this way. Citizens Union greatly values the fundamental rights and protections provided in New York State’s constitution, including many that provide basic freedoms analogous to those provided in the U.S. Constitution, as well as additional rights and protections in such areas as labor, education, the environment and care for the needy. Citizens Union would not support any effort to weaken or eliminate those valuable rights and protections. After a YES vote, Citizens Union will work to ensure that the convention would focus on a platform for democratic reform. Though an unlimited Constitutional Convention does present some risk to currently codified protections, we believe that this risk is worth taking, as it provides the opportunity to construct governmental systems that improve representative democracy through increased accountability, transparency, effectiveness, and ethical conduct.

*Adapted from Citizens Union’s position paper Why Vote Yes
LESSON 1: EXIT TICKET – Reflection

Reflect on today’s class research and discussion and answer the following questions.

Which PRO did you find the most convincing? 😊

Why? 🎈

Which CON did you find the most convincing? 😞

Why? 🎈

How would you vote and/or suggest that other people vote? 👨‍👩‍👧‍👦

Why? 🎈
LESSON 2: DO NOW – Constitutional Convention Statistics

Examine the graph below and then answer the accompanying questions below it.

The New York State Constitutional Convention
Sienna College Poll September 2017 (https://www.siena.edu/assets/files/news/SNY0817_Crosstabs_090517.pdf)

1. According to polls, how many Americans actually know they have a state constitution in addition to a national one?

2. Why is this fact important?

3. According to polls, how many New Yorkers haven’t heard anything at all about the possibility of a Constitutional Convention?

4. Why is this fact important?

5. According to polls, how many New Yorkers support having a Constitutional Convention? How many do not support it?

6. What do you notice when you compare whether people have heard of the Constitutional Convention and whether they want it or not?
LESSON 2: DO NOW – Constitutional Convention Statistics – FACILITATOR'S KEY

Examine the graph below and then answer the accompanying questions below it.

The New York State Constitutional Convention
Sienna College Poll September 2017 (https://www.siena.edu/assets/files/news/SNY0817_Crosstabs_090517.pdf)

1. According to polls, how many Americans actually know they have a state constitution in addition to a national one?
   48%

2. Why is this fact important?
   ANSWERS CAN INCLUDE: ALL AMERICANS ARE PROTECTED BY THE RIGHTS OF BOTH THE FEDERAL AND STATE CONSTITUTIONS. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT STUDENTS KNOW THIS AND KNOW THEIR RIGHTS.

3. According to polls, how many New Yorkers haven’t heard anything at all about the possibility of a Constitutional Convention?
   58%

4. Why is this fact important?
   ANSWERS SHOULD INCLUDE: NEW YORKERS WILL HAVE THE CHANCE TO VOTE ON THIS ISSUE IN NOVEMBER AND NEED TO BE ABLE TO MAKE AN INFORMED DECISION ABOUT SOMETHING THAT WILL AFFECT THEIR LIVES.

5. According to polls, how many New Yorkers support having a Constitutional Convention? How many do not support it? How many do not know or do not have an opinion?
   45% SUPPORT IT; 33% - OPPOSE IT; 22% - DON’T KNOW/HAVE NO OPINION

6. What do you notice when you compare whether people have heard of the Constitutional Convention and whether they want it or not?
   THAT PEOPLE ARE LARGELY DIVIDED ON WHETHER TO HOLD A CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION
LESSON 2: EXIT TICKET – Individual Commitment

Now that you have all this knowledge on the Constitutional Convention, what will you do with it? Will you share this information with friends? Will you post it online? Will you teach your family or neighbors about it? What will you tell them? Will you ask them to do something? Make a personal commitment below about what you’ll do with your knowledge on the Constitutional Convention?

Name:

Personal Commitment:
Taking Action Option # 1: Writing Your Elected Official

Hearing from constituents, or the people they represent, helps decision-makers formulate a position on an issue and prioritize which issues they will prioritize. An effective way for you, your allies, or coalition members to make your voices heard is to send emails directly to decision-makers.

Length of Time:
- Can be completed in 1 class period.
- If you decide to launch a letter writing campaign, then it can take longer.

Materials:
- Computers (and access to the internet)
- Student printed copies of the steps and examples below

Preparation:
- Gather and print materials

Steps for Emailing a Decision-Maker

Step 1: Review your goal(s) to adjust your ask of the elected official. For example: “Will you please help to ensure voters in our community are educated about the Constitutional Convention?” Keep in mind your target audience (state, city, local, school).

