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This year, 2004, South Africa celebrates ten years of democracy. I am sure that public libraries will join in these celebrations by arranging displays and exhibitions. It is likely that schools will set projects on the subject for their learners and you, as librarians, will be expected to provide the children with information.

You can delve into your newspaper cutting files, or surf the 'Net' for ideas and information. Here are a few web sites that might prove useful.

The Constitution and other important legislation

The cornerstone of any democracy is the Constitution. Source this and other legislation from various web sites:

www.gov.za/ South Africa Government Online, is an extremely interesting site. Choose the *Government System* link under *Content* on the home page and you will find a whole list of links to really useful information about how government in South Africa works. You will also find the answers to those trivial pursuit questions - who is the Minister of...? and even their contact information. By choosing the *Documents, Reports and Forms* link on the home page, access will be provided to the Constitution, as well as all the various Acts, Bills, White Papers, et cetera.

Access www.polity.org.za/ and click on *Constitutional Matters* under *Historical Docs* (Pre-2002) and you will be able to access the Constitution from here. There is also an option to choose the language, so this site will be useful for libraries with borrowers who would like the Constitution in their home language, such as isiXhosa or isiZulu.

Keep these two web sites handy to research any requests on the laws that govern our daily lives, be it at home or in the workplace.

www.concourt.gov.za/constitution/ is the official site for the Constitutional Court of South Africa, the highest court in the land regarding constitutional matters. Not only can one access the Constitution on this site, but there is also information regarding the composition of the court, the role it plays in co-operation with Parliament and the Provincial Assemblies, cases brought before it and the judgements handed down.

Comparison of constitutions

How does the South African Constitution compare with that of Britain and the United



States of America? If it is a comparison between constitutions and systems of government you are researching, use the following web sites to access information on the constitutions and political systems of Britain and the United States of America.

Britain

Access www.historylearningsite.co.uk and scroll down to the section entitled *Advanced level politics courses*. There are links to both British and American politics. Select the *British politics* link and then choose *The British Constitution*. Britain has an unwritten constitution, which is derived from various sources, such as the Magna Carta of 1215, Laws and Customs of Parliament, and Case Law (constitutional matters decided in a court of law). The two basic principles to the British Constitution are The Rule of Law and The Supremacy of Parliament. Click on these links to find out more.

United States of America

www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/ will provide a copy of the United States Constitution, together with the amendments. The Bill of Rights consists of the first ten amendments to the Constitution.

Use the www.historylearningsite.co.uk link to access information about the American electoral system. 2004 is a Presidential election year and the information you access will, I am sure, throw some light on this cumbersome process. The site also has links to Congress, its role and composition.

Parliament of South Africa

To find out about our own Parliament - the Members, National Assembly, National Council of Provinces, how legislation passes through Parliament to become law, access www.parliament.gov.za.

The site provides an agenda of daily events taking place in Parliament. The *Members of Parliament* link provides information on the responsibilities, accountability and Code of Conduct governing Members of Parliament (MP). The links to *Bills* and *Acts* will provide insight into the process of lawmaking. Adobe Acrobat Reader is required if one wishes to download copies of bills or acts - this can be downloaded from the site.

Also perhaps interesting will be the Western Cape Parliamentary web site, www.wcpp.gov.za for information on the provincial government. And demarcation.org.za for information on municipalities.

Democracy and your rights

The Constitution guarantees your rights, but do you know who to report to if you believe that they have been violated? I found a very useful site, www.southafrica.info. Select the link *Advice for citizens* listed under *Public Services* and then click on *Your rights*. When the window loads, click on *You & your rights*. There are contacts for reporting violations on Human rights, Gender rights, Language rights, Workplace rights, Landlord/tenant rights, the Police & your rights and Government & your rights. This site also has links to related articles, such as *You & your domestic/ 'madam'* and *The Public Protector* and related links such as the CCMA and Independent Complaints Directorate.

Another important site is www.sahrc.org.za - the South African Human Rights Commission. As an organisation they are committed to the promotion of human rights for everyone.

Election 2004

It seems so strange now, ten years on, to imagine that voter apathy has already set in and people are not as excited as they were in 1994 to queue for days to cast their vote. However, for those that do want to keep their eye on the election, there is www.elections.org.za, the official web site of the Independent Electoral Commission. You can access the site and check whether you are registered as a voter - all you need is your identity number. You will also find a list of all the registered political parties, as well as their list of candidates. If you are thinking of starting your own political party, check out under *Political Parties*, then *Parties Registration* to see what is required. After the election, results will be listed on the site.

To locate the web sites for particular political parties, try the following sites www.southafrica.co.za/govt/parties.html.

If you don't find the party you want listed on these sites, you will have to resort to your trusty search engine.

I hope that I have aroused your curiosity a little and that you will find surfing these web sites as interesting as I did.

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