Middle School Civics Mandate

This slide presentation is from the many in-person workshops that we have presented during the spring and summer of 2022. It offers an overview of what is now required for civics in New Jersey middle schools and a sample of some of the many resources available in the Curriculum Guide for Middle School Civics, as well as the many other resources available on our website at http://civiced.rutgers.edu.
VISION: An education in social studies fosters a population that:

- Is civic-minded, globally aware, and socially responsible;
- Exemplifies fundamental values of democracy and human rights through active participation in local, state, national, and global communities;
- Makes informed decisions about local, state, national, and global events based on inquiry and analysis;
- Considers multiple perspectives, values diversity, and promotes cultural understanding;
- Recognizes the relationships between people, places, and resources as well as the implications of an interconnected global economy;
- Applies an understanding of critical media literacy skills when utilizing technology to learn, communicate, and collaborate with diverse people around the world; and
- Discerns fact from falsehood and critically analyzes information for validity and relevance.
Civic Literacy is more than just content
Laura Wooten Law (S-854)

Beginning in the 2022-2023 school year, each board of education shall provide a course of study in civics, which shall be taken by all students in an appropriate middle school grade.

The course shall 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 board shall ensure that the course of study includes a minimum of two quarters of instruction, or the equivalent.

Directed the New Jersey Center for Civic Education at Rutgers, the State University to provide a clearinghouse of materials, an online resource center, technical assistance, professional development.
What does this mean?

- A separate, explicit and sustained course of civics in any middle school grades (6-8)
- A minimum of two quarters is required
- It should not be instruction in civics infused in another social studies course, such as U.S. history
What are the options?

- A full year of civics: many districts that have been teaching civics before it was mandated offered a full-year course.

- Three quarters of civics and one quarter of financial literacy (although the financial literacy standards may be addressed in other subject areas, such as math).

- A semester of civics and a semester of U.S. history (1754-1876).

- A full year of civics which integrates U.S. history into civics themes.
Inquiry Approach to Civics

- C3 or College, Career and Civic Life for Social Studies: develop questions, gather and evaluate information and draw conclusions based on evidence in the social studies disciplines of history, geography, civics and economics

- NJ Student Learning Standards

- Middle School Civics Inquiry Framework

- High quality civics-based inquiry questions can provide the organization for the course, including the 123 years of U.S. history covered by the standards
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Narrative history/Textbooks</th>
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<td><strong>Students as receivers of information</strong></td>
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<td>- Conclusions given to students</td>
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<td>- Voice of the writer(s) of the textbook is prevalent</td>
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<td>- One or limited perspective</td>
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<td>- Teacher centered</td>
<td>- Student and evidence centered</td>
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NJ Student Learning Standards for Social Studies

- Content: 6.1.8 and 6.3.8
  - Civic and Political Institutions (PI)
  - Participation and Deliberation (PD)
  - Democratic Principles (DP)
  - Processes, Rules and Laws (PR)
  - Human and Civil Rights (HR)
  - Civic Mindedness (CM)

- Practices

- Skills
Inquiry Framework for middle school civics

- Outlines the big questions that should be answered
- Includes Civic content, civic skills such as media literacy, suggested practices, civic action and dispositions

- Key components of a middle school civics course:
  - Foundational Concepts and Principles
  - Foundational Documents
  - The Constitution, American Ideals, and the American Experience
  - The Role of the Citizen in a Democratic Society

- The Inquiry Framework is online on our website
Suggested Practices

- Addressing current events and controversial issues
- Simulations of democratic processes (e.g., Mock Elections, Simulated Town Meetings, Mock Legislative hearings and debates, Mock Trials, Moot Courts, etc.)

6.3.8CivicsPR5

- Developing Questions and Planning Inquiry
- Gathering and evaluating sources
- Finding, evaluating and organizing information and evidence from multiple sources and perspectives
- Seeking diverse perspectives
- Developing claims and using evidence
- Taking informed action
Teaching Controversial Issues

Some of the civics topics are controversial. It is important to address current controversial public issues because:

- Is authentic and relevant
- Enhances students’ sense of political efficacy
- Improves critical thinking skills
- Increases students’ comfort with conflict that exists in the world outside of the classroom
- Develops political tolerance
- Motivates students
- Results in students gaining greater content knowledge.
Teaching Controversial Issues: An Ounce of Prevention

- Be prepared for controversy by letting your administrators know what you plan to do
- Reference the state standards and your district course curriculum that supports teaching this topic
- Look at your school policy about teaching controversial issues, which protects teachers unless they are “indoctrinating” students
- Know your community
- Know the goals of your lesson that might be controversial
- Consider carefully whether you should disclose your personal views
- Do not try to indoctrinate your students to your point of view
Resources available at http://civiced.rutgers.edu

- **Resources for Teaching Controversial Issues**: to help you navigate the pitfalls due to our highly polarized society.

- **Resources for Teaching Conflict Resolution Skills**: Practice Active Listening activities with your students:

- **Resources for Teaching Media Literacy**: help your students develop critical thinking skills so that they can assess the veracity of news and online sites and identify logical fallacies.

- The Center offers workshops on media literacy, teaching controversial issues and developing conflict resolution skills.
Middle School Civics Curriculum Guide

Includes:

- Relevant Standards
- Content—including concepts such as consent of the government, the rule of law, civic virtue, the common good, liberty, justice, equality, and diversity
- Suggested Practices--evaluating sources, seeking diverse perspectives, engaging in civil discourse and taking informed action
- Suggested Performance assessments

It is a living document that will be expanded, revised and improved over time
Middle School Civics Curriculum Guide

- Begins with human rights: How do we protect human rights?
- What would a world be like with no rules, laws, or authority?
- Why do we need government?
- Comparing different forms of government
- What makes a government legitimate?
- Consent of the governed
- The Rule of Law
- The Common good and civic virtue
After considerable discussion we decided to start the Curriculum Guide for Middle School Civics with the idea of 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
What might life be like in a state of nature?
Why do we need authority, rules and government?

- To protect individual rights
- To protect the weak from the strong
- To keep us safe
- To help us keep order
- To settle arguments
- To ensure the burdens and benefits are fairly shared
Social Contract Theory of Government

- Locke argued that the best way for each person’s natural rights to be protected so that everybody could live in peace and enjoy their rights was for each person to agree with others to create and live in a government and give that government the authority to make and enforce laws.

- Individuals give up the right to do anything they please in return for security provided by government, including protection of individual rights.

- Individuals surrender those rights they do not want others to use against them in order to enjoy the rest of their rights.