- Class Goal:
- Target for this Tactic:
- Ask:

Step 2: Develop your email script. An effective and professional script will include:

- Greeting: Address your decision-maker with “Dear Mr./Ms./Dr./Councilmember,”
- Issue: Explain the topic to be discussed.
- Position: Take a stand and make your “ask” – what you want your decision-maker to do and how they can do that.
  > Make sure your “ask” is specific, for example: “Would you meet with us on one of these dates?” or “Will you please attend this event?”
- Points: Present your key points, based on evidence.
  > Don’t argue every point that comes to mind. Instead identify two to three key arguments and discuss those.
  > Make sure your claims are supported by honest and accurate evidence. Your decision maker will find it difficult to support you if your claims seem exaggerated or false.
- Conclusion: Restate your position and thank the decision maker for his/her time.
  > By restating the important part of your message, you will remind the decision-maker to remember what you are asking.
Step 3: Go through the checklist to make sure you haven’t forgotten anything.

- Did you use a strong subject line in your email? Remember to reference the Constitutional Convention.
- Did you personalize your email? If it reads like a SPAM message, it is not likely to be taken seriously.
- Are you brief and clear? Remember a short email is more likely to be read than a long one.
- Are you specific about what you’re concerned about and what you want done?
- After sincerely, have you included the following information?
  - Your Name
  - Your Street Address
  - Your City/State/Zip Code
  - Your Phone Number

* If you did not check all of the boxes, make edits and go through the checklist again.

Step 4: Send your email to your decision-maker OR If you are mobilizing others to contact your decision-maker, launch a campaign!

- Determine where and when you can get access to your target audience (school lunch, community event, sports game, outside of a grocery store, coalition meeting, etc.).
- Set up the location, date and time you will be holding your letter-writing or email campaign.
- Recruit a small team of supporters to join you.
- Bring (laptop) computers and your email template. Consider bringing signs to attract the attention of potential supporters walking by.
- Recruit others to send their own emails to the decision-maker, utilizing your template as a guide. **However, all writers should personalize their emails slightly** so that they have an individual voice. Your decision-maker will not be impressed by “spam” that others simply copied and sent. A personalized letter or email conveys that the writer put effort into it and cares about the issue.
- Thank all writers for their support. If possible, give them information about your action plan and collect their contact information to get in touch with them about future efforts.

Step 5: Follow up.

- If you received a response, answer the email with a professional email (no one-line or one-word responses) or follow up with a handwritten thank you note.
- If you have not heard from your decision-maker within a week of your communication, send them another email, checking in and restating your ask in a simple way.
Sample Email Script

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Make Community Aware of Constitutional Convention</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greeting</td>
<td>Dear Council Member Levin,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue</td>
<td>I am a constituent and a student at Williamsburg Collegiate High School in Williamsburg, Brooklyn NY. Though only 15 years old, I am aware that New Yorkers will have the ability to vote on whether we should hold a Constitutional Convention and that this opportunity only occurs every twenty years. Many of my community members are unaware of the Constitutional Convention and need access to more information to make an informed decision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position: Your “Ask”</td>
<td>I am writing to urge you to host a balanced community forum to provide your district with information on the Constitutional Convention, which will directly affect our neighborhood, as well as all New Yorkers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Points</td>
<td>According to an August Siena poll, 58% of the population has not heard anything about the possibility of a Constitutional Convention. 45% of New Yorkers support having the Constitutional Convention compared to 33% that are in opposition, and 22% of people are undecided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>It is important that New Yorkers receive information on the Constitutional Convention so they can make an informed decision and are aware and prepared to vote in November.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I hope that you understand the importance of this issue in communities like mine, and support hosting a community forum to provide your constituents with the information they need to decide whether they are in favor of having a Constitutional Convention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sincerely,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brandon Ambrose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>151 Nassau Ave, Brooklyn, NY 11222</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(718) 456-8920</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Draft Your Own Email Script</th>
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<td>Points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
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Taking Action Option # 2: Create a Data Visual or Infographic

Creating a visual or infographic is a great way to present and display your data. Visuals can clearly present vast quantities of data, and can attract the attention of your audience. Infographics can range from simple charts to complicate maps and images. Many free tools are available for creating infographics. Be sure to think about where these visuals would be displayed to optimize results.

Length of Time:
- Can be completed in 1-2 class periods.

