

Curriculum Guide for Middle School Civics

On July 23, 2021, New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy signed “Laura Wooten’s” Law, which mandated that every New Jersey school district offer a course of study in civics in middle school beginning in the 2022-2023 school year and directed the New Jersey Center for Civic Education to provide a curriculum guide, resources, and professional development. The legislation explained that the course should address "the values and principles underlying the American system of constitutional democracy; the function and limitations of government; and the role of a citizen in a democratic society." The civics course must include "a minimum of two quarters of instruction, or the equivalent" (that is, a trimester and a half for schools with trimesters). Many school districts are opting for a full-year of civics.

The New Jersey Center for Civic Education organized a team of social studies supervisors and teachers and university faculty from across the state to create an Inquiry Framework which identified the big questions that should be answered in a middle school civics course. The Inquiry Framework offers a coherent scope and sequence focused on the core concepts and principles underlying our democracy, the structure and limits of the national government as set forth in the U.S. Constitution, an examination of how well we have met our democratic ideals, and the role of the citizen in a democratic society.

Links to relevant student learning standards, practices, lessons, activities and resources following the inquiry questions were added to develop a Curriculum Guide. The Curriculum Guide is focused on both content—including concepts such as consent of the government, the rule of law, civic virtue, the common good, justice, equality, and diversity—and practices, such as evaluating sources, seeking diverse perspectives, engaging in civil discourse and taking informed action. It offers teachers a variety of options for teaching an engaging middle school civics course. Vocabulary words are listed for each topic and defined in the lessons. The materials include word documents, powerpoints, videos and slides. Some of the lessons and activities may be employed as formative and benchmark assessments for student learning. Each unit includes a suggested performance assessment which will actively involve students in participating in simulated democratic processes.

The Curriculum Guide is a living document that will be expanded, revised and improved over time as we continue to better understand how to help students gain the civic knowledge, skills and dispositions they will need to fulfill their role as citizens in a democracy. We welcome any suggestions that you may have for the continual improvement of this document.

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Unit 1: Foundational Concepts and Principles

Grade Level: 6-8
8 weeks

Unit Summary

The United States of America is unique among nations in that it was founded upon an idea. What unites us as Americans is our shared commitment to those ideas and ideals. Any analysis of the structure of American government requires that students first understand the foundational concepts that are the rationale for a constitutional democracy. This unit will ask students to explore the key concepts and principles upon which the government of the United States was established.

Essential Question

How do citizens, civic ideals, and government institutions interact to balance the needs of individuals and the common good?

Standards

[NJ Student Learning Standards for Social Studies:](#)

- 6.3.8.CivicsHR.1: Construct an argument as to the source of human rights and how they are best protected.
- 6.3.8.CivicsPI.1: Evaluate, take, and defend a position on why government is necessary, and the purposes government should serve
- 6.3.8.CivicsPR.1: Analyze primary sources to explain how democratic ideas in the United States developed from the historical experiences of ancient societies, England and the North American colonies.
- 6.3.8.CivicsPR.5: Engage in simulated democratic processes (e.g., legislative hearings, judicial proceedings, elections) to understand how conflicting points of view are addressed in a democratic society

[Suggested Practices for Social Studies](#)

[Differentiation for Middle School Social Studies](#)

[NJ ELA Grade 6-8 Companion Standards](#)

- RH.6-8.4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.
- RH.6-8.6. Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).
- RH.6-8.10. By the end of grade 8, read and comprehend history/social studies texts in the grades 6-8 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

Student Learning Standards for English Language Arts

8.1 Technology Standards

- 8.1E 6-8. Use a variety of search tools and filters to access multiple data bases (for example, census data, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Departments of Education, Agriculture, Health & Human Services) in order to find information relevant to the solution of a real world problem.

Career Readiness, Life Literacies & Key Skills

CRP1. Act as a responsible and contributing citizen and employee.

CRP4. Communicate clearly and effectively and with reason.

CRP5. Consider the environmental, social and economic impacts of decisions.

CRP8. Utilize critical thinking to make sense of problems and persevere in solving them.

CRP9. Model integrity, ethical leadership and effective management.

Social and Emotional Learning in Middle School Social Studies Instruction

Unit Assessment

E.g., Mock Election: instill the habit of participating in elections by having students research candidates and vote in the annual [New Jersey Mock Election](#), held each year two weeks prior to election day in November

Topic 1: Human Rights

Timeframe: three days

Inquiry Questions

- How can natural/human rights be protected?

Supporting Questions

- What are natural/human rights?
- How do natural rights represent the dignity of each human being?
- How does the “consent of the governed” protect human rights?

Enduring Understandings

- Every human being is entitled to certain “natural” rights.
- The concept of natural or human rights arises from basic common religious or philosophical concepts about the dignity of each human being.
- Natural rights were defined by John Locke as “life, liberty and property”.

- The Declaration of Independence is based on the concept of human rights

Vocabulary

- Consent of the governed
- Dignity
- Due Process
- English Bill of Rights
- Human Rights
- Inalienable Liberty
- Magna Carta
- Natural Rights
- Property
- Rule of Law
- Social contract

Lessons, Activities and Resources

- What are natural/human rights?
 - NJ Center for Civic Education: [What are natural/human rights?](#)
 - See five-minute video summarizing John Locke's "revolutionary" ideas about natural rights from the Fraser Institute at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ocJ2fPk5FGE>
- How did the idea of human rights develop?
 - Youth for Human Rights: [The Background of Human Rights](#)
 - For students who are proficient readers, consider this lesson submitted by a successful middle school civics teacher on the evolution of specific human rights from the Magna Carta to the founding of the American colonies: [The Magna Carta and Asserting Human Rights in the American Colonies](#) .
- [Analyze The Peoples Ancient and Just Liberties, as presented in William Penn's trial.](#) What section of Magna Carta did he invoke? How was his trial instrumental in creating the colony of Pennsylvania? What influence did the Magna Carta have on Penn's creation of government in Pennsylvania as evident in *The Frame of the Government of the Province of Pennsylvania*?
- Why did Thomas Jefferson change Locke's "right to life, liberty and property," to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" in the Declaration of Independence? Why is the consent of the governed important to protect human rights?
 - National Archives: [Declaration of Independence: A Transcription | National Archives](#)
 - Bill of Rights Institute: [Declaration of Independence and Understanding Rights Lesson](#)
- See the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights> or <https://hreusa.org/> or [Facing History lesson on Human Rights](#)

Topic 2: Why Do We Need Government?

Timeframe: One week

Inquiry Questions

- Why do we need government?
- What makes government legitimate?

Supporting Questions

- What would life be like in a state of nature?
- How does government balance the need for social order and individual liberty?
- What is the difference between power and authority?
- What is the source of authority?
- What is meant by “consent of the governed”?
- What is a social contract?
- What forms can governments take?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of each form of government?
- What is the “rule of law” and why is it necessary for authority to be legitimate?
- According to the Declaration of Independence what are the main purposes/goals of government?

Enduring Understandings

- In a state of nature, the strong would take advantage of the weak. We need a government with the authority to protect individual rights, resolve conflicts and maintain order.
- Through the social contract, people give up some of their freedom to the government to preserve order and peace.
- A strong commitment to the rule of law has been crucial to efforts to limit the abuse of authority and the arbitrary use of power.
- Governments establish and enforce laws to maintain safety and order.
- There are many different forms of government that government may take. Some forms of government, such as dictatorships, are based solely on power.
- The legitimacy of a government is based on consent of the governed, the rule of law and the protection of human rights.
- Democratic governments work to balance social order and the protection of individual rights.

