Episode 2: Voices in the Hall

Lesson Title: Casimiro Barela: A Resonating Voice in the Halls of the Colorado State Capitol

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Episode Description:

Voices in the Hall explores how diverse Coloradans fought for representation, civic participation and expanded civil rights across multiple generations. The story connects early struggles for inclusion with modern movements that reshaped Colorado's political and social landscape. Interviews with disability advocates, supported by accessibility subject matter experts, illuminate how Colorado became a focal point of disability justice.

Episode Inquiry Questions:

1. What strategies have people and communities used to influence change in Colorado? What were the outcomes of civic engagement?
2. Why is it important that diverse voices are heard by communities, as well as, local and state government officials?
3. Why is it important for those who are most impacted by an issue to be involved in creating solutions?

Lesson Description:

How does a state's founding document balance the diverse identities of the people it governs? This 8th-grade history and civics lesson (45-95 minutes) explores the question by examining the unique origins of the 1876 Colorado Constitution and the legacy of pioneer lawmaker Casimiro Barela.

Students investigate how Colorado entered the Union with a historic, progressive mandate to publish its laws in English, Spanish, and German. Through primary

source analysis of the handwritten constitution and a close reading of Barela's life, students grapple with complex themes of shifting geopolitical borders, language access in a democracy, and individual advocacy against powerful corporate interests.

By engaging in collaborative concept mapping and structured civic dialogue (such as Socratic Seminars or Concentric Circles), students build historical empathy, evaluate the responsibilities of a representative government, and analyze what it means for ordinary citizens to insist on fairness.

Grade Level/Time Needed:

8th Grade/60 minutes

Lesson Inquiry Questions:

1. To what extent does a state's founding document truly reflect the diversity of all the people it governs?
2. How can the actions of a single individual change the politics of a state?
3. When a political border moves over a community, who holds the responsibility to adapt - the people or the government?

Supporting Questions:

1. How does a state enter the Union?
2. Why is it important to have laws and constitutions available in multiple languages important for democracy?
3. What impact did Casimiro Barela have on the state of Colorado?

Lesson Objectives:

Students will be able to:

1. Examine key unique features of the Colorado Constitution and the history of its ratification.
2. Examine the life of Casimiro Barela and his impact on Colorado history.

Background Knowledge / Contextual Paragraph for Teachers:

Teachers will be examining unique facets of the Colorado Constitution with students. They should pre-read the two student articles. There are multiple lessons on the constitution.

Building Background Knowledge for the Student

Students can discuss how a state joins the union and what they already know about the Colorado Constitution. They could also discuss how it impacts their lives.

Lesson Sources:

- Colorado Constitution Article. Source: Colorado Encyclopedia.
- Casimiro Barela Article. Source: Denver Public Library.
- Colorado State handwritten constitution. Source: History Colorado.

Lesson Materials Needed:

- Internet access or printouts of the two articles
- Optional: pictures of the handwritten Colorado Constitution
- Posters/butcher paper for small groups
- Projection or printout of discussion questions

Lesson Instruction:

1. Begin with a bell ringer/hook question: What three languages was the Colorado Constitution printed in? (answer: English, Spanish, and German)
2. Ask students when they think the Colorado Constitution was ratified and why? (answer: 1876, so that Colorado could become a state)
3. Have students read the following article on the Colorado Constitution.
4. Post pictures of the actual handwritten constitution or include with article
5. Have students create a poster with the question "What makes Colorado unique?" in the center. Around this, students can write or draw unique facets of Colorado from the article.
6. Spotlight: Casimiro Barela (1847-1920) - Have students read this article on Casimiro Barela.

7. Host a discussion (can be partner, small group or large group) and discuss the following questions:
    a. The text states “His family did not move, but they became part of a new country overnight.” How do you think an event like this would change a family’s sense of identity? If a border moves over you, do you change? Do you have to change?
    b. Casimiro studied hard to be fluent in English and Spanish. Why was this a powerful tool for him in his life?
    c. Casimiro insisted the Colorado Constitution be published in three languages. Why is having laws and constitutions available in multiple languages important for democracy? How does language access connect to fairness and voting rights?
    d. Casimiro defended a Latino ranching family from the Rockefeller owned Colorado Fuel and Iron Company. Why is it important for political leaders to stand up to major corporations or wealthy individuals on behalf of everyday citizens? What risks did Casimiro take in doing this?
    e. Casimiro is one of only 16 people that has a stained-glass window at the Colorado Capitol Building. Why do you think the state chose him? What do you think is his greatest legacy?

- Discussion in connection to the film *Becoming Colorado: Episode 2: Voices in the Hall*
    - In the film students respond to a quote that states “Rights are won when ordinary people insist on fairness.” Is this true of Casimiro Barela?
    - From the video and what you have learned in this lesson, how has Colorado progressed, regressed, and where do you think the state is headed from 2026 onward?

Strategy Instruction Differentiation:

- The article on the Colorado Constitution is available at different levels (full, 10th, 8th, and 4th grade). It can also be translated using a feature in the upper right corner.

Assessment:

Exit ticket that addresses the two objectives:

1. How is the Colorado Constitution unique? (name at least two ways)
2. Name two impacts Casimiro Barela had on the state of Colorado.

2022 Colorado Social Studies Standards:

SS.8.1.1.a – Use and interpret documents and other relevant primary and secondary sources pertaining to U.S. history from multiple diverse perspectives.
SS.8.1.1.e – Synthesize data from multiple sources to connect those sources to the traditional historical narrative.
SS.8.1.2.a – Determine and explain the historical context of key people and events through Reconstruction, including different perspectives.
SS.8.4.1.a – Describe political and social changes affecting citizenship and the rights of citizens, including impacts on Latinos and people living in annexed territories.
SS.8.4.1.b – Analyze the relationship between citizenship, national identity, and political institutions.
SS.8.4.2.a – Evaluate the strengths of the rule of law.
SS.8.4.2.e – Discuss tensions between individual rights and state, tribal, and national laws.
SS.8.4.2.g – Use a variety of resources to evaluate civic responsibility, individual rights, and the common good.

Extension Activities:

Students could go more in-depth on the Constitution such as doing a scavenger hunt using Lesson 3 in this archive of Colorado Government Lessons.
Students can delve deeper into the life and work of Casimiro Barela.

Additional Resources:

- Denver Public Library's Colorful Coloradans: Casimiro Barela
- History Colorado's Biography Guides (including Casimiro Barela)
- Gang of 19 with connections between them and Casimiro Barela
- iCivics educator resources and discussion routines