Materials:
- Computers (and access to the internet)
- Student printed copies of the steps and examples below
- A poster printer if you want the visuals to be large

Preparation:
- Gather and print materials

Steps for Creating a Data Visual or Infographic

Step 1: Review your overall project goal(s) to focus your infographic. Remember, we are trying to ensure people are informed about the Constitutional Convention. How does this visual help us in reaching that goal? Keep in mind your project’s target audience (national, state, or local government, or school).

- Class Goal with Data Visual or Infographic:

Step 2: Decide on a visualizing tool to use!

There are many possible tools to create data visuals or infographics.

- Microsoft Excel
  - Excel is a great tool to create simple graphs/charts

- Piktochart
  - Provides more features than Excel
  - Has sample infographics

- Visualize Free
- Tableau Public
- Infogr.am
Step 3: Create the Visual

Microsoft Excel:
- Enter your data into Excel. Make sure that you have titles for each field of data.
- Select the data you want to use for your chart. You could use some of the statistics from the lesson or you could research more online.
- Click Insert, and then click Chart. Or, click the Charts tab and select the type of chart you would like:
  - Line graphs are great to show trends over time
  - Bar graphs are great to compare similar fields
  - Pie charts are great to show the proportions/components that makeup a larger set of data
- Modify your chart by clicking the Chart Layout tab:
  - You can edit titles, axis titles, legend, and overall format
  - Feel free to play around with colors, shading, and format
- Make sure your chart clearly presents the data and is easy to understand
- Avoid being too flashy

Piktochart:
- Visit the website and create an account:
  - Free and quick
- Decide what kind of infographic you want:
  - There are several free templates
  - You can also create your own from scratch!
- Follow instructions on the website to create your infographics

Other Sites:
- There are many other sites that allow you to create free infographics online
- Most sites require creating an account
- Most sites also have detailed instructions/guides
Examples

1. Excel Pie Chart

Violent Crime in the US 1994-2013

- 62% Aggravated assault
- 31% Robbery
- 6% Rape (legacy definition)
- 1% Murder and nonnegligent manslaughter

2. Excel Line Chart

Violent Crime in the US 1994-2013

- Murder and nonnegligent manslaughter
- Rape (legacy definition)
- Robbery
- Aggravated assault
3. Other Sample One-Pagers

The Great Recession’s Effects On

HOMELESSNESS

Total Population of Washington Heights
57,073

60%
Of the homeless population of New York city lives in Manhattan of that 60%,

4 in 5
homeless citizens are men
children account for
36%
Of the homeless population

Homelessness Throughout the Years

Homeless Living on Surface in Boroughs

Homeless Living in Subways

© Generation Citizen 2017
Taking Action Option # 3: Create a Video

A video is a creative way of presenting your information, and can allow you to incorporate information gathered using various other tactics. If you have interviews and/or testimonials, they can be powerfully shown through a video. Once you’ve created the video, you’ll want to think about the best way to ensure people see it. It could be shared in a digital school newsletter to the parents, for example. Or it could be sent to local News agencies to be shown on the air. Or students could share it on their social media accounts tagging elected officials.

Length of Time:
- Can be completed in 2-3 class periods.

Materials:
- Cameras or phones with cameras
- Computers (and access to the internet)
- Student printed copies of the steps and examples below

Preparation:
- Gather and print materials

Steps for Making a Video

Step 1:
Review your overall project goal(s) to focus your video. Remember, we are trying to ensure people are informed about the Constitutional Convention November 7 ballot measure. How does this video help us in reaching that goal? Keep in mind your project’s target audience (national, state, local government, or school).
- Class Goal with Video:

Step 2:
Consider your audience.
- Who is the intended target audience for the information?
- What abilities does this person/people have?
- What actions do you want the audience to take?
Step 3: Plan the video

- **Length**
  - In general, the video should be no longer than 3-5 minutes
- **Make an outline**
  - Make a list of every scene for the video. For each, include:
    - Length
    - Actors (classmates or other people)
      - If you’re going to be talking, make sure to write a script!
    - Location
    - Props
  - **Evaluate Needs**
    - What content do you already have?
      - Interviews/Testimonials
    - What content do you still need to create?