Vocabulary

- Authority
- Autocracy
- Consent of the governed
- Democracy
- Dictatorship
- Government

- Individual rights
- Legitimate
- Monarchy
- Oligarchy
- Order
- Popular Sovereignty
- Power
- Republic
- Rule of Law
- State of Nature

Lessons, Activities and Resources

- What would life be like in a state of nature? Why do we need government?
 - Center for Civic Education: [Why do we need a government](#)
 - iCivics: [Why Government? Hobbes & Locke philosophy](#) Lesson
 - C-Span -<https://www.c-span.org/classroom/document/?8394>
- Conclude: We need government and authority:
 - To protect the weak from the strong
 - To protect individual rights
 - To provide order and safety
 - To settle arguments
 - To ensure that benefits and burdens are fairly shared
- What is the difference between power and authority?
 - Center for Civic Education: [Why Do We Need Authority?](#)
 - NJ Center for Civic Education: [Power and Authority](#)
- What is “consent of the governed” and how is it demonstrated?
 - Center for Civic Education: [How Does Government Secure Natural Rights?](#)
 - NJ Center for Civic Education: [What does “consent of the governed” mean?](#)
 - [Center for Civic Education - What is Democracy?](#). This lesson is a simple introduction at an accessible reading level for lower middle school grades.
- What forms can governments take? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each form of government?
 - NJ Center for Civic Education: [Comparing Forms of government](#)
 - Common Sense: [Forms of Government Lesson](#): Anarchy, Monarchy, Dictatorship, Oligarchy, Republic, Democracy
- What is the “rule of law” and why is it necessary for authority to be legitimate?
 - New Jersey Courts: [What is the Rule of Law?](#)
 - Facing History: [The Rule of Law and Why it Matters](#)
 - iCivics: [Rule of Law & What it might be like without it](#) Lesson

Topic 3: The Common Good and Civic Virtue

Timeframe: One week

Inquiry Questions

- How does the idea of the “common good” give rise to a social contract?
- What is the proper balance between individual freedom and the common good?
- Why is “civic virtue” necessary for a democracy to survive?

Supporting Questions

- What ideas from the classical republics about the need for civic virtue did the Founders adopt?
- What is the social contract?
- What is civic virtue?
- What is the “common good”?
- Why is a commitment to the common good important in a democratic society?
- How does the social contract limit individual freedom for the common good?

Enduring Understandings

- The Founders based their concept of a democratic republic on the ideas of civic virtue and the common good that they adopted from ancient Greek and Roman republics.
- Civic virtue requires citizens to put the interests of the community or the “common good” or general welfare above their individual interests. This involves informed, engaged participation in voting, volunteering, and acting responsibly.
- Civic virtue is the cement that holds a democratic society together.

Vocabulary

- Civic Virtue
- Classical Republics
- Common Good
- Individual Rights
- Liberty
- Order
- Social Contract

Lessons, Activities and Resources

- What ideas from the classical republics about the need for civic virtue did the Founders adopt?
 - Center for Civic Education: [Commitment to the Common Good](#) (60-sec. podcast)
 - National Constitution Center: [Civic Virtue and Why it Matters](#) (article)
 - Center for Civic Education: [Common Welfare and Civic Virtue Lesson](#)
 - Center for Civic Education: [Civic Virtue Makes Republican Rule Possible](#) (podcast)

- What is the social contract?
 - iCivics [John Locke and the Social Contract Mini-lesson](#)
 - NJ Center for Civic Education: [Social contract](#)
- How do we promote the common good?
 - NJ Center for Civic Education: [What is the “common good”?](#)
 - Facing History: [How Can We Make Choices that Promote The Common Good?](#) (Covid focus)

Topic 4: American Ideals

Timeframe: One week

Inquiry Questions

- What are American Ideals?
- What American Ideals are the basis for the American social contract (the Constitution)?

Supporting Questions

- What is the difference between an ideal and a practice or institution?
- Where in the nation’s founding documents are American ideals expressed?

Enduring Understandings

- American Ideals are those core values and principles that the structures and practices of the Constitutional system are designed to realize and protect.
- While citizens may debate how to best realize them, American Ideals represent the core elements of a national consensus if democracy is to survive.
- American Ideals represent the American experiment in representative government at its best and are enshrined in the nation’s founding documents.

Vocabulary

- Consent of the Governed
- Domestic Tranquility
- Equality
- Freedom/Liberty
- Ideals
- Justice
- Limited Government
- Property
- Property Rights
- Religious Tolerance
- Rights
- Rule of Law

Lessons, Activities and Resources

- What are ideals? What are practices?
 - [American Ideals and Practices Flashcard](#)
- What are American Ideals?
 - Bill of Rights Institute: [America's Civic Values](#)
 - Facing History: [Exploring Individual and American Identity](#)
- Where do we find our “American Ideals” in our founding documents?
 - Link to Constitution at <https://constitutioncenter.org/media/files/constitution.pdf>
 - Choices: [Ideals in US Founding Documents](#)
- NJ Center for Civic Education: [Using American Ideals to Teach About Controversial Issues and Elections](#). This lesson will have students identify American ideals located in our founding documents. It is useful preparation for teaching about controversial issues and elections, focusing the lesson on adherence to the ideals expressed in the Constitution and /or Declaration of Independence.

Topic 5: Civil Discourse and Conflict Resolution

Timeframe: One week

Inquiry Questions

- How can conflicts be resolved peacefully in a democratic society?
- Why are active listening and civil discourse about conflicting political ideologies or viewpoints necessary in a democratic society?

Supporting Questions

- What are the sources of conflict?
- How are conflicts resolved?
- How can conflicts be resolved peacefully in a democratic society?
- Why is respect for diverse perspectives a crucial component of civil discourse?
- What strategies can help incorporate multiple perspectives into civil discourse?

Enduring Understandings

- Conflicts are often unavoidable. One of the roles of government is to create institutions--primarily courts-- to resolve conflicts among individuals through litigation.
- Individuals can learn skills for resolving conflicts peacefully in their lives.
- Peaceful conflict resolution requires active listening and respect for diverse perspectives.

Vocabulary

- Active Listening
- Avoidance
- Civil Discourse

- Compromise
- Conflict
- Ideology
- Litigation
- Mediation
- Negotiation
- Perspectives
- Positions
- Pride
- Respect
- Underlying Interests

Lessons, Activities and Resources

- What are the sources of conflict? How are conflicts resolved? How can conflicts be resolved peacefully?
 - NJ Center for Civic Education: [How can conflicts be resolved peacefully?](#)
 - NPR: [Conflict and its Resolution](#)
- What strategies can help to encourage civil discourse regarding controversial issues?
 - Your Classroom rules, for example: [Mr. Savino's Controversial Topic Discussion Guidelines](#)
 - Kid's health.org: [Teacher's Guide to Conflict/Resolution Grades 6-8](#)
 - New York Times: [Talking Across Divides: 10 Ways to Encourage Civil Classroom Conversation On Difficult Issues](#)
 - NJ Center for Civic Education: [How can conflicts be resolved peacefully?](#)
 - Constitutional Rights Foundation: [Civil Conversation and Roleplays Curriculum Library](#)
- What strategies can help incorporate multiple perspectives into civil discourse?
 - Learning for Justice: [Perspectives For a Diverse America](#) (Identity, Diversity, Justice and Action)
 - Facing History: [Fostering Civil Discourse](#)
 - [Story Corps Active Listening Activity](#)
- Why is respect for diverse perspectives a crucial component of civil discourse?
 - Choices: [Values and Public policy](#)

Topic 6: Elections

Timeframe: Three weeks

Inquiry Questions

- Why is the right to vote critical in a democratic republic?

