

Panama Canal

Mini-Lesson



Panama Canal

Contacting your Representatives

Mini-Lesson Teacher Materials

Grade Level

9-12, CP US Government, AP US Government, CP US History, AP US History

Standards

GC. 12, 15, 16, 34

TN.61,

US. 88

AP HuG SPS-4.B

AP Gov CON-3.B.3

APUSH Unit 8: LO.H

AP World Unit 8: LO.K

Objectives/Learning Outcomes

Students will be able to identify the process by which treaties are signed and ratified.

Students will be able to identify the role of citizens in influencing political decisions.

Students will be able to exercise their right to communicate with their representatives as constituents.

Time Needed

45 Min

Key Terms and People

Treaty, Constituents, Representative, General Omar Torrijos, President Jimmy Carter, Senator Howard H. Baker, Jr., Ronald Reagan



Author

Written by Derek A. Griffin, PhD Candidate—History, Institute of American Civics, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Lesson Overview

In this lesson, students will learn about the process of signing and ratifying treaties with foreign countries. Students will learn about the Panama Canal treaties and identify why they were so controversial. Additionally, they will learn how public opinion plays a role in the decision-making process for political leaders. Finally, students will learn how to contact their federal, state, and local representatives and will prepare, write, revise, and send them letters.

Standards and Guidelines Alignment		
Tennessee State Standards		
U.S. Government and Civics	GC.12	Identify leadership positions of the legislative branch, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Majority and minority leaders • President pro tempore • Role of the vice president • Speaker of the House
	GC.15	Describe the powers of U.S. Congress, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriations • Commerce • Confirmations • Declaration of war • Implied powers • Necessary and proper clause
	GC.16	Analyze Article II of the Constitution as it relates to the executive branch, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointments • Commander-in-chief of the military • Eligibility for office • Executive orders • Length of term (22nd Amendment) • Oath of office • Powers of the president Succession (25th Amendment) • Treaties
	GC.34	Describe the means that citizens use to participate in the political process, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campaigning • Demonstrating • Lobbying • Petitioning • Running for office • Voting

Tennessee History	TN.61	Identify the contributions of influential Tennesseans of the era, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lamar Alexander • Alex Haley • Pat Summitt • Howard Baker • Dolly Parton • Fred Thompson • Al Gore, Jr. • Wilma Rudolph • Oprah Winfrey
United States History and Geography	US.88	Identify and explain the significant events of President Jimmy Carter’s administration, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor economy • Panama Canal Treaty • Camp David Accords • Energy crisis • Iran Hostage Crisis
AP Course Alignment		
AP Human Geography	SPS-4.B	Explain how political, economic, cultural, and technological changes challenge state sovereignty.
AP United States Government and Politics	CON-3.B.3	Chamber-specific procedures, rules, and roles that impact the policy-making process include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treaty ratification and confirmation role of the U.S. Senate
AP United States History	Unit 8: LO.H	Explain the various military and diplomatic responses to international developments over time.
AP World History	Unit 8: LO.K	Explain the extent to which the effects of the Cold War were similar in the Eastern and Western Hemispheres.
IAC Guidelines		
Topic 3: The Institutions of the United States Government	IAC.T3.2	Identifying how the three branches work together to form a system of checks and balances.
Topic 4: Citizens in a Democratic Society	IAC.T4.7	Identifying methods for individuals to work cooperatively with their elected leaders.
	IAC.T4.9	Evaluating the role of elected representatives by discussing those who have demonstrated political courage.