- One of the most dominant theories within moral and political theory throughout the history of the modern West.

- Examples of social contracts: The Mayflower Compact, New Jersey and other state constitutions, U.S. Constitution.
What makes government legitimate?

- The consent of the governed
- The Rule of Law
What does “consent of the governed” mean?

- Consent as approval or agreement
- A government is lawful and justified to use power only when consented or agreed to by its people
- How do we consent? By:
  - voting
  - following the laws
  - staying in the country
What is the “rule of law”?

- No one is above the law--everyone is held accountable to the same laws
- Everyone is treated equally under the law
- Laws are publicly promulgated (approved and announced)
- There are clear and fair processes for enforcing laws
- There is an independent judiciary, and
- Human rights are guaranteed for all
- Aristotle in 4th cen. BCE distinguished “the rule of law” from “the rule of an individual"
What is the difference between power and authority?

- Power is the ability to control or direct someone or something.

- Authority is the power combined with the right to use the power.
Is it power or authority?

1. A jury decided Maggie Smith is guilty of robbery and the judge sentences her to prison.
2. Bob Washington, who is bigger than most of his friends, cuts in front of the line at the movie theatre.
3. While his parents are out and leave him in charge, Chris Matthews tells his younger brother not to touch his computer.
4. The referee ejects two players from the game for fighting.
5. Richard Lee tells his son that he is grounded because he broke his curfew.
6. Johnny, an eighth grade student, tells third grade students Tony and Stan, that they have to clear his lunch tray for his group of friends.
Student Activity: Monarchy/Dictatorship vs. Democracy

- Divide students into groups of 4-7, give them paper, cardboard, legos (or anything else that you might have available) and ask them to build a house.
- Have some groups work under one individual in charge and able to make all decisions, others cannot make any suggestions.
- Have other groups work as a “democracy” with nobody in charge and open to suggestions from all (the group may “select” someone to be in charge if they want to).
- Give the class time to build their house, then discuss the benefits or difficulties of the process they used.
- Students should appreciate that when decisions are made by one individual without the input of anybody else (a “monarchy or dictatorship”) things may be built faster but the members of the group may feel frustrated because they had no input.
- Students should appreciate that when decisions are made “democratically,” it may take longer because deliberation and consensus take time but everybody had input.
Alternative Classroom Activity

- Consider the advantages and disadvantages of a democratic republic.

- Which form of government is most likely to prevent abuse of authority and protect human rights, and why?
  - In a democracy, an individual or group is less able to abuse authority because of the rule of law, checks and balances, separation of powers, and the need for continual consent of the governed through elections.
  - A representative democracy (democratic republic) is most likely to protect individual rights because of the rule of law and consent of the governed--representatives are elected by the people and beholden to the people.
What did the Founders believe?

Based on John Locke’s ideas:

- Every person has natural rights to life, liberty and property
- People need government to protect their rights
- Individuals give up the right to do anything they please in return for security provided by government—this is called a “social contract”
What is the common good?
The Common Good

- The purpose of government is to make decisions for the common good—to improve our society—and protect individual rights.

- How do we decide what is for the common good? In a democratic society, often we vote.

- Our elected representatives are supposed to make and enforce laws for the benefit of all—the common good.

- Democracy depends on ALL people—not just elected leaders—recognizing and supporting the common good.
Making Decisions for the Common Good

- *Letting Swift River Run* (Janet Yolen, 1992) -- residents of a town make a decision for the common good to let Swift River be dammed and turned into a reservoir to supply drinking water for the larger community

- *A River Ran Wild* (Lynne Cherry, 1992) -- a true story about the pollution and ultimate cleaning of the Nashua River in MA when citizens took action

- *The Lorax* (Dr. Seuss, 1971) -- we are all responsible for the environment
What is civic virtue?

- The character of a good participant in a system of government--the personal qualities associated with the effective functioning of the civil and political order or the preservation of its values and principles.
- These personal qualities include justice, wisdom, courage, and moderation or self-discipline.
- The Founders designed the American republic with those qualities in mind and believed they were essential to upholding it. These civic virtues undergirded the Founders’ conception of the constitutional structure.
Who has demonstrated civic virtue?

- Courage
- Wisdom
- Moderation or self-restraint
- Makes decisions putting country above personal or political interests
Who has demonstrated civic virtue? Explain why.

- Cincinnatus
- George Washington
- John Adams
- Abraham Lincoln
- Harriet Tubman
- Gandhi
- Nelson Mandela
- Martin Luther King, Jr.
- Republicans during Watergate
- Al Gore
- John McCain
- Mike Pence
- Liz Cheney
- Others?
Why is civic virtue important?

- In many countries, leaders have not had the justice, wisdom and temperance to walk away from continuing to serve as leader of their country.

- The Founders recognized the fragility of a system that depended on wisdom, prudence and justice, and the need for all citizens, not just elected representatives to exercise civic virtue.

- Public figures must model the values of civic virtue for the public. Otherwise, the public sees that it is okay for them to follow the worst personal characteristics, such as greed, fear, indulgence and thoughtlessness or foolishness.

- Without civic virtue and a concern for the common good, a society cannot function in a fair, prudent and wise manner.
Middle School Civics Curriculum Guide

- American Ideals
- Civil Discourse and Conflict Resolution
- Media Literacy Skills
- Mock Election
Identifying American Ideals Activity

- American ideals are a source of unity for a diverse nation and provide an important context for civic education.

- Focusing on American ideals places valid parameters on classroom discussions, rather than opening classroom discussions to random statements potentially disruptive of the school climate.

- Basing instruction on American ideals in founding documents (especially the Constitution) provides a non-partisan basis for responding to any outside advocacy or pressure groups. *It is crucial that instruction be non-partisan.*

- American ideals can form the basis for inquiry-based lessons and provide a reference point for questions and discussions during the year that can be revisited. It can facilitate the infusion of civic education across the curriculum and help link civics to history.
What are “American Ideals”?

- It may be necessary to define what is meant and expected by the term American “ideals”. Students may confuse these with practices and policies.

- Ideals can be defined as those values and principles that are the ultimate goal or aim of our founding documents and institutions and which define the best of America. For example, limited government is an ideal, checks and balances is the practice to help achieve limited government. Democracy is an ideal, voting is a practice. The rule of law is an ideal, establishing a system of courts is a practice.

- Once ideals are listed, and before narrowed down to the best or most important five or six, expect to dedicate class time to the precise definition of the terms (ex. What is really meant by “liberty”?)