Supporting Questions

- What are the requirements for voting in New Jersey?
- What are the responsibilities of elected representatives?
- How can you determine the accuracy of what you read and view?
- How can you evaluate candidates for positions of authority?

Enduring Understandings

- Elections are how the public identifies and approves those individuals who will make political decisions for the common good. This is “consent of the governed”.
- Elections are also how we discuss and debate political issues. Therefore, elections are inherently controversial and critical thinking skills need to be used to understand facts and issues.
- Elections are at the core of how a representative democracy functions. The right to vote is a critical component of American political life.

Vocabulary

- Accuracy
- Confirmation Bias
- Consent of the governed
- Controversy
- Distracting news
- Elected representatives
- Evaluate
- Fabricated news
- Facts
- Media
- Mock Election
- Reliable
- Responsibilities
- Right to Vote
- Sources

Lessons, Activities and Resources

- Why is voting important?
 - iCivics: [Voting Matters](#)
- What are voting requirements in New Jersey?
 - [NJ State Dept.--Elections](#)
- How do elections work?
 - Center for Civic Education: [Becoming A Voter](#)
 - iCivics: [The Electoral Process](#)
 - [NJ State Dept.--Elections](#)
 - Center for Civic Education : [Being an informed voter](#)
- Who represents me?

- iCivics: [Who Represents Me? Webquest](#)
- C-Span: [Researching your members of the House of Representatives](#)
- What are the responsibilities of elected representatives?
 - Edsitement: [The President's Roles and Responsibilities](#)
- How can you determine the accuracy of what you read and view (Media Literacy)?
 - NJ Center for Civic Education: [Media Literacy](#)
 - Learning for Justice: [Digital and Civic Literacy](#)
 - International Federation of Library Associations chart: [How to Spot Fake News](#)
 - Facing History: [Media Literacy](#)
 - FactCheck.org at <https://www.factcheck.org/> a nonpartisan, nonprofit “consumer advocate” for voters that aims to reduce the level of deception and confusion in U.S. politics by monitoring the factual accuracy of what is being said in TV ads, debates, speeches, interviews, etc.
- How can you evaluate candidates for positions of authority
 - How well do a political party’s views conform with your values? [Pew Research political party affiliation quiz](#)
 - Center for Civic Education: [How can you choose people for positions of authority?](#)
 - iCivics: [How can we evaluate candidates for positions of authority?](#)

Unit 2: Foundational Documents

Grade Level: 6-8

Unit Summary

This unit examines how the foundational concepts identified in Unit One are articulated in the nation’s founding documents and established in the structure of American government. Students will explore the ideals expressed in the Declaration of Independence, providing the background for the next unit’s study of how the Declaration inspired generations of Americans to more fully realize its core concepts of liberty, equality, and justice. The United States Constitution and the state constitutions provide the structural framework for limited government and constitutional democracy, and understanding these documents is a crucial component of active citizenship. The unit concludes with an examination of the Bill of Rights and the amendment process as students come to understand that the Constitution is a living document and American democracy is an ongoing experiment requiring their active participation.

Essential Question

How have economic, political, and cultural decisions promoted or prevented the growth of personal freedom, individual responsibility, equality, and respect for human dignity?

Standards

[NJ Student Learning Standards for Social Studies:](#)

- 6.1.8.HistoryUP.3.a: Use primary sources as evidence to explain why the Declaration of Independence was written and how its key principles evolved to become unifying ideas of American democracy
- 6.1.8.HistoryCC.3.d: Compare and contrast the Articles of Confederation and the United States Constitution in terms of the decision-making powers of national government.
- 6.1.8.CivicsPI3.d. Use data and other evidence to determine the extent to which demographics influenced the debate on representation in Congress and federalism by examining the New Jersey and Virginia plans.
- 6.1.8.Civics.PD.3.a: Cite evidence to determine the role that compromise played in the creation and adoption of the Constitution and Bill of Rights
- 6.3.8.CivicsPR.5: Engage in simulated democratic processes (e.g., legislative hearings, judicial proceedings, elections) to understand how conflicting points of view are addressed in a democratic society

[Suggested Practices for Social Studies](#)

[Differentiation for Middle School Social Studies](#)

[NJ ELA Grade 6-8 Companion Standards](#)

- RH.6-8.3. Identify key steps in a text's description of a process related to history/social studies (e.g., how a bill becomes law, how interest rates are raised or lowered).
- RH.6-8.9. Analyze the relationship between a primary and secondary source on the same topic.
- WHST.6-8.4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, voice, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

[Student Learning Standards for English Language Arts](#)

[8.1 Technology Standards](#)

- 8.1D 6-8. Demonstrates ability to differentiate the degree of credibility and accuracy of different digital content

[Career Readiness, Life Literacies & Key Skills](#)

CRP1. Act as a responsible and contributing citizen and employee.

CRP7. Employ valid and reliable research strategies.

CRP8. Utilize critical thinking to make sense of problems and persevere in solving them.

[Social and Emotional Learning in Middle School Social Studies Instruction](#)

Unit Assessment

E.g., Simulated Federal Convention: engage students as participants from the 12 states represented at the Federal Convention in Philadelphia in 1787 to appreciate the need for compromise and the compromises made. One possibility is to focus on the role of [New Jersey's](#)

[delegates](#) regarding the debate over representation. Another more sophisticated activity focuses on the issue of [slavery at the Federal Convention](#).

Topic 1: Historical Foundations of the American Republic

Inquiry Questions

- To what extent did the founding documents (Declaration of Independence, Constitution Bill of Rights) articulate and establish/ensure American Ideals?
- To what extent does democracy depend on citizens and elected representatives and appointed officials adhering to democratic norms?

Supporting Questions

- What led to the Declaration of Independence?
- What did the Founders believe about government?
- Why was the Declaration of Independence written?
- What is popular sovereignty?
- How did the Constitution address the problems of the Articles of Confederation?
- What are the norms and values that support a democratic society?
- What character traits did the Founders expect of their elected and appointed representatives?
- According to the Preamble, what are the six main purposes/goals of government?
- How does the U.S. Constitution organize government to prevent an abuse of authority?
- How do the three branches of government interact: separation of powers vs. checks and balances?
- How does the Constitution promote economic development?

Enduring Understandings

- The United States Constitution and Bill of Rights were designed to provide a framework for the United States system of government, while also protecting individual rights.
- Debates about individual rights, states' rights, and federal power shaped the development of the political and economic institutions and practices of the new Republic.

Vocabulary

- Articles of Confederation
- Checks and balances
- Constitution
- Popular sovereignty
- Separation of Powers
- The Enlightenment

Lessons, Activities and Resources

How did the Magna Carta influence the founders and American government?

- The National Archives: Magna Carta. A very brief introduction to the Magna Carta can be found at [Magna Carta - National Archives](#) . Teachers can find useful content for their own planning at [The American Legacy of the Magna Carta](#). This text is more detailed and may be applicable for high school students.

How did Enlightenment ideas influence America’s founding documents?

- iCivics min-lesson: [Enlightenment Ideas that influenced American political thinkers](#)

Why was the Declaration of Independence Written?