Step 4: Film the Video

- Be sure to allot plenty of time for this – filming inevitably takes longer than anticipated
- See if you can borrow a video camera from the school; if this isn’t possible, a phone camera will also work.
- Try to shoot scenes by location instead of the order in which they will appear in the actual video

Step 5: Revise/Edit

- Combine all of the clips into one video
- Use an editing tool on the computer (iMovie, MovieMaker, etc)
- Add in music/text as appropriate
- Add in transitions as appropriate
- Watch the video!
  - Is there anything missing?
  - Is there anything included that should not be?
  - Does it flow?
  - Does it convey your message?
  - If you answered yes to all of these questions, you’re finished! If not, revisit one of the earlier steps!
Example Storyboard

1. Wide shot of both Sarah and Callum, illustrating where they are and what the film is about
   Props: Megaphone, Camera Food

2. Close up of Sarah speaking directly to camera
   Script: Sarah
   One thing you must remember...

3. Low angle camera pointing up at Callum
   Props: Mustache, Paintbrush
   Script: Callum
   "Oops! Sarah is right..."

4. Close up of Sarah holding photograph

5. Camera zooms out to a wide shot showing Sarah speaking about using photographs to plot your storyboard.

6. Over shoulder shot of Callum pointing to drawings of different shots that you could try filming.
Taking Action Option # 4: Create a Presentation

A presentation can be a great way of communicating your research to your audience. Your presentation is your chance to convince someone to support your cause or to educate them on a topic. Your presentation needs to have a clear audience, goal, and evidence. The presentation should be persuasive and convincing – the target audience should be motivated to take the intended action. Think about when you’d like to present this – it could be at a school PTA meeting or you could host a community meeting – see Option # 5.

Length of Time:
• Can be completed in 1-2 class periods.

Materials:
• Computers (and access to the internet)
• Presentation software like PowerPoint, Keynote, Prezi, or Google Slides
• Student printed copies of the steps and examples below

Preparation:
• Gather and print materials

Steps for Creating a Presentation

Step 1: Review your overall project goal(s) to focus your Presentation. Remember, we are trying to ensure people are informed about the Constitutional Convention. How does this presentation help us in reaching that goal? Keep in mind your project’s target audience (national, state, or local government, or school).

• Class Goal with Presentation:

Step 2: Consider your audience.

• Who: Who is the target audience of your presentation?
  o How many people?
  o Are the people decision-makers, such as elected officials? (You could show your presentation to your legislator, for example.)

Step 3: Choose a format.

• Choose the format that most effectively conveys your points.
• Be creative. Make sure the format allows you to incorporate images/media but do not make the media the entirety of your presentation.

**Step 4: Incorporate the research**

• Examine your research:
  o How do you want to incorporate your research, i.e. do you want to include pictures or graphs?

• Overview
  o Describe the situation – what is the issue and why is it important?

• Thesis
  o What is your main point/goal? What is the purpose of your presentation?

• Facts and Claims
  o Provide the research and information on the Constitutional Convention
    ▪ You could include statistics, historical facts, and/or quotes

• Call to Action
  o Go back to your goal: what are you trying to accomplish through this presentation? Do you want people listening to go and educate other people? Do you want them to listen and make a decision and commitment to vote in November?
  o How can you motivate someone to take action?

**Step 5: Practice, practice, practice**

• Rehearse your presentation.
• In this step, focus on delivery:
  o Speak clearly and articulately.
  o Use humor where appropriate.
• Ask for feedback:
  o Present to as many people as you can, and ask for feedback
    ▪ Teachers
    ▪ Other Classmates
Step 6: Present!

- Now that you have finished practicing, you’re ready to present!

Example Presentation Outline

Note: This demonstrates the basics sections to consider including in your presentation. Images, media and photos can make this presentation more engaging and creative!
Taking Action Option # 5: Hosting an Assembly

Hosting an Assembly is one way to advertise a project or initiative you are working on, to educate others about your issue, and to mobilize a large audience to support your cause. An assembly is an event where a person or a group of people gives an informational presentation to an audience about a specific topic.

Length of Time:
- Timing can vary – between planning and executing it could take 2-3 weeks

Materials:
- Computers (and access to the internet)
- Presentation software like PowerPoint, Keynote, Prezi, or Google Slides
- Student printed copies of the steps and examples below

Preparation:
- Gather and print materials
- Secure an event space
  - With chairs
  - AV equipment if needed

Steps for Hosting an Assembly

Step 1: Review your overall project goal(s) to focus your Assembly. Remember, we are trying to ensure people are informed about the Constitutional Convention. How does this assembly help us in reaching that goal? Keep in mind your project’s target audience (national, state, or local government, or school).

- Class Goal with the Assembly:

Step 2: Determine and plan your desired event.