- Identifying ideals should precede any discussions of government, the electoral process, or the candidates.
Identifying American Ideals: The Process

First Inquiry:
- Guide the class to the inquiry and supporting questions regarding ideals.
- Brainstorm the concept of ideals.
- Interpret documents (in this case, the Constitution) and locate ideals. Make sure the students actually examine the document.
- Present, critique and defend conclusions on ideals, developing a class consensus.

Second Inquiry:
- Guide class to inquiry question regarding which historical figure best articulates and supports the identified American ideals from the Constitution. If doing this for an election, identify which candidate best articulates the ideals he/she will swear to uphold. Show class the oath of office they will take swearing to uphold the Constitution and its ideals.
- Interpret documents and/or candidate statements, comparing historical actions or candidates to ideals.
- State and defend conclusions
Possible List of American Ideals *

- Democracy
- Liberty (negative conception)
- Limited Government
- Justice
- Equality
  - Of opportunity, both political and economic
  - Equal protection under the laws
- Property Rights

* This is just one possible list developed at a workshop. Other possible ideals might include majority rule, popular sovereignty, rule of law, etc.
Rules for Civil Discourse in the Classroom

- Research indicates that students are more likely to follow rules when they are part of the rule-making process.

- Involve your students in a discussion about classroom rules that will encourage civil discourse.

- Keep (and perhaps post) the rules for use during the school year.
Civil Discourse in the Classroom

- Wait to be recognized by the teacher before speaking.
- Don’t interrupt or talk over someone else who is speaking.
- Listen for content in the statements of others, even if you disagree. Don’t engage in side conversations that distract from the speaker who has the floor.
- Don’t assume that you know what someone else means. Ask questions that help you understand perspectives different from your own.
- Relate your comments to those of previous speakers.
- Don’t get personal. No demeaning or inappropriate comments, facial expressions, or gestures.
- Differentiate between facts and opinions. Both are valid when expressed appropriately.
- Listen more than you speak.

Source: United States Courts: Guidelines for a Civil Discussion
We listen to respond rather than listening to understand.
What is active listening?

- Eye contact?
- Nodding?
- Shaking head?
- Saying yes or no?
- Seeking information: asking a question?
- Seeking confirmation: rephrasing or paraphrasing?
Active Listening Activity

- Select a controversial issue—in this case we will look at the issue of immigration. It can be any controversial issue.
- Place 6-8 chairs in front of the classroom
- Form two teams of 3-4 people each
- First person states viewpoint and briefly explains why
- No one interrupts
- Opposite side takes turn making argument
- Before person across from him or her can respond, must in some way restate his or her understanding of what has been said.
Active Listening

Should the U.S. provide a path for undocumented immigrants who came here illegally or overstayed their visas to become naturalized citizens?
Illegal Immigration

The last time the issue of illegal/undocumented immigration was addressed was the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 under Pres. Reagan:

- outlawed hiring of illegal immigrants
- required verification of workers’ citizenship status
- offered permanent resident status to illegal immigrants who could prove that they had lived continuously in the U.S. for the past FIVE years.

The 1996 Immigration Act:

- doubled the size of the border patrol
- authorized the construction of barriers along the US-Mexican border
- made illegal immigrants ineligible for most governmental benefits.

There are an estimated 10-12 million undocumented immigrants in the United States.

Efforts to provide a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants have failed to pass in Congress although public polls indicate that American want the government to do something.
The Value of the Active Listening Activity

- This process can be a bit tedious because we do not normally take the time to acknowledge and give feedback for each statement made.

- However, it is serious active listening practice. Students are practicing explaining, listening, reflecting and perhaps changing views—the core of having civil conversations rather than heated debates.

- Invariably, repeating in some format what has been said before, tends to bring views closer and towards more common ground.
SEND US YOUR BEST AND BRIGHTEST POINT-GETTERS, YEARNING TO RAISE OUR G.D.P. ALL OTHERS PAY A FINE OF $5,000 AND MAYBE YOU CAN STAY.
Follow-up: What should be done about illegal immigration?

Have your class:

- research current U.S. immigration policy
- develop a proposal to change it to address illegal immigration and encouraging legal immigration
- send their proposal to their member of Congress
Other activities for developing conflict resolution skills

Can be found at:

Using conflict resolution skills in roleplaying conflicts in history can be found at:
https://civiced.rutgers.edu/conflict-resolution
Media Literacy

- How do we determine what is true?
- How can we identify bias in print and online media?
- How can we recognize confirmation bias?

Resources:

- Media Literacy on the NJ Center for Civic Education’s webpage
- On the NJ Mock Election webpage NJ Student Mock Election – Teacher Resources
HOW TO SPOT FAKE NEWS

CONSIDER THE SOURCE
Click away from the story to investigate the site, its mission and its contact info.

READ BEYOND
Headlines can be outrageous in an effort to get clicks. What’s the whole story?

CHECK THE AUTHOR
Do a quick search on the author. Are they credible? Are they real?

SUPPORTING SOURCES?
Click on those links. Determine if the info given actually supports the story.

CHECK THE DATE
Reposting old news stories doesn’t mean they’re relevant to current events.

IS IT A JOKE?
If it is too outlandish, it might be satire. Research the site and author to be sure.

CHECK YOUR BIASES
Consider if your own beliefs could affect your judgement.

ASK THE EXPERTS
Ask a librarian, or consult a fact-checking site.
Is it a legitimate social media account?

- Quiz where you examine images of real social media content and decide whether it’s a legitimate account or an internet troll
- From Clemson University
- [https://spotthetroll.org/](https://spotthetroll.org/)
Media Literacy: A Little Logic

“In a republican nation, whose citizens are to be led by reason and persuasion and not by force, the art of reasoning becomes of first importance.” - Thomas Jefferson
Ad Hominem

- Falsely directs attention from claim evidence to the person making the claim.
- Candidate X attempts to discredit Candidate Y’s economic policies by describing her as a career politician.
- What is wrong with this is that we are not discussing the policy but rather the person. Who the person is does not necessarily disqualify the value of her policies or ideas.
Strawman

- Replacing the original claim with an extreme or exaggerated version. When a candidate cannot refute the opponent’s original claim, he/she may attack an extreme version easier to knock down, as a strawman would be easier to knock down.

- Candidate Y criticizes a particular (unpopular) treaty. Candidate X claims Candidate Y will rip up all of the nation’s security treaties endangering the nation.

- Candidate Y only wanted to challenge one treaty, not the more extreme position of all security treaties. By falsely claiming an extreme position for Candidate Y, Candidate X is seeking to sow distrust and fear.
Red Herring

- Intentional diversions to redirect the conversation away from an argument the candidate doesn’t want to address.