- Declaring the Grievances: NEH Edsitement
 - [Lesson Plan: Declare the Causes: The Declaration of Independence](#)
- National Archives: [What does the Declaration of Independence say?](#)
- National Archives: [Excerpts from the Declaration of Independence](#)
- Declaring Independence:
 - [Lesson Plan: The Argument of the Declaration of Independence](#)
- Close Reading: <https://teachinghistory.org/teaching-materials/ask-a-master-teacher/21770>
- National Archives: [To Sign or Not to Sign](#)
- NJ Center for Civic Education: [Could the American Revolution have been avoided?](#)

Articles of Confederation

- iCivics Lesson: [Wanted: A Just Right Government](#)
- NEH EDSITEment: [The Road to the Constitutional Convention](#)

Constitution

- iCivics Lesson: [Constitution Day Lesson Plan](#)
- Why was the Constitution written? How is it structured? What does it do? How can it be changed? [Civics Webquest: The Constitution: Rules for Running a Country](#)
- The question of representation: NJ Center for Civic Education: [New Jersey and the Federal Convention](#)
- National Constitution Center: [To Sign or Not to Sign](#)

Bill of Rights

- iCivics Lesson: [You've Got Rights!](#)
- iCivics Game: [Do I Have a Right?](#)

Topic 2: The Legislative Branch

Inquiry Questions

- Why did the founders create three branches of government?
- Should the legislative branch continue to be considered “first among equal” branches?

Supporting Questions

- What are the powers, responsibilities, limits and role of the Congress?
- How can we protect against abuse of authority by Congress?

Enduring Understandings

- Congress represents the diverse interests of the American people.
- Congress is the most important link between citizens and the federal government.
- Lawmaking is the primary and most important function of Congress.
- Members of Congress must fulfill several roles as lawmakers, politicians, and servants of their constituents.
- State and local legislatures carry out many of the same powers as the national legislature

Vocabulary

- Bicameral Legislation
- Checks and Balances
- Congress
- House of Representatives
- Senate

Lessons, Activities and Resources

Why do we have three branches of government?

- House of Representatives: [Branches of Government | house.gov](https://www.house.gov/about/branches)

How do the three branches of government interact? Separation of Powers and Checks and Balances

- NEH EDSITEment: [Balancing the Three Branches](https://www.edSITEment.org/branches)
- National Archives: [Checks and Balances in Action](https://www.archives.gov/education/activities/checks-and-balances) and [Separation of Powers or Shared Powers](https://www.archives.gov/education/activities/separation-of-powers)

The Legislative Process: How does a bill become a law?

- iCivics: [Legislative Branch](https://www.icivics.com/legislative-branch)
- National Archives: [Congress in Article I of the Constitution](https://www.archives.gov/education/activities/congress-in-article-i) and [The Legislative Process: Congress at Work](https://www.archives.gov/education/activities/congress-at-work)
- ERIC: [Legislative Lobbying Simulation](https://eric.ed.gov/?q=legislative+lobbying+simulation)

How many representatives should each state have?

- NJ Center for Civic Education: [New Jersey and the Federal Convention](https://www.njccce.org/curriculum/new-jersey-and-the-federal-convention)

Topic 3: The Executive Branch

Inquiry Questions

- How can the United States government ensure effective administration while protecting against abuse of power by the president?

Supporting Questions

- What are the powers, responsibilities, limits and role of the President?
- How and why has the authority of the President expanded over time?
- How can we protect against the abuse of authority by the President?

Enduring Understandings

- The Constitution defines the roles and qualifications of the President
- The role of the Executive Branch has expanded since our nation was founded.
- Historically the President has stretched the powers of the office and debate continues over this issue today.
- The Cabinet members are the President's top advisors and are influential in decisions that affect the country.
- The Electoral Process has led to much controversy in recent Presidential elections.
- The State and local levels include executive offices which carry similar responsibilities to those of the President of the United States.

Vocabulary

- Cabinet
- Electoral College
- Electors
- President
- Veto
- Vice-President

Lessons, Activities and Resources

The power and role of the Executive Branch

- iCivics
 - [Executive Branch](#)
 - [A Very Big Branch](#)
 - [Executive Command](#)
- NJ Center for Civic Education: [What are the qualifications for president?](#)
- NJ Center for Civic Education: [The Electoral College](#)
- National Constitution Center
 - [Investigating the Executive Departments](#)
- Separation of Powers: NEH EDSITEment: [Balancing Three Branches at Once: Our System of Checks and Balances](#)

Topic 4: The Judicial Branch

Inquiry Questions

- How does the Constitution try to ensure that all citizens are equal before the law?

Supporting Questions

- How does Judicial Review function?
- How and why has the scope of judicial review expanded over time?
- Can we ensure that all citizens are equal before the law?
- How can we best protect against the abuse of power and authority?

Enduring Understandings

- The Constitution created a Supreme Court, its jurisdiction and the manner and terms of federal judicial appointments.
- The Supreme Court will make decisions that will impact the country for years to come.
- The inferior constitutional courts form the core of the federal judicial system
- The power of judicial review laid the foundation for the judicial branch's key role in government.

Vocabulary

- Supreme Court
- Judicial Review
- Justices
- Opinions
- Moot Court

Lessons, Activities and Resources

Separation of Powers

- EDSITEment: [Balancing the Three Branches](#)

How does Judicial Review Function?

- U.S. Courts [About the Supreme Court | United States Courts](#)
- Library of Congress: [Marbury v. Madison](#)

Judicial Branch

- iCivics
 - [Judicial Branch](#)
 - [Court Quest Extension Pack Teacher's Guide \(including ELL Supports\)](#)
- EDSITEment
 - [The Supreme Court: The Judicial Power of the United States](#)

Topic 5: Federalism

Inquiry Questions

- How and why is federalism a key part of the structure of U.S. government?

- How is federalism a positive or negative force today?

Supporting Questions

- What is federalism?
- How does federalism work?
- What powers have been delegated to the national government and which have been retained by or shared with state governments?
- Why is the Supremacy Clause important?
- How does the U.S. Constitution balance the interests of individuals and states with the need for a strong national government?
- How has federalism changed over time?

Enduring Understandings

- Federalism promotes national unity while giving states control over state and local matters.

Vocabulary

- Delegated powers
- Federalism
- Supremacy Clause

Lessons, Activities and Resources

- What is Federalism? How does it work? Powers delegated to the federal government and powers reserved to the states.
 - iCivics: [The “Federal” in Federalism](#)
 - National Archives: [Understanding Federalism](#)
- Federalism and Separation of Powers
 - National Constitution Center: [Federalism](https://constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/learning-material/federalism)
<https://constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/learning-material/federalism>
- Supremacy Clause and implicit powers
 - History.com: [McCulloch v. Maryland](#) (1819)
- How has federalism changed over time?
 - ThoughtCo.: [Types of federalism](#)
 - Carnegie Council: [Energy Policy](#)

Topic 6: Bill of Rights and Amendment Process

Inquiry Questions

- Did the Constitution need a Bill of Rights?
- How does the Bill of Rights ensure that fundamental human rights are protected?
- Is the Constitution a “living document”? Why did the founders make the amendment process difficult?

Supporting Questions

- Was the Constitution sufficient to protect individual rights without the Bill of Rights?
- What is the process for amending the U.S. Constitution?
- What fundamental human rights are protected in the Bill of Rights?
- How does the Bill of Rights ensure that fundamental human rights are protected?

