

Collin Libassi
Concept Lesson

Context:

10th grade world history 1&2 – honors

Length: ~ 45 minutes

Topic: “Republic” as a concept

Context

This lesson is a concept formation exercise. A concept, by definition, is an idea formed by recording its necessary characteristics. The goal of this type of lesson is to get students thinking about critical attributes of a concept before they know what the concept is called. The definition of any concept ideally briefly outlines what criteria an example must meet in order for it to be labeled as an example of that concept. For instance, a “language” must be a system of roughly formalized symbols, signs, sounds, or gestures used by a group of people as a means of communicating. This definition of the concept would assume that a system of communication that does not adhere to recognized patterns does not qualify as a language.

Rather than learning the concept by reciting its definition then, a concept formation can lead to a greater understanding of how to apply that concept and distinguish between examples of the concept and non-examples. Students examine a set of examples of this concept, taking note of the common characteristics that they all share as well as where they differ. Only after students have noted the critical attributes and formed a definition of the concept do they learn what the concept is called. Learning a concept in this manner may lead to a firmer understanding and better ability to apply the concept.

For this lesson, the concept is a republic. Republic is an especially good concept to use for a concept formation lesson because the students are about to start a unit on Ancient Rome. The textbook starts out with the Roman Republic, completely ignoring the form of government that came before the Republic, but also failing to adequately explain what a republic is. Republic and democracy are two terms that Americans frequently use interchangeably, and many people do not understand that historically they have meant different things. A republic is a form of democracy, but all democracies are not republics. Furthermore, these students are just coming off a unit on Ancient Greece in which the textbook failed to adequately highlight the fact that the Athenians had a direct democracy. The Ancient Athenians would probably not have called what the Romans had from 509BC to 27BC or the form of government the United States has to be democracies. Yet Americans refer to ourselves as democratic citizens. By learning the critical attributes of a republic before even knowing that what they are learning is a republic, students may better understand the key differences between a true democracy and a republic.

Objectives:

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Identify the critical attributes of a republic
- Identify examples and non-examples of republics
- Apply the critical attributes of a republic to determine whether or not a governmental system is a republic

SOL objectives:

WHI.6 The student will demonstrate knowledge of ancient Rome from about 700 B.C. to 500 A.D. in terms of its impact on Western civilization.

NCSS Standards:

Strand 6: Power, Authority, and Governance

Intervention Objectives:

By the end of this lesson, the student with the learning disability will be able to:

Assessment

Give students a list of the following countries: Denmark, Venezuela, Germany, Russia, and Turkey. For homework, each student must select one of these countries and write a paragraph summary of the country's governmental organization, including a judgment on whether or not the country qualifies as a republic and why. They may use the internet, encyclopedias, or other books in order to research the selected country's government; however, they must cite their source using Chicago or MLA style.

Resources:

Computer with internet access

Computer speakers

LCD projector

Data retrieval chart and accompanying worksheets discussed below

Content and Instructional Strategies:

I. Concept Definition

A government in which powers are shared between a democratically elected, non-hereditary chief of state as well a legislature and/or other officers who are elected as representatives of the citizenry, who are seen as responsible to that citizenry, and whose governance is based on the rule of law.

II. Hook

Have the class watch a 4 minute scene from HBO's "Rome." In this particular scene Mark Anthony is meeting with Brutus and other senators who were involved in Caesar's assassination. Anthony makes a power play to assert how the government will be run after the assassination, primarily with him retaining the consulship and much political power. The dialogue mentions many of the different governmental offices as well as the question of whether or not Caesar was a tyrant. Explain to the students that they are going to be learning a concept based off many of the ideas that Rome's characters discuss in this clip.