- A “red herring” gets its name from the practice of fox hunts dragging a red herring along the path to distract the less well-trained dogs.

- During a debate, Candidate X identifies potential conflicts of interest on the part of Candidate Y. Candidate Y starts talking about the age of Candidate X.

- Watch interviews with the candidates and see how many times they try to change the subject when confronted with a question they don’t want to discuss.
Slippery Slope

- When the candidate *falsely* posits a sequence leading to an unfavorable outcome.

- Candidate X says if we pass regulations prohibiting dumping in rivers, the chemical industry will go bankrupt. If the chemical industry goes bankrupt, the economy will collapse. If the economy collapses, America will be weak and conquered by enemies. Therefore, we should not pass regulations prohibiting dumping in rivers.

- This one is tricky. Our example was preposterous to make it easy to understand. However, in the "real world" if one can show evidence that a sequence does lead to unfavorable consequences, a slippery slope doesn’t occur.
Question Begging Definition

- Attempts to redefine terms to rule out contrary views.
- Candidate X asserts that no “true American” can support a peace treaty. Candidate Y points out that Person W, an American war hero and diplomat, does support a peace treaty. Candidate X states that this just goes to show that Person W is not a “true American”.
- In the current GOP intra-party schism, the use of the term RINO often commits this fallacy.
Appeal To Fear

- When the candidate, in the absence of evidence or reason, plays upon people’s fears to damage an opponent or discredit a policy.

- Candidate X asserts that “if we continue the past administration's immigration policies terrorists will be ravaging our streets and taking citizens hostage.”
**Bandwagon**

- Basing the truth of a position on a large number of followers.
- Candidate X says that his policy of printing lots of extra money is sound because many people say so.
- As your mother used to say, “If everyone jumped off a bridge would you do it?”
- Historical examples of majorities committing this fallacy during some of our historical tragedies, such as witch trials, internment of minorities, etc.
False Disjunct

- In our deeply divided partisan era, this one is especially problematic.
- This is the fallacy of claiming that a combination of possibilities cannot occur. While some options are indeed mutually exclusive, that is not always the case.
- You’re either with us or against us.
- You’re voting for either Republican or Democratic candidates.
- Candidate X is either on the side of the police or Black Lives Matters.
- This fallacy is used by those who disdain compromise and may profit from exploiting wedge issues.
NJ Student Mock Election

- NJ Center for Civic Education, NJSSSA and NJCSSS sponsor an Annual NJ Student Mock Election to help students get in the habit of being informed voters.
- At https://njmockelec.org/
- Includes teacher resources
- Has links to sources of information about candidates
- Students can vote online or with paper ballots
- Mock election **October 17-Nov. 4, 2022**
Middle School Civics Curriculum Guide

- Unit Two: Focus on our Foundational Documents (involves primarily 6.1 standards)
- Declaration of Independence
- U.S. Constitution: the structure of our government:
  - Three branches of government
  - Separation of powers
  - Checks and Balances
  - Federalism
Foundational Documents

- Consistent with traditional civics or government textbooks
- Many options
- Resources from a variety of sources:
  - National Archives
  - iCivics
  - NEH
  - EDSITEment
  - National Constitution Center
What is Federalism?

Image from We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution
The Constitution, the national government and the states

- Which powers are delegated to the national government?
  - E.g., foreign relations and immigration are delegated to the national government

- Which powers are delegated to the states?
  - E.g., authority over voting, health, education and welfare are reserved to the states

- Where are there concurrent powers?

- What powers are kept by individuals?
Federalists

- Would the Constitution maintain republican government?

- Would the national government have too much power?

- Should there be a Bill of Rights?

Antifederalists

- Would the Constitution maintain republican government?

- Would the national government have too much power?

- Should there be a Bill of Rights?
The necessity of compromise

- "Compromise" seems to have become a dirty word. Yet it is critical to decision-making in a democracy.

- The "Great Compromise" regarding representation was viewed by many as a pact with the devil, yet it is probably the only way to have one united nation. (See Slavery and the Federal Convention or New Jersey and the Federal Convention)

- A Bill of Rights was initially opposed by Madison but he compromised to get the opponents to ratify the Constitution and introduced a Bill of Rights at the first congress. He did not get everything that he wanted but compromised to secure his two main goals: limited government and the essential rights of the people.

- When a compromise no longer works, you change it.
Take a Stand/Continuum

- Forces your students to think about their own views, express them, and, most importantly, listen to others without responding.

- Can use with any controversial topic—e.g., immigration, gun control, fracking, Electoral College, hate speech on social media, reparations, carbon taxes. Almost anything with two sides.

- Phrase a question as either/or (yes or no, agree or disagree). E.g., Should we enact more stringent gun control laws? Should we ban hate speech on social media? Should we abolish the Electoral College)
Take a Stand/Continuum

- Should management of elections be left to the states? YES OR NO
The Issue: Voting and Elections

- The Constitution is clear that voting and elections are primarily a state concern.
- However, the federal government, in the interest of fairness and equal access to voting rights, has exercised some control over voting through the 14th, 15th, 19th, 24th, and 26th Amendments and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Recent Supreme Court decisions have effectively gutted the Voting Rights Act.
- The Pew Research Center found that Americans remain divided on whether voting is a right or a regulated privilege.
- Since the debunked claims of a “stolen election” in 2020, there has been an upsurge in bills before state legislatures regulating voting and allowing increased partisan control over the tabulation and certification of votes. Some states seek to more tightly regulate voting procedures and voter registration, while others have pending legislation to expand voter registration and access to the ballot.
- For more complete details and statistics, see the Brennan Center for Justice, Voting Laws Roundup, May 2022.
“Nothing can be more evident, than that an exclusive power of regulating elections for the National Government, in the hands of the State Legislatures, would leave the existence of the Union entirely at their mercy.”


The Anti-Federalists were in favor of state control of elections.
Take a Stand/Continuum

- Ask students to stand to one side of you if they agree and to the other side if they disagree. You can ask those who are unsure to stand in the middle.
- Now the students have taken a stand and formed a continuum of views. Turn and face the line.
- Ask those at either ends of the line to explain WHY they take their position.
- There are no rebuttals, students explain their views (why) and listen to others.
- If you hear a viewpoint that does not fit with where the student stands, have the student move to an appropriate spot.
- Ask those in the middle who were unsure if what they heard helped them decide and ask them to move to the appropriate spot.
- Ask others if they changed their views based on what they heard and ask them to move to the appropriate spot.
Research: Does this change your opinion?