Enduring Understandings

- The guarantees in the Bill of Rights reflect the nation’s commitment to personal freedom and to the principle of limited government.
- The due process clause of the fourteenth amendment ensures that state governments do not limit or take away rights given to citizens by the national government.
- The establishment clause sets up “a wall of separation between church and state”.
- The free exercise clause protects religious beliefs but does not religious actions that violate laws or threaten safety
- The guarantees of free speech and press are intended to protect the expression of unpopular views.
- The rights of peaceable assembly and petition protect the people’s right to bring their views to the attention of public officials.

Vocabulary

- Amendment
- Anti-Federalists
- Bill of Rights
- Federalists
- Ratify

Lessons, Activities and Resources

- Was a Bill of Rights necessary?
 - iCivics: [Federalists and Antifederalists views](#)
 - NJ Center for Civic Education: [Federalists and AntiFederalists](#)
 - Center for Civic Education: [Antifederalists](#) and [AntiFederalist Response \(Federalist 10\)](#)
 - Constituting America: [Why did James Madison change his mind?](#)
- How does the Bill of Rights protect rights?
 - National Constitution Center: [Eight basic facts about the Bill of Rights](#)
 - National Archives: [The Bill of Rights: What Does it Say?](#)
 - Bill of Rights Institute: [Explains each amendment](#)
- What rights does the Bill of Rights protect?
 - iCivics Lesson: [You've Got Rights!](#)

- iCivics Game: [Do I Have a Right?](#)
- iCivics: [Do I Have a Right? Extension Pack](#)
- iCivics: [Amendment Mini-Lesson](#)
- How is the Constitution Amended?
 - U.S. Senate: [Amending the Constitution](#)
- Why did the Founders make it difficult to amend the Constitution?
 - National Park Service: [Amending the Constitution](#)

Unit 3: The Constitution, American Ideals and the American Experience

Grade Level: 6-8

Unit Summary

The Preamble to the United States Constitution outlines its purposes and ideals in the following language: *“We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States...”*

This unit will investigate the challenges and triumphs to fulfilling our American ideals. The unit will begin with an examination of the goals highlighted in the Preamble of the Constitution. By tracing the preamble through American history, students will assess the effectiveness of our early citizens in meeting the goals of the Constitution. Students will evaluate how each American ideal has grown and expanded to be more inclusive. As we continue to struggle in fulfilling the potential of the American ideals, students will be encouraged to identify additional areas of growth toward a “more perfect union.”

Essential Question

How have economic, political, and cultural decisions promoted or prevented the growth of personal freedom, individual responsibility, equality, and the respect for human dignity?

Standards

[NJ Student Learning Standards for Social Studies:](#)

- 6.1.8.CivicsPI.3.a. Cite evidence to evaluate the extent to which the leadership and decisions of early administrations of the national government met the goals established in the Constitution.
- 6.1.8.CivicsPI.3.b and 6.3.8.CivicsPR.2: Evaluate the effectiveness of the fundamental principles of the Constitution (i.e., consent of the governed, rule of law, federalism, limited

government, separation of powers, checks and balances and individual rights) in establishing a federal government that allows for growth and change over time.

- 6.1.8.CivicsDP.3.a: Use primary and secondary sources to assess whether or not the ideals found in the Declaration of Independence were fulfilled for women, African Americans and Native Americans during this time period.
- 6.1.8.CivicsHR.3.a: Explain how and why constitutional civil liberties were impacted by acts of government during the Early Republic (i.e., Alien and Sedition Acts).
- 6.1.8.CivicsHR.3.b: Evaluate the impact of the institution of slavery on the political and economic expansion of the United States.
- 6.1.8.CivicsHR.3.c: Construct an argument to explain how the expansion of slavery violated human rights and contradicted American ideals.
- 6.1.8.CivicsHR.4.a: Examine sources from a variety of perspectives to describe efforts to reform education, women's rights, slavery and other issues during the Antebellum period.
- 6.3.8.CivicsDP.2: Make a claim based on evidence to determine the extent and limitations of First Amendment Rights (e.g., Supreme Court decisions).
- 6.3.8.CivicsDP.3: Use historical case studies and current events to explain why due process is essential for the protection of individual rights and maintenance of limited government.
- 6.1.8.CivicsDP.4.a: Research and prioritize the most significant events that led to the expansion of voting rights during the Jacksonian period.
- 6.1.8.HistoryUP.5.a: Analyze the effectiveness of the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments to the United State Constitution from multiple perspectives.

NJ ELA Grade 6-8 Companion Standards

- WHST.6-8.8. Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.
- RH.6-8.7. Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.
- RH.6-8.8. Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.

Suggested Practices for Social Studies

Differentiation for Middle School Social Studies

Student Learning Standards for English Language Arts

8.1 Technology Standards

- 8.1D 6-8. Demonstrates ability to differentiate the degree of credibility and accuracy of different digital content.

Career Readiness, Life Literacies & Key Skills

CRP1. Act as a responsible and contributing citizen and employee.

CRP5. Consider the environmental, social and economic impacts of decisions.

CRP7. Employ valid and reliable research strategies.

CRP8. Utilize critical thinking to make sense of problems and persevere in solving them.

Social and Emotional Learning in Middle School Social Studies Instruction

Unit Assessment

E.g., a simulated legislative or judicial hearing about a current day issue. For example, use the [questions](#) about the principles underlying the U.S. Constitution and its application today from the *We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution* in a simulated Congressional Hearing in your classroom. Or hold a judicial hearing about an issue involving the application of the Bill of Rights, such as the [Supreme Court Simulation](#) from the United States Courts.

Topic 1: “A More Perfect Union”

Inquiry Questions

- How well has the U.S. met the fundamental principles established in the Constitution?

Supporting Questions

- How did the Constitution establish a “more perfect union” than the Articles of Confederation?
- How has extending the right to vote supported the concept of the consent of the governed?
- How has the rule of law prevented abuse of authority?

Enduring Understandings

- One of the great successes of the American experience is demonstrating to the world that citizens could establish a government based on a social contract with the “consent of the governed”. A founding generation drafted a Constitution that joined political ideas and practical experience, making real what had previously only been a theory.
- The Constitution addressed many of the deficiencies of the Articles of Confederation.
- The right to vote, initially granted to a limited segment of the population, has gradually been extended to different groups enhancing the concept of “the consent of the governed”.
- Ensuring the right to vote is an essential component of a successful democracy.

Vocabulary

- Blessings of Liberty
- Checks and Balances
- Domestic Tranquility
- Franchise
- General welfare
- Impeachment
- Justice
- Posterity

- Preamble
- Rule of Law
- Separation of Powers
- Sovereignty
- Suffrage
- Union

Lessons, Activities and Resources

Preamble to the Constitution: *"We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States..."*

How did the Constitution establish a “more perfect union” than the Articles of Confederation?

- iCivics: [The Constitution's Cover Letter Lesson DBQuest](#)
- Edsitement.neh.gov: [The Preamble to the Constitution: A Close Reading Lesson](#)
 - [Activity 1](#). Questions to form a Government
 - [Activity 2](#). Teachers' Guide
 - [Activity 2](#). What the Preamble Says (comparison with the Articles of Confederation)
- iCivics game: [iCivics America's Founding Preambles DBQuest](#)
- C-Span Lesson Plan: [Introduction to the Principles of Democracy](#)
 - Video Clip 2: [Introduction to the Rule of Law](#) (Video Length-1:17)
 - Video Clip 6: [Justice Breyer on Democracy](#) (Video Length-4:14)
 - Video Clip 7: [Rule of Law, Equal Protection and Rights](#) (Video Length-2:40)
 - [Introduction to the Principles of Democracy Handout](#)

How has extending the right to vote supported the concept of the consent of the governed?