III. Data-Retrieval Chart and Example Analysis:

Procedure:

1. Have students break up into pairs, and pass out the data retrieval chart to each of the students. This chart contains 4 examples of republics – Ancient Rome, the United States, the French 5th Republic, and the Venetian Republic. The left side of this chart contains brief overviews of each government. Across the top of the chart are the following questions:

1. What purpose do these bodies serve?
2. Who has power, and where does this power come from?
3. Who is the executive?
4. How do officials come to office? Does heredity play a part?

After the students have broken into pairs and received the data retrieval chart, have them read the 4 government overviews to themselves. Then ask them to discuss and answer the focus questions with their partner, writing down their answers in the boxes provided.

2. Once the students have completed this activity, ask for volunteers to give state the answers

they and their partner came up with. For each given answer, ask the rest of the class if anyone has a different answer or something more to add to the previous volunteer's answer. Continue this until the class has come to satisfactory answers for all of the questions.

3. Have the students turn their chart over and to answer the first two focus questions on the back with their partners. Again, once they have done this, ask for volunteers to give some of the answers they wrote down. There should be multiple answers for each question, so make sure that anyone who has an answer to add has a chance to state it. Write all of the answers down on the board under the "similarities" and "differences" headings so that the whole class can see how the critical attributes and the differences side by side. The teacher will go over the differences first, but highlight that the similarities are the part that matters more when describing the concept. Next, have each student complete the 3rd question, which requires them to form a definition for the concept. Call on various students to give their definition of the concept, and then ask the class which of the definitions they think best represented the concept. Finally, have each student think about the definition of the concept and write down a name for it. Ask for volunteers to give their name for the concept. If there are different names given, have the class vote on which name they think is most fitting. In the event that no one gives the correct name, tell the class what the correct label is [Republic].

4. Hand out the sheet of paper that overviews the governments of New Zealand, China, Ancient Athens, and Switzerland. Have them read over these examples with their partners and discuss whether or not the examples qualify as a republic. For any governments that do not qualify, tell them to write down on sheet what would have to change about the government for it to be a republic. After they have done this have students discuss their answers.

Differentiation: One of the differentiations that may be made with this lesson is reading a few of the examples out loud. The 6th period average class will often not read at all if they are told to read silently, so having students or the teacher read some of overviews aloud may help them digest the material better.

Adaptations: None of the students in these classes require adaptations other than testing and quizzing in the special education room if desired, additional time for completing assignments, and clarified explanation of assignments. For this lesson then, the only adaptation that may be necessary is additional clarification. The teacher may pair any students who need this clarification with a student who is adept at following and clarifying instructions. The teacher will also need to keep an eye on such students to make sure that instructions are clear.

PASS Standards:

1. Higher Order Thinking: This lesson was a bit more abstract than most. It is not easy for high school students to think of a definition of a concept when they do not know the concept's name. So overall I would say I am pleased with the amount of high order thinking involved in this lesson. Though it was very tough to get many of these students to grasp some of the ideas in this concept lesson [partly due to my own lack of clarity], I think the lesson would rate pretty well in the realm of higher order thinking.
2. Deep Knowledge: Students definitely formed a deeper knowledge of republics than they would have received in their normal lessons. The differences between Athenian democracy and the US Republic especially led them to deeper understanding of the differences. However, I have noticed in subsequent observations that this knowledge may not be as lasting as I would hope. The topic of the Roman Republic has come up in a few other lessons, and students are slow to recall what a republic means, and I and my cooperating teacher have had to explain it over again. Still, by the end of this lesson students generally had come to a much better understanding of republics and direct democracies than they had previously.
3. Substantive Conversation: There was a decent amount of conversation back and forth between the class and myself, but most of it was basically me guiding them to certain ideas and conclusions. The conversations like the one mentioned above in which a girl grappled with the issue of claimed republicanism vs. practiced communism tended to be one on one.
4. Connections to the World Beyond the Classroom: Several of the government examples I used were of modern nations. I also drew on the issue of voting and representation in the United States to illustrate the idea of direct and indirect democracies. Other than these areas though, there was not much in the way of connections beyond the classroom.
5. Ethical Valuing: The only ethical valuing that might have been present would have been the issue of the Chinese government suppressing the privileges that are present in a true republic but still continuing to call themselves a republic. The point of the lesson though was not to make judgments on the ethics of republics or non republics; rather, it was simply to understand the fundamental characteristics of the concept.
6. Integration: This activity was more a lesson in government than it was in history, so in that respect it can to have been integrative within the social studies. It also covered many different times and places. These are the only areas in which the lesson can said to have been integrative though.