- Set a vision for the event.
  - Who is your target audience? What is the size of your target audience?

  - What guest speakers will help you accomplish this goal? Could you invite an elected official? You can also consult Generation Citizen staff who can put you in touch with experts and potential speakers.
• Plan a general outline of the event. Your outline should include the following parts as well as approximate timing each section:
  > Introduction: Who are you? Why are you hosting this event? Why should people care about this issue? Who else is present at the event?
  > Content:
    ▪ For an assembly, you will need to create an educational presentation. (See Option # 4)
  > Question & Answer time
  > Closing: thank your audience for coming and any guests who participated in leading the event. Reiterate what you hoped the audience learned and any next steps they may take to stay engaged in your work and/or the issue.

**Step 3: Arrange the event logistics.**

• Identify places where you could potentially hold the event and determine dates and times when your target audience would be able to attend.
• Reserve a location.
  > Possible sites include your school auditorium, cafeteria, or local community center.
  > Make sure that the event space is big enough to accommodate the number of people you are expecting.
  > Consult your teacher and school or site administrators to get permission to hold the event. If requesting space from someone with whom you are not familiar, be sure to introduce yourself, explain your issue and your proposed event, and give specific information about what you are asking.
• Identify event leaders/participants.
  > If holding an assembly, you need a presenter/facilitator or a group of presenters/facilitators who are comfortable speaking in front of an audience. Consult with your class to decide if a group or group member will lead the event, or reach out to elected officials or Constitutional Convention experts to see if they would be interested and available to participate in the assembly. Utilize presenters/facilitators with varying backgrounds so that your audience will learn about the issue from multiple viewpoints.
• Invite event leaders/participants, if they are not your classmates or peers, by email, via a phone call, or in-person. In your invitation, be sure to include:
  > An introduction: State who you are, what issue you are working on and why, and what your class’ goal is. (See Option # 1 for email templates.)
  > An explanation of the event: What is the purpose of the event? What is the agenda? When and where will the event be held? Who is the audience?
  > A clear “ask”: How do you want this person/group to be involved? Why? What will they need to do?
  > Next steps: Share your contact information. When do you need a response by? What additional planning is needed? Thank them for their consideration.
Step 4: Once you have confirmed who will speak at the event, invite your audience.

- Audience members can include classmates, parents or other community members who can engage in a dialogue with your presenter(s).
- Utilize tools such as phone-banking and email campaigns to invite people to the event.
- Raise awareness about the event by posting flyers around your school, neighborhood, and/or city and by utilizing social media. For example, you can make a Facebook page for the event and invite friends, classmates, and coalition partners.
- Make sure to reference the topic, time, date, and location of the event on all publicity materials.

Step 5: Prepare for the assembly.

Go through checklist to make sure you haven’t forgotten anything:

- Add details to your original event outline so that all timings are planned, needed materials are listed, and tasks assigned.
- One to two days before the event, call to confirm that the location is still available and reserved.
- One to two days before the event, confirm with your guest speakers to make sure that they will be able to attend, know the timing and place details, are aware of how they will participate, and are prepared.
- Make sure that your goals for the event are clear and that your guests speakers understand and share this vision for what the audience will learn.
- Create and share an event agenda for the speaker(s) which clearly communicates in what order participants will speak and what each will be talking about.
- Create pamphlets for the audience so that they have something to walk away from the event with. This pamphlet should include your contact information, relevant online or local resources to learn more, and ways for people to get/stay involved with your issue.
- Create a sign-in sheet so that people in the audience can write down their information if they want to be contacted in the future about your cause.
- Make an exit survey to poll the audience on their reaction to the event. Ask what people learning during the event, what questions they still have, and for feedback on if the event was well advertised and well organized.

*If you did not check all of the boxes, go through the checklist again and make sure you have completed everything.

Step 6: Host the event.

- Arrive early so that you can set up the event before the audience arrives.
- Greet audience members at the door, pass out any materials, direct them to your sign-in sheet, and tell guests where to go/what to do.
- Lead the event according to the outline you created.
> Get the audience’s attention before beginning. Welcome them again and give a brief introduction to the event, stating its purpose and what you hope the audience will learn.
> Be sure to introduce all guest speakers.
> Have a timekeeper to make sure that all sections of the event are running according to plan.
> At the end of the event, thank the audience for attending. Make sure you thank the speakers for coming and sharing their expertise. Share any next steps that were determined during the course of the event and reiterate resources available to the audience.
> Distribute, administer, and collect exit surveys.