- Vocabulary: franchise, suffrage and right to vote
- Expansion of franchise to men in 1830s:
 - C-SPAN Classroom: [Video Clip: Who Could Vote in the Early United States?](#)
 - C-SPAN Classroom [The Expansion of Voting Rights charts and video links](#)
 - PBS Learning Media: [History of U.S. Voting Rights | Things Explained](#)
- Fifteenth Amendment
 - PBS Learning Media: [The 15th Amendment Challenges the Women's Movement Carrie Chapman Catt](#)

- PBS Learning Media: [The 15th Amendment and the Battle Over Voting Rights \(PBS Learning Media\)](#)
- Women’s Suffrage
 - PBS Learning Media: She Resisted:[Seneca Falls Convention | The Vote](#); [Strategies of Suffrage | The Vote](#); [She Resisted: Strategies of Suffrage - Remote Worksheet](#); [She Resisted: Strategies of Suffrage - Group Work](#)
 - iCivics: [Women’s Suffrage: A Movement in the Right Direction Infographic](#)
 - C-SPAN Classroom Lesson: [Early Women in Congress](#)
 - Alice Paul Institute: [Who Was Alice Paul?](#)
 - The New Jersey Center for Civic Education provides three lessons from the collection of New Jersey lessons in Word format: [New Jersey Women](#) (grades 3-5), [New Jersey Women You Should Know](#), and [Alice Paul and Women’s Suffrage](#)
 - Library of Congress: [NJ Women Gain and Lose the Vote](#) (Document image)
- Expanding the right to vote
 - Southern Monmouth League of Women Voters [“Fight For the Vote”](#) and [lesson materials](#).
 - The 26th Amendment
 - Should the voting age be lowered?
 - [State Voting requirements](#)

How has the rule of law prevented abuse of authority?

- National Constitution Center: [U.S. v. Nixon](#) (1974)

Topic 2: “. . .Establish Justice. . .”

Inquiry Questions

- What is “fairness” or “justice”?
- How does the Constitution “establish justice”?
- How do we ensure that people are treated fairly?
- Can there be justice without equality?

Supporting Questions

- How are the terms “fairness” or “justice” commonly defined and used in law? By people you know?
- What is “due process” and how does it protect individual rights?
- What does the 14th Amendment mean by “equal protection under the law”?
- What is equality of opportunity?

Enduring Understandings

- The desire for “fairness” or “justice” is a primary reason why people are willing to create a government. These concepts are difficult to precisely define. The Constitution and state constitutions establish a court system to help decide questions of justice.
- The right to “due process” is considered one of the most fundamental guarantees of individual rights.
- *Procedural Due Process* means that the government must follow rules and procedures that are reasonable, fair, and not arbitrary.
- *Substantive Due Process* means that the government cannot make or interpret laws in a way that violates fundamental rights.
- The Fifth Amendment established the concept of “due process” in the Constitution regarding the federal government.
- The Fourteenth Amendment extended the concept of “equal protection under the law” to the states.

Vocabulary

- Affirmative Action
- Civil Rights Movement
- Due Process
- Equality
- Fairness
- Habeas Corpus
- Jim Crow
- Segregation

Lessons, Activities and Resources

What is Justice or Fairness?

- Background article: [Equality and Justice: History and Ideals — Equal Justice Under Law](#)
- Culture of Dignity.com activity: [The Difference between Equality and Equity](#)
- NJ Center for Civic Education: [What is fairness or justice?](#)

To what extent has the United States established justice for all?

- How fairly has the United States treated Native Americans?
 - C-Span Classroom Lesson Plan: [The Indian Removal Act of 1830](#)
 - PBS Learning Media: [Trail of Tears: The Cherokee Fight Against Removal](#); [Trail of Tears: Are the Cherokee an Independent Nation?](#) and [Worcester v. Georgia | Cherokee Nation](#)
 - NJ Center for Civic Education: [Cherokee Removal historical roleplaying activity](#)
 - Constitutional Rights Foundation: [Choosing a Native American Policy: Simulation Activity](#)
- How fairly has the United States treated African Americans?
 - NEH Edsitement: [Slavery and the American Founding: “The Inconsistency Not to be Excused”](#)
 - PBS learning Media: [Teaching Guide: Exploring American Abolitionism](#)
 - 13th Amendment

- Link to Mock Congressional Hearings regarding Reconstruction in Conflict Resolution and U.S. History
- Jim Crow
- C-Span Classroom: [Poll Taxes](#); [Literacy Test](#); [Grandfather Clause](#)
- Junior Scholastic: [How Barbara Johns Helped End Segregation](#)

What is “due process” and how does it protect individual rights?

- Justice In The Classroom: [Due Process and the Constitution](#)
- NJ Center for Civic Education: [What is due process and why is it important?](#)

What does the 14th Amendment mean by “equal protection under the law”?

- PBS Learning Media: [The Reconstruction Amendments](#)
- NJ Center for Civic Education: [What does “equal protection” mean?](#)
- [Triad Debate: Affirmative Action](#) law.washington.edu

Topic 3: “. . .insure Domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense. . .”

Inquiry Questions

- How well has the U.S. balanced the need for order and the protection of individual rights?

Supporting Questions

- What is “domestic tranquility?”
- What is “privacy”?
- How has the U.S. balanced the need for order and the protection of rights during times of peace and times of war?

Enduring Understandings

- Domestic tranquility refers to the expectation by citizens that government will ensure an orderly society based on due process and an inviolate/minimum sphere of personal liberty.
- Democracy places a high value on the right to privacy, which is the basis for many of the more specific protections enshrined in the Bill of Rights.
- The right to privacy and other rights have sometimes been restricted during times of war as the need to ensure national security conflicts with more expansive individual rights enjoyed during times of peace. It is the role of the courts to help determine the appropriate constitutional balance between individual rights and national security and to review acts of the legislative and executive branches.
- Habeas corpus is a fundamental right that prevents arbitrary abuse of authority by the government and indefinite detentions of political opponents.

- The peaceful transfer of power is a critical element of democracy, requiring both constitutional procedures and the commitment by citizens to uphold a free society and a republican form of government.
- *The use of force by the government must be within constitutional constraints in a democratic society. A cornerstone of American democracy has been a professional, non-political military that takes an oath to support the Constitution.*

Vocabulary

- Alien and Sedition Acts
- Domestic Tranquility
- Habeas Corpus
- Liberty
- Patriot Act of 2001
- Privacy

Lessons, Activities and Resources

What is “domestic tranquility”?

- NJ Center for Civic Education: [How do you “ensure domestic tranquility”?](#)

Privacy rights during war:

- C-SPAN: [Schenck v. United States and the Espionage Act](#)
- Bill of Rights Institute: [Security, Liberty and the Patriot Act](#)

What is habeas corpus and why is it important?

- C-SPAN Classroom: [The meaning and Origins of Habeas Corpus](#)
- C-SPAN Classroom: [The Writ of Habeas Corpus and the Constitution](#)

How does the Fourth Amendment protect privacy rights?