**Pro (Yes)**
- Voting is a right that should not depend on state of residence.
- Some states are engaging in tactics that result in “voter suppression,” such as limiting the places or times for voting, or placing the counting of votes in the hands of partisans, or diluting the impact of certain votes by gerrymandering.
- Our democracy depends on every citizen having the same access to voting and having their vote count equally.

**Con (No)**
- Voting is a privilege that states have a legitimate interest in regulating.
- States have an interest in regulating their own state elections and adapting to local views and conditions.
- If one party intent on rigging elections gained control of the branches of federal government, it could end our democracy. With state control, some states would likely remain in control of the opposition party and a check on the federal government.
Follow up: Take and defend a position on H.R. 5746

- Have students read the bill and conduct research
- Take and defend a position on it—write to their member of Congress
Simulations of democratic processes

- Simulated Federal Convention in 1787—great performance assessment for Unit Two
- Congressional Hearings
- State Legislative Hearings
- Mock Trials
- Moot Courts

➢ Directions in Suggested Practices
Middle School Civics Curriculum Guide

- Unit Three: Examine how well we have met the ideals proclaimed in the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution
- 6.1.8 and 6.3.8 Evaluate effectiveness of fundamental principles of the Constitution
- Very history based—standards 6.1
Middle School Civics Curriculum Guide

Unit Three: “We the People of the United States…”

- Proclaims who is adopting the Constitution
- Makes a statement of popular sovereignty, that the authority of a state and its government are created and sustained by the consent of its people who are the source of all of its power (signed on their behalf by representatives of each state.

“…in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic tranquility, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty…”

- Reinforces the reasons for adopting a new Constitution
- Explains the purposes of the government: to maintain peace, promote the common good (general welfare), ensure liberty and justice.

How well have we met these promises or goals when we look at our history and what challenges still face us today?
“...in order to form a more perfect union...”

- Looks at voting
- Resources available from many sources:
  - CSPAN
  - PBS
  - iCivics
  - Library of Congress
“...establish Justice...”

Lady Justice, blindfolded with measuring scales and a sword, is an allegorical personification of the moral force in the judicial system.
What is fairness or justice?

Scroll to “What is Fairness or Justice”, based on a series of short lessons from Foundations of Democracy...
Where do we get our ideas of fairness or justice?

- That’s not Fair! Everybody has an idea of what’s fair, especially in regard to themselves.
- Where do we get our ideas about fairness or justice?
  - our families
  - our religious and/or cultural beliefs or morals
  - rules and laws that tell us what is right and wrong.
- Philosophers and religions have grappled with the issue or fairness or justice for millennium.
  - Plato was concerned about how to have a good society. In his Utopian Republic he had it ruled by “philosopher kings” who would make fair and just decisions.
  - The Judeo-Christian and other religions emphasize the ‘Golden Rule”: treat others as you would like to be treated.
How do we determine what is fair or just?

- When we are concerned about the fairness of how something is shared or distributed, we look at the benefit or the burden of the thing to be distributed. For example, how should the amount of pay for work (the benefit) be allocated? Or how should household chores or taxes (the burden) be distributed. This is DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE.

- When we are concerned about the fairness of how we correct or respond to some injury (such as an accident) or wrongdoing (such as a crime), we are talking about CORRECTIVE JUSTICE.

- When we are concerned about how we gather information and make decisions, we are talking about PROCEDURAL JUSTICE.
Which type of justice is involved?

- Your class has 12 color markers. There are 20 students who want to use them.
- A student in your class cheats on a test.
- The principal wants to find out who painted graffiti in the restrooms.
- Your class has to decide how much each student should donate for a spring party.
- The librarian has $2000 to spend on the school library. She has to decide whether to buy more books or a new computer.
- During recess, a student in your class throws a ball and breaks a window.
- Identify situations involving distributive, corrective and procedural justice from media sources.
Distributive justice is based on the principal of similarity

- People who are in similar positions should be treated the same.
- How do we determine which similarities or differences are important?
  - NEED: the degree to which the persons or groups are similar or different in terms of need for what is being distributed
  - CAPACITY: the degree to which the persons or groups are similar or different in terms of their capacity or ability to deal with whatever is being distributed.
  - DESERT: the degree to which the persons or groups are similar or different in terms of deserving what is being distributed.
Need, capacity and desert

- Who has the greatest need and should be seen first?
  - Suppose there are ten people waiting in a hospital emergency room. Six have been waiting a long time, but are not seriously injured. The other four, who just arrived, suffered severe injuries in a car crash.

- Who has the greatest capacity and should be given the opportunity?
  - Six students want to work on the school newspaper. Two of the students write very well.

- Which teams were the most deserving of the Gold Medal, Silver Medal and Bronze Medal?
  - Suppose that in the Olympic Games six nations had teams running the 400-meter relay race. At various stages, different teams were ahead, but at the finish the runner from Germany was first over the finish line, the runner from Canada was second over the line and the runner from the United States was third over the line.
Procedural Justice or procedural due process

How we gather information and make decisions

- To increase the chances of discovering information necessary to make wise and just decisions

- To insure the wise and fair use of the information in making decisions

- To protect important values and interests, such as the right to privacy, human dignity, freedom of expression and distributive justice
How well have we “established justice”?

- Consider treatment of Native Americans: Cherokee Removal
- Consider treatment of African Americans: Slavery, Jim Crow and segregation
- Consider treatment of immigrants
- Due Process
- Equal Protection
“...insure domestic tranquility...”

- SCROLL TO “How do you Ensure Domestic Tranquility”
- What is domestic tranquility and how do you ensure it?
  - Civil Wars
  - Coups
  - Trust in government
  - Crime
  - Violence
  - Poverty
- CSPAN—privacy, habeas corpus
- Bill of Rights Institute: Fourth Amendment
- iCivics--Peaceful transfer of power
“...promote ...the General Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty”

- What does “promote the general welfare” mean?
- What does liberty mean?
- Freedom of Expression
  - C-Span
  - National Constitution Center
  - Newseum
  - US Courts
  - ABA
- Individual liberty and the Common Good
First Amendment

“Congress shall make no law ...abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people to peaceably assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”
Freedom of Expression

The First Amendment prohibits the Congress (that is, the national government—extended to state and local governments through the 14th Amendment) from interfering with:

- an individual’s ability to express views freely
- the ability of the press to write and publish (no censorship)
- individuals’ ability to assemble (meet with) others
- Individuals’ ability to petition the government (send letters, emails, phone calls, meet in person, lobby, protest peacefully)
Why is Freedom of Expression important?