**Step 7:** Follow up.

- Send thank you notes to each of your speakers and presenters and to people who helped who reserve the space for the event.
- Follow up with people who wrote their information on the sign in sheet with any additional information and resources or upcoming events.
## Sample Guest Speaker Invitation

### Introduction
Dear Captain Russell,

My name is Robert, and I’m a junior at East Village High School. This semester, one of my classes has been working on a project to foster positive relationships between local community members and the police in the area. Over the past year, we’ve seen a series of unfortunate incidents damage the relationship between the two groups to the point where people don’t feel safe and police aren’t able to effectively do their jobs.

### Event Details
We are planning to host a community forum to begin a productive dialogue between community members and police, as a first step in building trust and bolstering reputations. The forum will be held on Wednesday, October 23rd from 6-7pm at our school.

### “Ask”
We expect between 60 and 75 community members to attend, including prominent clergy, school administrators, and city councilmen. My class would like to invite you or a colleague from the police department to participate in the forum by presenting current initiatives designed to strengthen relationships with the community, including the Police Athletic League. We think your participation would send a strong message to the community of mutual commitment and dedication to repairing relations.

### Next Steps
Please feel free to reach out to me at (555) 555-5555 or robert@eastside.org with questions or thoughts. We are hoping to confirm our speakers’ participation by Friday, October 4th.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Robert and Ms. Kurzy’s 8th period Civics Class

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He introduces what the class is working on and why it is important.

All event logistics are shared to the guest can plan accordingly.

The “ask” is specific, and Robert suggests how the guest would benefit from participating.

Contact information and a date for RSVP is included.
Sample Event Outline

| Logistics | Community – Police Relations Forum  
| | East Village High School  
| | Wednesday, October 23rd, 6-7pm  
| (Materials Needed) | Sign-in sheets, pamphlets, surveys, pens,  
| | microphone, podium  
| Introduction | (Marian and Jonathan pass out pamphlets at door.)  
| 6:00-6:15 | Welcome, Robert  
| | Discussing the Problem, Shayna and Liza  
| Content | Police Initiatives, Captain William Russell  
| 6:15-6:35 |  
| Q&A, 6:35-6:50 | Moderated by Jessica  
| Closing | Thank you and upcoming events, Omar  
| 6:50-7:00 | (Luke and Michelle pass out and collect surveys.)  

Draft Your Own Invitation

| Introduction |  
| Event Details |  
| “Ask” |  
| Next Steps |  

All event details are clear.

Timings planned and roles assigned.
## Draft Your Own Event Outline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Logistics</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Materials Needed)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q&amp;A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Taking Action Option # 6: Utilize the Press by 1) Writing an Editorial and/or 2) Attracting Press Attention

Writing an editorial allows you to publish your opinions and to share these opinions with a broad audience. Getting your thoughts in print also strengthens your reputation – you can share the published article with other influencers and decision-makers to demonstrate support for your cause.

There are several different formats for editorials. Each serves a different purpose, but, both can, if used wisely, help further your efforts and bring attention to your action. An op-ed sample is outlined below.

• • •

Writing an Op-Ed

“Op-ed” stands for “opposite the editorial page.” Newspaper editors share their opinions on the editorial page of the newspaper. On the opposite page, other readers are given space to submit their thoughts. Op-eds are opinion articles (“editorials”) written by members of the public. Newspapers often publish op-eds whose authors are experts in their field or authorities on their writing subject.

Length of Time:
• Timing can vary – should take 1-2 class periods to write and longer to get it published

Materials:
• Computers (and access to the internet)
• Student printed copies of the steps and examples below

Preparation:
• Gather and print materials

---

Steps for Writing an Op-Ed

Step 1:
Review your overall project goal(s) to focus your Op-Ed. Remember, we are trying to ensure people are informed about the Constitutional Convention. How does this Op-Ed help us in reaching that goal? Keep in mind your project’s target audience (national, state, or local government, or school). Note: Your Op-Ed can be about informing people, but it can also include your opinion on how you think voters should vote in November.

• Class Goal with Op-Ed(s):

Step 2:
Identify press targets that you would like to publish your op-ed.
Identify your audience before writing your op-ed so that you can tailor your arguments with these readers in mind.

• Focus on local newspapers or magazines whose readers would be interested in your specific perspective.
Collect the contact information of reporters at these press outlets to whom you can submit your op-ed or other directions for submission.