- New Hampshire Institute for Civics Education: [Privacy and the 4th Amendment](#)
- Learningforjustice: [What is a Hate Crime?](#)
- [NJ State Bar Foundation Law Adventure Competition](#)

Political stability and peaceful transfer of power

- iCivics: [Peaceful Transfer of Power](#)

Topic 4: “promote. . .the General Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty”

Inquiry Questions

- What is “liberty”? Why did the Founders make it the defining purpose of American government?
- To what extent has the American experience succeeded in promoting the general welfare or common good?

- How can we best balance individual rights and the general welfare when these important concepts are in conflict?

Supporting Questions

- What is “the general welfare”?
- What is liberty?
- Should there be limits on freedom of speech or the ability to protest and petition the government?
- Why is freedom of speech important for sustaining democracy?
- How has social media changed public discourse and how can we address the spreading of propaganda and lies in social media?
- What is the difference between “the establishment of religion” and the “free exercise of religion”?
- How can we balance conflicts between religious beliefs and the protection of the rights of citizens?

Enduring Understandings

- The American system of limited government is designed to promote a specific definition of liberty. This definition differs from that used by other nations with different forms of government.
- The American system of government is based on the concept of social contract theory and the idea that individuals agree to place some limits on their absolute liberty in order to actually enjoy the greatest possible amount of liberty. What these limits should be is an important part of Constitutional law and public discourse.
- Democracies must also balance individual liberty and “the common good”. Debates about how to best achieve this balance is an important element of politics and public policy.

Vocabulary

- Assembly
- Censorship
- Common Good
- Establishment Clause
- Free Exercise Clause
- General Welfare
- Individual rights
- Libel
- Liberty
- Petition
- Press
- Protest
- Religion
- Sedition
- Slander
- Social Media
- Speech

Lessons, Activities and Resources

What does “promote the general welfare” mean? How does the government promote the general welfare or common good?

- NJ Center for Civic Education: [What is the “general welfare”?](#)

What is liberty?

- NJ Center for Civic Education: [What is “liberty?”](#)

Why is freedom of expression? Why is it so important? When should it be limited?

- NJ Center for Civic Education: [First Amendment Freedom of Expression](#)
- C-SPAN: [Zenger Trial and the Colonial Press](#)
- National Constitution Center [The First Amendment Plan of Study](#)
- Newseumed.org: [My Five Freedoms](#)
- US Courts: [First Amendment Modified Oxford Debates and Scenarios](#)
- TPS: [Sedition Act: Should speech ever be restricted?](#)
- Right to Petition and Assemble
 - American Bar Association: [Right to Petition Lesson Plan](#)
 - Freedoms Foundation: [Freedom of Petition & Assembly Lesson Plan](#)
 - National Constitution Center: [Freedom of Assembly & Petition Lesson Plan](#)

What is the difference between “the establishment of religion” and the “free exercise of religion”? How do we balance religious beliefs v. the common good?

- NJ Center for Civic Education: [How does the First Amendment protect freedom of religion?](#)

How can we balance individual rights and the general welfare when these important concepts are in conflict?

- C-SPAN: [Individual Liberty and the Common Good](#)

Unit 4: Role of the Citizen

Grade Level: 6-8

Timeframe: 8 weeks

Unit Summary

In addition to civic education content, students require opportunities to develop and practice the skills and dispositions to become active and well-informed supporters of their community. Voting is an important responsibility of citizenship, but students must also learn how to interact with the appropriate levels of government to address matters of public policy that affect their lives and occupations. This unit explores the nature of citizenship and offers questions and strategies to help

students develop the skills they will need to be active members and supporters of their communities.

Essential Question

How do citizens, civic ideals, and government institutions interact to balance the needs of individuals and the common good?

Standards

NJ Student Learning Standards for Social Studies

- 6.3.8.CivicsHR.1: Construct an argument as to the source of human rights and how they are best protected.
- 6.3.8.CivicsPI.1: Evaluate, take, and defend a position on why government is necessary, and the purposes government should serve
- 6.3.8.CivicsPR.1: Analyze primary sources to explain how democratic ideas in the United States developed from the historical experiences of ancient societies, England and the North American colonies.
- 6.3.8.CivicsPR.5: Engage in simulated democratic processes (e.g., legislative hearings, judicial proceedings, elections) to understand how conflicting points of view are addressed in a democratic society

Suggested Practices for Social Studies

Differentiation for Middle School Social Studies

NJ ELA Grade 6-8 Companion Standards

- WHST.6-8.7. Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.
- WHST.6-8.9. Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Student Learning Standards for English Language Arts

8.1 Technology Standards

- 8.1A 6-8. Demonstrate ability to manipulate, analyze and/or interpret data for particular purposes when the purpose and the data sources are provided by the teacher

Career Readiness, Life Literacies & Key Skills

CRP1. Act as a responsible and contributing citizen and employee.

CRP4. Communicate clearly and effectively and with reason.

CRP5. Consider the environmental, social and economic impacts of decisions.

CRP6. Demonstrate creativity and innovation.

CRP7. Employ valid and reliable research strategies.

CRP12. Work productively in teams while using cultural global competence.

Social and Emotional Learning in Middle School Social Studies Instruction

Unit Assessment

E.g., a Class Project identifying, researching and proposing a solution to an important public policy issue, such as *Project Citizen*.

Topic 1: Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship

Inquiry Questions

- What is a “citizenship”?
- What are the essential attributes of a citizen?

Supporting Questions

- Who, by law, is a citizen?
- Who are resident aliens?
- How does an immigrant become a citizen?
- What rights and responsibilities does a citizen have that a non-citizen (resident alien) does not have?

Enduring Understandings

- Citizenship is a relationship between an individual and a state to which the individual owes allegiance and in turn is entitled to its protection.
- Each nation determines the conditions under which it will recognize persons as its citizens, and the conditions under which that status will be extended or withdrawn.
- Citizens have additional rights and responsibilities that non-citizens do not possess.

Vocabulary

- Allegiance
- Citizenship
- Citizen
- Immigrant
- Legal Permanent Resident
- Naturalization
- Obligations
- Resident Alien
- Responsibilities

Lessons, Activities and Resources

What is citizenship? Who is a Citizen? What is Naturalization? What rights and obligations do citizens have?

- iCivics: [Citizen me](#) Students create a graphic organizer that diagrams citizen rights and responsibilities at different levels of citizenship--home, school, city, state, and nation. They also learn the sources of their rights and responsibilities at each level.
- NJ Center for Civic Education: [What is Citizenship? Who is a Citizen?](#)

How does an immigrant become a citizen?

- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services: [Citizenship and Naturalization in the U.S.](#)
- National Archives: [Analyzing Einstein's Citizenship Application](#); [Exploring America's Diversity: Luther Powell](#); [Analyzing Rick Rescorla's Petition for Naturalization](#)

Topic 2: Local and State Government

Inquiry Questions

- How do the three branches of government function at the local and state level in New Jersey?
- How well does federalism resolve the competing demands of limiting government power and the need for efficiency in government?

Supporting Questions

- How do ideas become laws or rules at local, state and national levels?
- How does federalism distribute government authority at the national, state, and local levels?
- How does government function in New Jersey and in your local community and school district?

Enduring Understandings

- Local government includes school boards, municipalities, and counties; each with specific authority.
- The [New Jersey Constitution](#) delegates certain powers and responsibilities to local governments and school boards.
- State government includes three branches--executive, legislative and judicial--with separate powers and checks and balances.
- Decisions made by local and state governments have enormous impact on our lives.