- Allows robust discussions and elections
- Provides a marketplace of ideas
- Advances knowledge and individual development
- Gives individuals agency and voice
- Permits peaceful social change
“Congress shall make no law...”

Exceptions made by the U.S. Supreme Court exclude from protection:

- Libel and Slander
- Pornography
- National Security
- Commercial Speech
How well have we met our promise of free speech and press?

The Sedition Act of 1798

- Made it a crime for American citizens to "print, utter, or publish . . . any false, scandalous, and malicious writing," in anticipation of an expected war with France.
- Used against Democratic-Republican newspapers criticizing the actions of the Federalists in power.
- Repealed after the election of 1800 changed parties.
- The U.S. government publicly repented and repaid the fines imposed.
How well have we met our promise of free speech and press?

- Espionage Act of 1917: crime in wartime to make false statements with intent to interfere with the military effort, to cause refusal of duty in the armed forces, or to obstruct military recruitment and enlistment efforts.

- The Sedition Act of 1918: a crime to “incite, provoke or encourage resistance to the United States” or to conspire to urge curtailment of munitions production with intent “to cripple or hinder the U.S. in the prosecution of the war.”


- Congress repealed the Sedition Act of 1918 on December 13, 1920. The Espionage Act of 1917 remains in effect (applicable only during wartime).
How well have we met our promise of free speech and press?

- The U.S. government attempted to cease publication of the Pentagon Papers as the war in Vietnam continued in 1971
- Was rebuffed by the U.S. Supreme Court in *New York Times Co. v. United States*
How well have we met our promise of free speech?

- **Brandenburg v. Ohio** (395 U.S. 444, 1969) government cannot punish speech advocating illegal action (inflammatory speech) unless it is “directed at inciting or producing imminent lawless action,” and is “likely to incite or produce such action.”

- **Virginia v. Black** (538 U.S. 343, 2003) burning a cross in public is a punishable hate crime if intent is to vilify, humiliate, or incite hatred against a group or a class of persons on the basis of race, religion, skin color, sexual identity, gender identity, ethnicity, disability, or national origin.
Why is Freedom of Assembly important?

- The right to join with fellow citizens in protest or peaceful assembly is critical to a functioning democracy and at the core of the First Amendment.
- Traditional public forums include public parks, sidewalks and areas that have been traditionally open to political speech and debate.
- The government may, however, subject speech to reasonable, content-neutral restrictions on its time, place, and manner.
- Freedom of assembly may be limited by ordinances prohibiting blocking or sidewalks or streets or may require a permit. And if the assembly turns violent, law enforcement may step in to help get things back under control.
How well have we met our promise of free assembly?

- Strikes outlawed—injunctions used, e.g. Pullman Strike in 1894

- McCarthy campaign against communism in 1950s was a campaign against free assembly
How well have we met our promise of free assembly and petition?

- Edwards v. South Carolina (372 U.S. 229, 1963) students' constitutionally protected rights of free speech, free assembly, and freedom to petition were violated when they peacefully assembled and planned to march to state capital to protest segregation and racial discrimination and refused to obey order to disperse.
What do you think?

Is the United States meeting its promise of free expression?

What challenges do we face today regarding free expression?
The Supreme Court has affirmed that students do not lose their constitutional rights “at the schoolhouse gate,” K-12 schools may impose rules for safety and to ensure that the environment is conducive to learning.

In 1969, Mary Beth Tinker and two other public school pupils in Des Moines, Iowa, were suspended from school for wearing black armbands to protest the government's policy in Vietnam in violation of a school regulation banning the wearing of armbands.

The students were not disruptive, and did not impinge upon the rights of others.

The Supreme Court held a prohibition against expression of opinion, without any evidence that the rule is necessary to avoid substantial interference with school discipline or the rights of others, violated the First and Fourteenth Amendments. *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, 393 U.S. 503 (1969).
Thinkalot Intermediate School has 750 bright, engaged students.

A group of 50 students at the school wanted to protest the lack of response to climate change by placing banners in the hallways and refusing to speak in class.

Classes proceeded as usual. There were no demonstrations and no threats of violence.

The principal spoke with the students in private and asked them to stop their silent protest.

The students shook their heads “no” and continued with the silence for the entire week.

The students were suspended.
What do you think?

- Based on the *Tinker* decision, should the students be suspended or is their action within the protection of the first amendment?
- Does the refusal to speak in school interfere with the rights of other students?
- Does it interrupt class routine or interfere with the educational process?
- Are there less disruptive ways for the students to make their views known?
Free Press in School: *Hazelwood*

- The Hazelwood School District wanted to restrict the publication of an article about teen pregnancy in school newspaper.

- In *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier*, 484 U.S. 260 (1988), the Supreme Court held that schools may restrict what is published in student newspapers if the papers have not been established as public forums.

- School officials can censor school-sponsored publications if their decision is “reasonably related to a legitimate pedagogical purpose.”

- Although school officials must show that they have a reasonable educational reason for censoring the material, this was a pretty broad loophole and protested for years.
Press Freedom of students

In 2021 New Jersey became the 15th state to enact legislation to protect the press freedom of students at public schools and public institutions of higher education, prohibiting censorship of student journalists except in narrow circumstances. If it:

- is libelous or slanderous, or obscene;
- constitutes an unwarranted invasion of privacy;
- violates federal or state law;
- incites students as to create a clear and present danger of the commission of an unlawful act, the violation of a lawful school district policy; or
- the material and substantial disruption of the orderly operation of the school.
Questions for discussion

- Why can students be treated differently than adults?
- What obligation does the school have?
- How does the school balance its dual responsibilities to respect students’ rights to freedom of expression and to protect children and the learning environment?
Social Media

- Private online platforms and social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, are not held to the same standards are print media
- Social media sites are free to set their own practices and rules on what we post or see
- Do Facebook, Twitter and other online platforms have an obligation to only allow postings that are truthful and do not promote violence?
  - Former President Trump was suspended from Twitter because he violated the platform’s policy against promoting violence
  - Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA), who promoted viral conspiracy theories like Qanon, was suspended from Twitter and from Facebook for posting misinformation about Covid-19 vaccines.
- Should the federal government regulate private online platforms as they do print media?
“Cancel culture”

What is it?

- Actions people take to hold others accountable
- Or silencing someone who has beliefs that are different than yours
- Or a way to call out issues like racism or sexism, or a misrepresentation of people’s actions
- Since these are actions by individuals, not government, they do not fall within the First Amendment

PEW Research Center project (Sept. 2020) American perspectives on cancel culture

- 49%: Actions people take to hold others accountable
- 14%: A form of censorship, such as a restriction on free speech or as history being erased
- 12% characterized cancel culture as mean-spirited attacks used to cause others harm
“If there be time to expose through discussion the falsehood and fallacies, to avert the evil by the processes of education, the remedy to be applied is more speech, not enforced silence.”

