

Course Preamble



Liberty, equality, freedom, responsibility, integrity, courage, respect, common welfare, *etc...* This list of buzzwords could come from your government class or from any number of speeches from an American politician of any political party. However, these “buzzwords” were not always the trite elements of a soundbite played on your favorite cable news station. Rather, these words were *and are* a small listing of the civic values and principles of the United States of America. Civic values are the founding principles of American democracy and many of them are expressed in the Declaration of Independence, the Preamble to the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. Whatever values we as Americans may hold, civic values are the concepts that frame how we think about the principles of democracy in the United States. These democratic principles include respect for the equality of all people, protection for individual freedoms, recognition of majority rule, support for minority rights, and the application of compromise. During this unit, you will examine the impact of constitutionalism, encounter the theoretical sources of the government’s authority, discover the historical origins of American government, understand the significance of federalism, and compare the varied governmental structures of nations throughout the world with those of the United States.

During this unit students will explore the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government. The framers of our constitution did not want one person/group to have too much control, so they very carefully divided up the powers (both enumerated and implied) between the three branches. Each branch has its own set of responsibilities, yet they work together to make the country run smoothly and uphold the rights of citizens. The legislative branch makes the laws, the executive branch carries out the laws, and the judicial branch evaluates the laws.

¹ <http://pixabay.com/static/uploads/photo/2013/12/31/12/58/white-house-236844_640.jpg>

In Unit Three, students will complete two subunits with multiple activities in Unit 3. In subunit 1, students will define and discuss citizenship and naturalization while identifying the historical and contemporary biases in the many forms of media regarding the ongoing immigration debate. In subunit 2, students will demonstrate basic knowledge of the citizenship process by further explaining, evaluating and analyzing the electoral process and value of party politics in our republic.

What does it mean to be a citizen? What type of responsibilities do we have to fulfill our duties as responsible citizens of an engaged republic? Following the Constitutional Convention, Benjamin Franklin was asked “Well Doctor, what have we got, a republic or a monarchy?” Franklin’s simple, yet challenging response, “A republic, if you can keep it.” Franklin’s words simply echoed the fears of our founders that a republic is challenging to preserve, and it relies on an engaged and involved citizenry. In this unit three we will discover what that means.

In Unit Four students will learn about rights. What are they? Moreover, what is a right? More than the opposite direction of left or the action taken when a person picks up or “rights” a knocked-over floor lamp, a right is a moral, ethical, or legal principle considered as the basic cause of truth, justice, morality, or ethics. Within the English political tradition--especially that of the United States of America--individual people are believed to hold certain rights that cannot be taken away without due process of the law. However, where do one person’s rights begin and end? How far can an individual act in accordance to his or her own wishes before the law is broken? Who determines what is permissible and how is this determined? In this unit of study you will examine the rights guaranteed to the individual by the United States Constitution. You will also encounter the meaning and expression of liberty--the freedoms you enjoy within the framework of the laws--and evaluate how the many exercises and expressions of liberty have been interpreted by the courts throughout American history. Though the rights and liberties were written down in what was considered to be the plain language of the late 18th century, they have been constantly reviewed, reinterpreted, and redefined by subsequent generations of Americans according to the context of the circumstances in which they lived. This process of constitutional review, reinterpretation, and redefinition continues to this day and fuels the same controversy today as it did over two centuries ago.

During Unit Five students will understand the powers of the government of Minnesota defined by the Minnesota constitution. Students will achieve this by comparing the Minnesota state constitution to the constitution of the United States. Students will look at the budgets and taxation of both the United States and Minnesota and will understand

how the budgets are made and how money is raised. Students will understand what power their local government(s) have and how those powers affect the local populace.

During the sixth and final unit of study students will complete three subunits, which look at the roles of citizenship in local, national, and global communities. The first subunit will be an examination of American Indian sovereignty and their relationship with the United States government. Then students will look at how public policy is developed, evaluated, and acted upon. While also looking at how the U.S. Armed Forces play a role in both public policy and foreign affairs. The third subunit looks at Foreign Policy, including how the U.S. works with other countries. The unit concludes with a final project that looks at how the U.S. effectively utilizes diplomats and international organizations to take leadership roles in various world events.