**Step 3:** Draft your op-ed.

A strong op-ed will include a:

- **Lead:** Draw the reader into caring about the issue with an interesting hook. Hooks can vary widely but common prompts are:
  - A human interest story
  - Shocking or powerful numbers/statistics
  - A focus on local and/or timely issues (how the problem affects your and the readers’ community)
  - Controversy
  - A situation which most readers can immediately relate to

- **Problem:** Explain the issue (lack of knowledge about the Constitutional Convention) and why it is a problem; include statistics and other relevant evidence and research

- **Solution:** Describe what you feel should be done about the issue

- **Counter-Point(s):** Predict possible arguments that opponents of your issue might raise and explain and provide reasoning for your disagreement. This would be relevant if you decide to propose how people should vote in November.

- **Conclusion/Call to Action:** Reiterate how and why the reader should get involved

**Step 4:** Edit your op-ed.

- Ask peers to edit and give you feedback on your op-ed for:
  - Clarity: Is your argument clear? Does it make sense? Do you use any vocabulary that your audience might not know?
  - Brevity: Is it too long? Can you say something in a simpler way?
  - Grammatical or spelling mistakes

- Go through the checklist to make sure you haven’t forgotten anything:
  - Did you check the press outlet’s op-ed guidelines? Most op-eds are between 500 and 800 words.
  - Did you include a name, address, and daytime and evening phone number with your submission so that you can be contacted if it is chosen for publication?
  - Did you time the submission of your op-ed to coincide or directly follow with relevant news or events that touch on your message? By timing your submission with a current event or hot topic, you’ll have a better chance of getting published.
  - Are you submitting your op-ed to several news outlets?

*If you answered no to any of these questions, go back and make sure to make the necessary adjustments.

**Step 5:** Submit your op-ed.
Step 6: Follow up.

- Reach out to the outlet within a week after submitting your op-ed to confirm that they received it and to check its progress.
- Once you confirm that it will be published, reach out to other press outlets where you submitted the op-ed and let them know that it will be published elsewhere.
- Thank the person your contact at the press outlet where your op-ed was published.
- Share the published op-ed via other media (blog, Facebook, Twitter).
- Collect hard copies, if possible, to share with your decision-maker and influencers.

Sample Op-Ed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lead</th>
<th>If murder is wrong, why did 9 states execute 43 inmates in 2012?</th>
<th>The lead includes a strong statistic.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem</td>
<td>Aside from the obvious ethical issues surrounding the death penalty, there are also commonsense issues. As humans, all of our actions are prone to error. Therefore, government and the judicial system are also capable of error. When a person’s life is at stake, error becomes deadly. A person could be killed for a crime that he or she was incorrectly found guilty of committing.</td>
<td>The issue is clearly explained.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solution</td>
<td>There are 36 states with the death penalty. These states need to abolish it on the grounds that it carries a dangerous risk of punishing the innocent. The U.S. must join its political allies – including Europe, Scandinavia, Russia, South Africa, and most of Latin America – that have abolished the death penalty.</td>
<td>A possible answer to the problem is offered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counter-Point(s)</td>
<td>Some favor the death penalty as an effective deterrent of crime; however, it is proven that states with the death penalty actually have higher murder rates than those without. In 2006, the FBI Uniform Crime Report revealed that the area of the U.S. that was responsible for the most executions, the South, also had the highest murder rate, whereas the Northern areas that had the fewest executions had the lowest murder rates.</td>
<td>It addresses a possible argument.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion/ Call to Action</td>
<td>The capital punishment system is capable of error and is ineffective. We need to replace the death penalty with a life sentence without parole – a safer and less expensive option. The death penalty does not guarantee safety for innocent victims; it does not follow the goals and promises of our nation; and it does not effectively deter crime. It cannot continue to be accepted by a nation that claims to have liberty and justice for all. The death penalty is murder and it’s dead wrong.</td>
<td>Main points are repeated.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# Draft Your Own Op-Ed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lead</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterpoint</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion/Call to Action</td>
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</table>
**Attracting media attention** can be a valuable tool to put pressure on decision-makers and to raise awareness about your cause. There are many different tactics for gaining press attention, including but not limited to emailing news outlets, utilizing your school news services, and finding a celebrity spokesperson.