Supporting Documents:

Examples of Concept	What purpose do these bodies serve?	Who has power, and where does this power come from?	Who is the executive?	How do officers come to office? Does heredity play a part?
<p>From 510 BC to 26 BC, Rome was run by a government divided into several separate bodies; each branch existed and operated separate from the others in order to prevent any one branch from becoming too powerful. 2 consuls, chosen annually by direct popular election, headed the executive branch. 4 separate Assemblies plus the Senate, each made up of elected representatives, formed the legislative branch which made up Roman law and held some judicial powers.</p>				
<p>The United States divides its government into different branches that hold separate powers, as outlined by the constitution, in order to create a system of checks and balances. The president, who serves 4 year terms, is chosen by the Electoral College, which indirectly represents the votes of the public. The legislative branch contains 2 houses, the House of Representative and the Senate, which are comprised of representatives elected by direct popular vote. Judicial power resides in the supreme court.</p>				
<p>The French government is headed by 2 executives. The president, elected by direct popular vote, appoints the prime minister. The legislative branch, called Parlement, is made of the National Assembly and Senate, each of which are representative bodies elected directly by the public. The judiciary is independent of the executive and legislative branches. Each of these bodies has a realm of authority that may not be infringed upon by another governmental branch.</p>				
<p>In the Middle Ages, Venice was an independent state. The head of state, called the Doge, was required to take an oath after being elected that required him to share powers with the Major Council. A governmental body called the Collegio held various powers independent of the Doge and Major Council, as did the Senate, which was elected by members of the Major Council. The parliament-like Great Council also made laws, though only aristocrats could be elected.</p>				

Questions for the Concept Spreadsheet [Rome, US, France, Venice]

1. Give 4 ways these examples differ.
2. Give 4 ways these examples are the same.
3. Write a definition of the concept (but do not give it a name yet!):

Mixed List (Identify as example or non-example)

In New Zealand, the English monarch is the official head of state, though the prime minister is the head of government, and the English monarch may not interfere with New Zealand affairs. As outlined by law, "The Governor-General, appointed by the Sovereign [queen], is the Sovereign's representative in New Zealand." In practice though, the governor general is chosen by the prime minister, whose decision the queen accepts by convention. Though the governor general technically has certain administrative powers, he/she is expected to exercise authority only on the consent of the prime minister. The prime minister is technically appointed by the governor general. By convention, however, the majority party in Parliament – a popularly elected representative legislature - selects a member of its party to become prime minister, and the governor general merely confirms this selection.

The highest branches of government in the People's Republic of China are the National People's Congress, the President, and the State Council. The Chinese constitution states that the National People's Congress, the legislative arm of the government, is the highest power in the government. Congressional delegates are elected for five-year terms via a multi-tiered representative electoral system. Delegates are elected by the provincial people's congresses, who in turn are elected by lower level congresses, and so on through a series of tiers to the local people's congresses which are directly elected by the electorate. Though several political parties exist in the NPC, they generally affirm the policies of the Communist Party of China, which is guaranteed power by the nation's constitution. The Communist Party also plays a large role in determining which candidates may be elected to the NPC. Most of the power within the NPC is

exercised through the Standing Committee, which is controlled by the Communist Party. The President, who is elected by the NPC, and the Premier, who is nominated by the President, head the executive branch.