Simulations of democratic processes

- Mock Trial
- Moot Court
- Simulated Congressional Hearing
- Simulated State Legislative Hearing
- Town Council Hearing

➢ Directions in Suggested Practices
Moot Courts

- A moot court is a mock appellate court hearing.
- The court, composed of a panel of judges or justices, is asked to rule on a lower court’s decision.
- No witnesses are called, nor are the basic facts of the case in dispute.
- The focus is on the application, fairness or constitutionality of the law.
- Each side presents arguments for consideration by the judges.
- A moot court is an effective strategy for focusing student attention on the underlying principles and concepts of justice.
Mini Moot Courts

Ensures that every student is involved in the moot court, by having students work in groups of three.

Set Up:

1. Make sure that everyone understands the factual and legal background.
2. Divide your class into triads (groups of three) by counting by 3s or assigning student to roles.
3. In each group of three, one person is the judge or justice, one the attorney for the appellant/petitioner (bringing the appeal) and one the attorney for the respondent (responding).
The hearing and decision

- Give the triads 10-30 minutes to make their arguments, depending on the complexity of the case.
- After the arguments have been made, ask all of the judges to come to the front of the room and have an “open court hearing” where the judges discuss their opinions and reasons. Some judges may decide to change their views after they have heard from their colleagues.
- Debrief the activity by discussing the actual ruling in the case, if a decision has been rendered, or the strongest and weakest arguments if a decision is still pending, or if it is a purely hypothetical case.
Separation of powers and authority to require vaccinations

- Does the Dept. of Health and Human Services have the authority to enforce a rule requiring health care workers at facilities that participate in Medicare and Medicaid to be fully vaccinated against Covid? (*Biden v. Missouri*—YES with 3 dissents)

- Does the Occupational Health and Safety Administration and the Dept. of Labor have the authority to require employers with at least 100 employees to mandate that its workers receive vaccination against Covid or wear and mask and have weekly testing? (*National Federation of Independent Businesses v. Dept. of Labor, OSHA*—NO with 3 dissents)
You may want to involve your students in a simulated congressional hearing

*We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution* provides such simulated congressional hearings

The NJ Center for Civic Education sponsors an annual statewide *We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution* competition for high school students

Classes of students present and answer questions

The highest scoring school goes to National *We the People* Competition

We previously sponsored a *We the People* showcase for middle schools and hope to bring this back next year
Middle School Civics Curriculum Guide

- Unit Four: Back to standards 6.3
- What is the role of a citizen—the rights and responsibilities?
- How do local and state government function?
- What public policy is and how can individuals and groups impact it?
- Students identify, research, and develop a solution to a public policy problem and present it to an appropriate governmental agency
- Why should individuals participate in civic life? What are the benefits of civic participation in a democracy?
What is citizenship?

- Citizenship is a relationship between an individual and a country to which the individual owes allegiance and in turn is entitled to its protection.

- People who are born or choose to be citizens of a nation must defend the laws and pledge allegiance to that nation.

- 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.
Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship

U.S. citizens (including naturalized citizens) have the RIGHT to:

- Vote
- Serve on juries (Serving on a jury is often seen as an obligation but women and African-Americans fought to have this right.)
- Run for office
- Register for the Selective Service (if you are male and between age 18 through 25)
- Equal protection and due process

U.S. citizens have a RESPONSIBILITY or OBLIGATION to:

- Follow the laws, including paying taxes
- Register for the Selective Service (if male aged 18-25)
- Be informed about public issues
- Support our democratic form of government and not work against the country’s national interests (e.g., for a foreign country).
- The is what “pledging allegiance” means.
State and Local Government

- Local government
- School Boards
- County Government
- State government
  - Governor
  - Legislature
  - Judiciary
- iCivics: Citizen me
- iCivics: comparing state and federal judiciary
- NJ Center for Civic Education: Lessons about New Jersey history and government
# Federalism and Separation of Powers

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<th>Executive</th>
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<td>• Appellate Courts</td>
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<td><strong>State Government</strong></td>
<td>Governor</td>
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<td>• NJ State Supreme Court</td>
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<td>• NJ Appellate Courts</td>
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<td>• NJ Superior Courts (by County)</td>
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<td><strong>County Government</strong></td>
<td>County Executive President</td>
<td>County Board of Commissioners</td>
<td>No separate courts (see above)</td>
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<td><strong>Municipal Government</strong></td>
<td>Mayor</td>
<td>E.g., Town council</td>
<td>Municipal courts (limited jurisdiction)</td>
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<td><strong>School Board</strong></td>
<td>Superintendent</td>
<td>School Board</td>
<td>Administrative Office of the Courts—Commissioner of Education</td>
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What is Public Policy?

- The concept or idea that guides a course of action or procedure in dealing with public issues or problems.
- It includes the decisions, commitments and actions made by those who hold or affect government positions, including school boards, municipal governments, state and local agencies.
- Public policies are often embodied in laws, rules or regulations.
- We the citizens can also INFLUENCE public policy by seeking information and providing feedback to those making public policy decision. We are all potential lobbyists for changes in public policy. That was the real point of the first amendment protection of the right to PETITION the government—for CITIZENS to be able to influence public policy-making.
**Civil Society**

**Private sphere:** family and friends associate to pursue private interests free of unreasonable intrusion by the government. E.g., individuals decide how many children they want to have.

**Civil society:** people associate to pursue interests they share and these associations monitor and influence government. E.g., NJEA, Bar Association, Medical Association, realtor, Insurance agents, religious organizations. It was our vibrant “civil society” that impressed De Tocqueville when he visited the U.S. in the 1830s (although he didn’t use this term.)

**Government:** formally elected or appointed representatives at local, state and national levels make decisions about public policy
Which sector of society? Private, civil society or government?

1. A local school board changes graduation requirements.
2. Susan becomes a member of the Girl Scouts.
3. Carmen and her friend go out to dinner and a movie.
4. Marco’s family and friends have a picnic on July 4.
5. Sara and her sisters join the teachers’ union.
6. The Sierra Club lobbies the New Jersey government to pass environmental protection laws.
7. The New Jersey state legislature passes a law limiting the use of cell phones while driving.
8. Citizens join a taxpayer’s association in an effort to get government to lower property taxes in NJ.
9. The federal government awards a contract to a private company to repair sections of an interstate highway.
10. A city council passes a law establishing smoke free zones in public parks.
Public policies may be implemented by:

- Government alone
- Government acting cooperatively with civil society
- Government and civil society acting independently
- Civil society handling problems in accordance with government policy
Is it a Public Policy?