Activating Strategy
10 Mins

Begin the activity by giving students 5 minutes to read the Background information in the student materials. Then ask the following questions:

*Where is the Panama Canal located (Handout A)? Why is it important to the United States? Why might some people think the U.S. should keep control of it? **It is located at the narrowest point between the Pacific and Atlantic oceans in Latin America. It is important to the U.S. because it greatly reduces the time for ships to travel from one side of our country to the other, which is beneficial for business and defense. Some people believe we should keep control of it so that the U.S. is not beholden to other countries for trade and in defense emergencies.***

*According to the constitution, who in the U.S. government has the authority to negotiate treaties with foreign countries and their leaders? **Article II, section 2, clause 2 gives the president the power to make treaties with the advice and consent of the senate.***

*How many senators are needed to ratify a treaty? **Two-thirds.***

Instruction
30 Mins

Tell students that in this activity, they will see how American citizens' opinions of controversial issues affect politicians' decision-making and that they will utilize this information to help them effectively communicate with their political leaders.

Have students read "Handout B| Perspectives on the Canal Treaties" (also available in "Panama Canal Mini Lesson Original Documents") as a whole group, in groups, or on their own. After students have had time to read the documents, ask them the following questions: Why should we write our representatives? What kind of topics should you write your representatives about? How do you address a representative? Are your representatives required to respond to you? ***Before moving on to the next step, you want to make sure that students understand that contacting our representatives can be an effective way of making sure that our opinions as constituents are recorded and that these***

letters become part of the public record. Students should also understand that representatives don't always respond for many reasons, but they try to because it is typically in their best interest. And that while representatives are serving their constituents, students should still address them respectfully as it is the most effective way to express their opinions.

Instruct students to think of a relevant current issue that they would like to ask their representative about (optionally, you can assign a particular issue or let students select from a list). Have students outline a three-paragraph letter/email on “Student Skill Sheet | Writing Your Representatives.” If time allows, have students write/type out the letter/email, revise with a peer, and send the letter/email! Students can use the “Find My Legislator” tool on the General Assembly’s website:

<http://wapp.capitol.tn.gov/Apps/fmlv3/districts.aspx>

**Closing
Argument**
5 Min

To conclude the activity, ask students to answer the following questions as a whole group:

*What role do citizens play in influencing political decisions?
Why should we, as constituents, ask questions of our representatives and share our opinions directly?*

KEY TERMS & PEOPLE*

Treaty- An agreement between two or more nations containing promises to behave in specified ways; U.S. treaties require ratification by a two-thirds vote of the Senate.

Constituents - Members of a particular area or community that elected officials represent.

Representative - A member of Congress elected by local citizens to act on behalf of their community.

General Omar Torrijos - Military leader of Panama, 1968-1981.

President Jimmy Carter - 39th President of the United States, 1977-1981.

Senator Howard H. Baker, Jr. - U.S. Senator (R - Tennessee) 1959-1980.

Ronald Reagan - Former governor of California, 1967-1975.

Cited Resources

Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopædia. "Panama Canal summary." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, April 29, 2021. <https://www.britannica.com/summary/Panama-Canal>.

Encyclopædia Britannica. *Ronald Reagan as Governor of California*. Photograph. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ronald-Reagan/Governorship-of-California#/media/1/492882/72178>.

Gallup, George. "The Gallup Poll: Public Closely Divided on Canal Issue." *The Washington Post* (Washington, DC), September 4, 1977, sec. A, 3.

Haltom, William H., Jr. "Saving the Panama Canal." In *The Other Fellow May Be Right: The Civility of Howard Baker*, 74-80. Nashville, TN: Tennessee Bar Association Press, 2017.

*Lyons, William, and John M. Scheb, II. *American Government: Politics and Political Culture*. 3rd ed. Cincinnati, OH: Atomic Dog Publishing, 2003.

Primary sources provided courtesy of the *Modern Political Archives* at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Public Domain. "Map of Panama." Map. *Wikimedia*. March 4, 2006. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=612136>.

Reagan, Ronald. "The Opposing Force: Price of Helping Panama Must Not Be U. S. Security." *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), August 20, 1977, sec. B, 1.



THE UNIVERSITY OF
TENNESSEE
KNOXVILLE

INSTITUTE OF
AMERICAN CIVICS