Vocabulary

- Appellate Court
- Civil suit
- County commissioners
- Defendant

- Municipality
- Ordinance
- Plaintiff
- School Board
- Trial Court

Lessons, Activities and Resources

- What is your local government and how can you interact with it?:
 - Municipalities: League of Municipalities: [Local Government in New Jersey](#)
 - Public schools are led by local boards of education: non-paid school board members elected by the community, except for 14 school districts where they are appointed by the municipal government. The local boards of education adopt policies under which the school district operates; oversee the budget; approve the curriculum; hire and evaluate the superintendent; represent the public during contract negotiations; and serve as a communications link between the community and the school system. The New Jersey [School Boards Association](#) is a statewide organization that supports the efforts of local school boards.
 - [County Government](#) provides many services, including parks and social services, based in the 21 counties, led by county commissioners.
- State Government:
 - NJ Center for Civic Education: [New Jersey's Powerful Governor](#)
 - NJ Center for Civic Education: [New Jersey Legislature](#)
 - NJ Center for Civic Education: [New Jersey Judiciary](#)
 - [NJ State House Tour](#) and [teacher resources](#)
 - [State House Express](#) - The Eagleton Institute of Politics offers funding for NJ State House tours by classes.
 - iCivics: [Court Quest game](#) has students navigate the differences between the state and federal court systems and identify the types and levels of courts within each system.

Topic 3: Public Policy and Civil Society

Inquiry Question

- How can individuals and civil society influence public policy?

Supporting Questions

- What is public policy?
- What is civil society?
- How do individuals and institutions of civil society, such as interest groups, fraternal groups, business groups, etc. Influence public policy?

- How have those without full political rights (women before 1920, minorities before the Civil Rights Movement) affected change?
- How can I engage with others to improve my local, state, national and/or global community?

Enduring Understandings

- Public policy includes the decisions, commitments and actions made by those who hold or affect government positions.
- Public policies are often embodied in laws, rules or regulations.
- Civil society includes media, voluntary organizations and interest groups, which mediate between individuals and government.
- Individuals and civil society can influence public policy outcomes by speaking with their elected representatives and lobbying for change.

Vocabulary

- Civil Society
- Interest groups
- Public Policy

Activities and Resources

- What is public policy? What is civil society? How do individuals and institutions of civil society, such as interest groups, fraternal groups, business groups, etc. influence public policy?
 - NJ Center for Civic Education: [What is public policy?](#)
 - Gettingsmart: [Strategies for teaching public policy](#)

Topic 4: Citizen Action - Identifying a Problem or Issue

Inquiry Questions

- What kinds of issues are appropriate for government action, and at what level?
- How can a group reach a consensus regarding a public policy issue?

Supporting Questions

- How can I identify problems that are important to be addressed at the local, state, national and/or global level?
- Are the proposed solutions constitutional according to either the U.S. or state constitutions?
- What matters to me and why?
- Do civil society and/or private initiatives have a role, or should the solution rely solely on government?

- How can the Universal Declaration of Human Rights help us to identify important issues at the state, local or national level?
- Why are issues involving climate change and the environment critical?
- How do issues of economic justice involve human rights?

Enduring Understandings

- Students will identify and discuss a variety of community issues, engaging in comprehensive research and analysis of the issues, utilizing appropriate reading, writing, and informational literacy skills.
- Issues will be prioritized based on their scope, duration, impact and feasibility.
- Students will appreciate the value of reaching consensus regarding which issue(s) to prioritize. of the issues identified.

Vocabulary

- Duration
- Economic justice
- Feasibility
- Human rights
- Intensity
- Resources
- Scope

Lessons, Activities and Resources

- Identifying important issues to be addressed at the local, state, national and/or global level
 - NJ Center for Civic Education: [Identifying Community Issues](#)
 - Newseum: [Identifying community issues](#)
 - [Project Citizen](#)
 - [Generation Citizen](#)
 - [Youth-Led Participatory Action Research](#)
- Why are issues involving human rights important? How do issues of economic justice involve human rights?
 - Human Rights Educators USA: [Service Learning for Human Rights Education](#)
- Why are issues involving climate changes and the environmental issues critical?
 - NJ Dept. of Education: [NJ Climate Change Education Resources](#)
 - Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry: [Identifying risks](#)

Topic 5: Citizen Action - Developing and Proposing a Solution

Inquiry Questions

- What are the skills necessary for influencing public policy?

- What are the possible alternative solutions to the problem and which solution is the best?

Supporting Questions

- How can the appropriate branch or agency of government with authority to address an important issue be identified?
- Why are digital tools, research skills, media literacy skills and active listening skills important for civic participation?
- Why is it important to consider several alternative solutions to an important issue?
- How can the best solution to an important issue be selected?

Enduring Understandings

- A fully researched and analyzed solution to a contemporary public policy issue helps students to develop important literacy, problem-solving and critical thinking skills.
- Developing an action plan to have a public policy solution implemented by an appropriate governmental agency develops civic skills and positive civic attitudes.

Vocabulary

- Action Plan
- Advocating
- Alternatives
- Bias
- Credibility
- Government agency
- Presentation
- Solutions

Lessons, Activities and Resources

- How can we identify the appropriate branch or agency of government with authority to address the issue that has been selected?
 - NJ Center for Civic Education: [Selecting an Issue](#)
- How are digital tools, research skills, media literacy skills and active listening skills used for civic participation? How can I assess the credibility of online or printed information? How can I determine whether a source is biased?
 - NJ Center for Civic Education: [Media Literacy](#)
 - NJ Center for Civic Education: [Suggested Practices--Active Listening/Civil Discourse](#)
- Why should I carefully consider several alternative solutions? How can I determine what is the best solution to the problem that I have identified?
 - NJ Center for Civic Education: [Selecting the best solution](#)
 - iCivics: [Identifying local solutions](#)
- How can I initiate change? What is an action plan?

- NJ Center for Civic Education: [How can individuals and groups bring their concerns to public policymakers?](#)
- How can I develop an effective written and/or oral presentation advocating our solution?
 - Scholastic: [Persuasive letter writing rubric](#):
 - iCivics: [Local Solutions Civic Action Plan](#)
 - NJ Center for Civic Education: [Presenting your class plan](#)

Topic 6: Civic Participation and Democracy

Inquiry Questions

- What is the value of civic engagement?

Supporting Questions

- What might happen if citizens do not participate in democratic government at the local, state, or federal levels?
- What can individuals do to help ensure that the American experiment with democracy continues?
- How does civic participation help our democracy evolve?
- What are the benefits of civic participation in a democracy?

Enduring Understandings

- Students will reflect on the value of civic engagement to society and to each individual.
- Lifelong citizen engagement and participation in the community is necessary for our democracy to continue.
- The cohesiveness of our democratic society today is a product of the contributions of historical and current leaders and citizens.

Vocabulary

- Benefits
- Civic engagement
- Civic skills
- Cohesiveness
- Participation
- Reflection

Lessons, Activities and Resources

- Reflecting on doing the public policy project
 - NJ Center for Civic Education: [Student Reflections](#)
- What are the benefits to individuals of participating in the civic life of our country?

- NJ Center for Civic Education: [Why should individuals participate in civic life?](#)
- What can individuals do to help ensure that the American experiment with democracy continues? How does civic participation help our democracy evolve? What are the benefits of civic participation in a democracy?
 - *The New York Times* video: [The Power to Change the World](#)
 - Center for Civic Education video: [Project Citizen International Documentary "The World We Want"](#)