Beginning in the 5th century BC, the Ancient Greeks in Athens setup one of the world's first democracies. All adult male citizens over the age of 18 were allowed to vote in the Athenian Assembly, which was the main governing body for the city-state. The assembly held some executive powers, such as decisions on foreign policy. It also appointed public officials and served as a legislative body as well as a court for certain crimes. Gradually a separate court system took over the trial role from the assembly. Each year 500 citizens aged 30 and over were selected by lot to form the council of 500, called the Boule. The Boule drew up the legislation that the assembly would debate over and vote on. The head officer of the Boule changed monthly.

In Switzerland, the chief executive is the 7-person Federal Council. In order to roughly represent the proportional support of the 4 major political parties in Switzerland, 2 of these council members must be of the Free Democratic Party, 2 from the Christian Democratic People's Party, 2 from the Social Democratic Party, and 1 from the Swiss People's Party. Each year, the Federal Assembly (the legislative branch) elects one of the 7 council members to the office of president; though the president is the highest-ranking Swiss official, his/her status is lower than the executive power of the Federal Council. The Federal Assembly is a bicameral parliamentary body in whose members are elected as representatives in proportion to the population of their home canton (similar to a US state). This Assembly also elects the members of the Federal Council to 4-year terms. All adult Swiss citizens may run for election, but generally only members of parliament are elected to the office.

Reflection:

One of the biggest things that I will need to address in teaching this lesson again is the explicitness of my directions. Students were very often confused as to what they were supposed to be doing or how to answer the questions I posed; this was partly due to them not paying attention and partly due to me not explaining the activities as thoroughly as they needed. For instance, groups frequently had trouble identifying who the executive officer was in each example of a republic. I assumed they might not all know what heredity meant, but I had not considered that they did not know what an executive is, and I should have gone over this before they started the worksheet. In fact, I should have gone over each of the questions on the first worksheet to make sure everyone knew what they were looking for. Also, students had a very hard time grasping the idea that they needed to come up with a definition for the term using all of its critical attributes when they did not even yet know what the term was. I eventually used the example of ‘communism’ to model the critical attributes and form a definition of it. After doing this, students had a slightly better understanding of how they were supposed to come up with a definition, though it still confused many of them.

Furthermore, I needed to be more explicit on how to apply the critical attributes to determine whether or not a government on the mixed list was a republic. Most of the groups had labeled all of the examples as republics, when in fact only 1 of the 4 (Switzerland) was a republic. The big problem here was that they were slow to grasp the fact that a government must meet *all* of the critical attributes in order to be called a republic. The tendency was to label it a republic simply because it had a few similarities with republics. Once I had them run down the list of critical attributes one by one, however, they finally understood that New Zealand and Ancient Greece were not republics.

My cooperating teacher did not have time for me to give them the homework on this lesson, so I did not have a chance to assess whether or not each individual could make the higher order connections that the lesson required. Still, I did go around to each group frequently and had a chance to explain to most students face to face how to analyze the examples in the way that I wanted. A few of them also made excellent observations that revealed good higher order thinking skills. For instance, one student pointed out that on paper, New Zealand’s government is not a republic, but that in practice it actually seems to function as a republic. Another student pointed out that it looked like China was a republic on paper, but that it couldn’t possibly be a true republic because of the Chinese Communist Party’s tight control over elections and legislation. I brought both of these issues to the attention of the whole class after these students had questioned me on them.

For future use of concept formation lessons, I mostly need to address the above problems. When I think I am being explicit, I am often not being explicit enough for the students. Only by constant review and overly explicit directions will some of these students understand exactly how to complete these activities. Also, managing the class groups is a major issue that I need to resolve in the future. Some of the groups were reasonably on-task while others basically got nothing done. By giving each student a number and then breaking the class into groups on those numbers, getting them to do more work might be easier. Obviously they want to sit with their friends, and this usually means they accomplish little. Having them work with partners rather than larger groups has also seemed to work in other activities.