**Length of Time:**
- Timing can vary – should take 1-2 class periods to write and then possibly longer publish and/or gain contacts and spokespeople

**Materials:**
- Computers (and access to the internet)
- Student printed copies of the steps and examples below

**Preparation:**
- Gather and print materials

---

### Steps for Attracting Press Attention

**Step 1:** Review your overall project goal(s) to focus your attracting of press attention. Remember, we are trying to ensure people are informed about the Constitutional Convention. How does attracting press attention help us in reaching that goal? Keep in mind your project’s target audience (national, state, local, school). Note: You can focus on informing people, but you can also include your opinion on how you think they should vote in November.

**Class Goal for Attracting Press Attention:**

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**Sending Emails**

**Step 1:** Research your audience

- Who will you contact?
  - Think local – local news outlets will be more interested in covering your class’s goal than national outlets.
  - Utilize your connections
    - Oftentimes, classmates or teachers may know people who work at local news outlets.
    - Even if these people aren’t in positions of power, they may be able to connect you to the decision-maker.
  - Research the news outlet and find the best contact.
    - The best contact will typically be a reporter that covers the field of your project or issue.
  - Avoid sending blanket emails to the entire organization.
Step 2: Draft the Email

- **Tone**
  - Be professional and courteous. Keep in mind the fact that you are asking them for their time and attention.

- **Content**
  - Why should the press care?
    - Give 1 or 2 critical reasons as to why your story is important.
      - How is your work applicable not just to your school, but to the community in general?
      - Make it clear how covering your story will also benefit the press.
  - What are you asking for?
    - Be clear and reasonable.
    - Possible requests include a press conference, short segment on television, televised interview, an article in the newspaper, etc.
  - Be persistent!
    - If you don’t receive a response within a few days, politely follow-up or if you have a connection, ask them to follow-up to ensure that your request was received.

Step 3: Communicate your message

- Keep the message clear, concise, and focused on the goal you want to achieve.
- Take your time speaking, and pause if you aren’t sure what to say – remember, you are “on the record.”

Utilize School News Sources

Step 1: Find the Contacts

- Your school news is the easiest media outlet to connect with.
- Use your friends/teachers to find the reporters.
- If you yourself are on the staff, write a piece about the work your class is doing!

Step 2: Make the request

- What are you asking for?
  - Since this is directed at other students, this “ask” can be more casual.
- Ask in person, if possible!
  - Make it clear how this story will benefit them as well.

**Find a Spokesperson**

**Step 1:**

Research local leaders who are invested in your cause.

- Think extremely local – with your time constraints, it will probably be difficult to convince anyone from outside the area.
- See if you can find local advocacy organization leaders, politicians who champion this issue or celebrities who have been impacted by your focus issue.
- Be creative – oftentimes, local leaders can be people who are well known or have influence in the community.

**Step 2:**

Contact them!

- Be professional and friendly – contact can be done through a phone call or an email (see tactics and lessons pertaining to these).
- Be clear and concise in your request, and make sure that it’s evident how much you care about the issue.

Possible requests could include speaking about the issue to a news source, speaking about the issue on social media, co-writing a newspaper article or attending
LESSON EXTENSIONS AND ADAPTATIONS

For those interested, the following is a list of ways to either extend this lesson past 2 days or to adapt it for use on other topics.

Extensions

1. Research Options:
   a. Have students conduct individual or group research on the Constitutional Convention (generally or each of the past Constitutional Conventions) in advance of the lesson.
   b. Have students conduct individual or group research on the different issues at stake in relation to the Constitutional Convention.
   c. Have students conduct individual or group research on the different supporters and opponents of the Constitutional Convention and what their arguments are in preparation for the Pro/Con discussion.

2. Writing:
   a. Have students write reports on the extended research they conduct on the Constitutional Convention, issues, and/or supporters and opponents.
   b. Have students write persuasive essays with their own opinions regarding the Constitutional Convention and how people should vote.
      i. Students could edit their peers’ work, too.

3. Action:
   a. Have students track their commitment post lesson. They each made a commitment at the end so hold them accountable for it and have class check ins on student commitments.
      i. Provide a class period(s) for students to actually work on fulfilling these commitments.
   b. Students can reach out to people outside of their class to work on the action with them – other classes, members of the school or greater community, etc.

Adaptations

1. The Action Options could be used on other advocacy issues and projects students are interested in.
2. For more information and additional Action Options, go to generationcitizen.org and/or contact NY Executive Director DeNora Getachew (dgetachew@generationcitizen.org) or New York City Program Director Brooke Wallace (bwallace@generationcitizen.org) to discuss incorporating Generation Citizen’s full Action Civics curriculum at your school.