The Problem: Poor families in the community need food and adequate clothing.

One solution: City officials fund a program for needy individuals to “buy” food and clothing from participating merchants using vouchers. This is a public policy.

Another solution: A women’s civic organization conducts a drive to collect food and clothing and then distributes it to needy individuals. This is NOT a public policy.
Civil Society Initiatives vs. Public Policy

- Have your students identify some local efforts by civil society organizations to improve the community.
- Have your students identify some public policies implemented to improve the community.
Why learn about public policymaking?

- Ignorance about the public policymaking process leaves us without the tools to get things done.
- There is confusion about who does what in the policymaking arena.
- Knowledge, practical experience and citizenship skills empower citizens to influence public policy.
What are the advantages of a public policy solution?

✓ Civil society solutions depend on the voluntary efforts of individuals and may end

✓ Public policy solutions continue until changed
Process for doing projects

1. Understand public policy
2. Identify a problem in the community that requires a public policy solution
3. Gather and evaluate information on the problem
4. Examine and evaluate alternative solutions
5. Develop a proposed public policy to address the problem
6. Develop an action plan to get their policy adopted by government
7. Organize the materials into a portfolio to present to the appropriate governmental agency and (if you want) to share at the annual State Project Citizen Showcase
8. Reflect on the learning experience individually and as a class.
Sources for Citizen Action Projects by Students

- Project Citizen
- iCivics: Local Solutions Civic Action
- Newseum
- Generation Citizen
- Youth-Led Participatory Action Research
- Mikvah Challenge
- Human Rights Educators USA
- NJ Dept. of Education—climate change
- Agency for Toxic Substances—identifying risks
A Public Policy Student Action Project involves:

- Interdisciplinary Learning
- Media Literacy
- Active Listening/Civil Discourse
- Critical Thinking
- Analysis
- Persuasive Writing
- Public Speaking
- Reflection
Identify possible problems to address
Decide on a problem to address: Is it important/feasible?

Consider:

- Scope?
- Intensity?
- Duration?
- Resources at stake?
- Human rights involved?
- Information available?
- Feasibility: Sufficiently narrow?
Is it important? Are human rights involved?

Our ideal of public education is one in which students are engaged in reflection and action that constantly encourages them to move America toward a “truer” democratic society, in which all people have enforceable, inalienable rights.
Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948
Decide on a problem to address

Here are two issues you can use to demonstrate the process:

- Violence on school campuses
- Budget cuts in school funding

- Consider and compare: scope, duration, resources at stake, information available and breadth of scope.
- Then apply the same criteria to the issues your students have identified.
Gather Information

✓ Identify sources of information
✓ Public policy makers and interest groups
✓ Telephone calls
✓ Interviews
✓ Letters
✓ Libraries, newspapers, websites
Identify, research, and develop possible alternative solutions
Select the best solution and explain why it is the best solution
Develop an Action Plan
Prepare a Class Project Portfolio

The digital portfolio should identify:

- the problem selected and why it was selected
- alternative policies
- the policy selected and why,
- Is it constitutional,
- an action plan
- reflections about the process and what was learned and
- a backup binder with research, letters, etc.
Present the Portfolio

Four basic goals of the presentation:

- Inform the audience of the importance of the problem identified
- Explain and evaluate alternative policies so audience can understand
- Discuss why the class choice was the “best” policy and that it is constitutional
- Demonstrate how the class could develop support for the policy (the action plan)
Students Reflect on the Learning Experience

- Once your class has completed the portfolio, add a reflection section to the Documentation binder.
- Describe what and how the class learned from developing the project, skills as well as knowledge.
- You can use the Reflection Questions in the Curriculum Guide.
Here is a middle school project

- **Fire Sprinklers in Schools**

- If you would like to see additional projects, projects from the last ten years are on our website at https://civiced.rutgers.edu/programs/project-citizen/project-citizen-Portfolios-lne/articles
Planning a Public Policy Citizen Action Project

- Some schools have done a public policy citizen action project as a “capstone” unit at the end of the year and work on the project during the last months of school. Allow approximately six weeks.

- Other districts have stretched it out over the entire year, dedicating one day per week to the project. This has the advantage of allowing time for editing student communications to officials and allowing time for responses.

- Both approaches have been successful.
The Center sponsors an annual statewide *Project Citizen* Showcase

First Friday of June

Classes of students present their projects

Highest scoring middle and high school projects are sent to a National *Project Citizen* Showcase held digitally in July
6.3.8.CivicsPD.3: Construct a claim as to why it is important for democracy that individuals are informed by facts, aware of diverse viewpoints, and willing to take action on public issues.

Athenian statesman Pericles said: “We do not say that a man who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business; we say that he has no business here at all”.

What does he mean by this statement?
What are the benefits to individuals of participating in the civic life of the community/country?

- Feeling part of the community
- Acquiring skills, such as speaking and debating in public, organizing groups and writing letters
- Becoming more self-confident
- Learning how to affect decisions
- Building a reputations as an important member of the community
- Making new friends
- Developing important contacts
What are the benefits to society when individuals participate in civic life?

- In a multiethnic, multi-religious country based on the shared secular ideas of liberty and justice rather than the “blood and soil” nationalism of European countries, a common understanding and appreciation of these fundamental American values was seen as critical.

- Individual participation in the civic life of a democracy is critical for national cohesiveness. The results of elections are not enough.
What might happen if individuals are not informed or do not participate in their government?

- We will not have very good government
- We will not be able to solve important public policy problems
How can individuals help ensure that the American experiment in democracy continues?

- Vote
- Work to improve your community
- Hold elected representatives accountable
- Bring ideas to governmental officials
- Run for office
- Have civil discourses about current events
- Peacefully protest when there is an unfair law or process that needs to be addressed
How can we make this understandable for our students?

“Democracy is a social and ethical commitment, not limited to the ballot box, that must be lived and practiced in all spheres of life.”

John Dewey, 1888
- Take sample *We the People* and *Project Citizen* middle school student textbooks

- Go to our [website](#) for resources

- Contact us at:
  - Arlene Gardner at [arlenega@sas.rutgers.edu](mailto:arlenega@sas.rutgers.edu)
  - Robert O’Dell at [ro205@scarletmail.rutgers.edu](mailto:ro205@scarletmail.rutgers.edu)