

Inquiry Framework for a Middle School Civics Course

Course Overview: Scope and Sequence

This framework is designed to help guide the development of a middle school civics course that each board of education must provide beginning in the 2022-2023 school year, along with the new Student Learning Standards for Social Studies. The legislation provides that 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 course of study must include "a minimum of two quarters of instruction, or the equivalent."

The framework offers a coherent scope and sequence focused on the core values and principles of democracy, the structure and limits of the American democratic republic as set forth in our founding documents, an assessment of how well we've met our democratic ideals, and the role of the citizen in a democratic society. It is structured in the format of big inquiry questions about 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.

Suggested lessons, classroom activities and links to resources will be added to the framework.

UNIT ONE: Foundational Concepts and Principles

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

NJ Student Learning Standards:

- 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

Topic	Inquiry Questions	Supporting Questions
Natural Rights	How can natural/human rights be protected?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● What would life be like in a state of nature?● What are natural/human rights?● How do natural rights represent the dignity of each human being?
Authority	Why do we need government? What makes authority legitimate?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● What forms can government take? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?● What is the difference between power and authority?● How does the "consent of the governed" provide legitimacy to a government?● Why is the rule of law important for a legitimate government?
Common Good and Civic Virtue	Why is "civic virtue" necessary for a democracy to survive?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● What is "civic virtue"?● What classical ideals about the need for civic virtue did the Founders adopt?● What are examples of civic virtue?

	How does the idea of the “common good” give rise to the social contract?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the “common good”? • What is the social contract? • Why is a commitment to the common good important in a democratic society?
Social Order and Individual Rights	How does the social contract limit individual freedom for the common good?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does government maintain safety and order? • How does government protect individual rights? • How does government balance the need for social order and individual liberty?
American Ideals	What are American Ideals?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is an “ideal”? • What are our “founding documents”? • What ideals are expressed in our founding documents? • Where are American Ideals stated in our founding documents? • How is the concept of “consent of the governed” implicit in our founding documents?
Conflict Resolution	How can conflicts be resolved peacefully?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the sources of conflict? • How are conflicts between and among individuals resolved? • How are conflicts between and among countries resolved? • When is compromise necessary? • 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 us better incorporate multiple perspectives into civil discourse?
Elections	Why is the right to vote critical in a democratic republic?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the responsibilities of elected representatives? • How can we evaluate candidates for positions of authority? • How can we determine the accuracy of what we read and view? • What is the role of political parties and interest groups? • Who represents you in New Jersey and Washington, D.C.? • Why are local and state elections important?
UNIT ONE ASSESSMENT: <i>E.g., Student Mock Election and an analysis of the benefits of democratic government</i>		

UNIT TWO: Foundational Documents

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?

NJ Student Learning Standards:

- 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

Topic	Inquiry Questions	Supporting Questions
Historical Foundations of the American Republic	<p>To what extent did the founding documents (Declaration of Independence, Constitution Bill of Rights) articulate and establish/ensure American Ideals?</p> <p>To what extent does democracy depend on citizens and elected and appointed officials having civic virtue and working toward the common good?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 character traits did the Founders expect of their elected and appointed representatives? • 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?
Federalism	How and why is federalism a key part of the structure of U.S. government?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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?
The Legislative Branch	Should the legislative branch continue to be considered “first among equal” branches?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the powers, responsibilities, limits and role of the Congress? • How can we protect against abuse of authority by Congress?
The Executive Branch	How can American government best ensure effective administration while protecting against abuse of power?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 abuse of authority by the President?
The Judicial Branch	How does the Constitution try to ensure that all citizens are equal before the law?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does Judicial Review function? • How and why has the scope of judicial review expanded over time? • How do Constitutional Amendments 4-8 help ensure fairness and equality before the law?. • How does the judiciary protect against the abuse of power and authority?

The Bill of Rights and Amendment Process	<p>Did the Constitution need a Bill of Rights?</p> <p>How does the Bill of Rights ensure that fundamental human rights are protected?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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?
UNIT TWO ASSESSMENT: <i>E.g., Simulated Federal Convention</i>		

UNIT THREE: The Constitution, American Ideals, and the American Experience

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?

NJ Student Learning Standards:

- 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
- 6.3.8.CivicsPR.3: Take a position on an issue in which fundamental ideals and principles are in conflict (e.g., liberty, equality)
- 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

Topic	Inquiry Questions	Supporting Questions
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American Ideals	<p>How well has the U.S. met the fundamental principles established in the Constitution?</p> <p>What are the opportunities and challenges facing a diverse democracy founded on ideas rather than ethnicity?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How has extending the right to vote supported the concept of the consent of the governed? ● What are examples where the rule of law has prevented abuse of authority (e.g. impeachment)? ● How have federalism and checks and balances been used to prevent abuse of power by the national government? ● How has the U.S. expanded or limited Individual rights?
Justice/Fairness	<p>How do we ensure that people are treated fairly?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How would you define “fairness” or “justice”? ● What is “due process” and how does it protect individual rights? ● How should criminal actions be fairly addressed?
Equality	<p>To what extent has the American experience succeeded in achieving the aspiration that “all men (people) are created equal”?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How have people used the language and ideas of the Declaration of Independence to promote equality? ● What does the 14th Amendment mean by “equal protection under the law”? ● Why has the 14th Amendment become important as the United States has become more diverse? ● Is there equality of opportunity in the United States? ● How can the tensions between individual liberty, diverse communities, and equality of opportunity be reconciled in a democracy?
Freedom of Speech, Assembly and Right to Petition	<p>Should there be limits on freedom of speech or the ability of protest and petition the government?</p> <p>Should there be restrictions on free speech in social media?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How does the First Amendment protect free expression? ● Why is freedom of speech important for sustaining a democracy? ● How has the “right to assemble and petition the government” been used to protect individual rights and/or prevent abuse of authority? ● How have relevant court cases about freedom of expression been applied to contemporary events? ● How has social media changed public discourse and what problems has it created? ● How can we address the spreading of propaganda and lies in social media?
Freedom of Religion	<p>How can we balance conflicts between religious beliefs and the protection of the rights of others?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Why was religious tolerance important in 18th century America and why is it important today? ● What is the difference between “the establishment of religion” and the “free exercise of religion”? ● How would relevant court cases regarding freedom of religion be applied to contemporary events?
Liberty versus “Domestic Tranquility	<p>How well has the U.S. balanced the need for order (“domestic tranquility”) and the protection of individual rights (“liberty”)?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What is “liberty”? ● What is “domestic tranquility”? ● What is “privacy”? ● How does the Fourth Amendment protect privacy and liberty? ● How has the Fourth Amendment been applied to past and current events?

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How has the U.S. balanced the need for order and the protection of individual rights during times of peace and times of war?
UNIT THREE ASSESSMENT: <i>E.g., We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution</i> and/or other simulated legislative hearing or judicial hearing about current day issues		

UNIT FOUR: The Role of the Citizen in a Democratic Society

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

NJ Student Learning Standards:

- 6.1.8.CivicsPI.3.c: Distinguish the powers and responsibilities of citizens, political parties, interest groups, and the media in a variety of governmental and nongovernmental contexts
- 6.3.8.CivicsPR.7: Compare how ideas become laws at the local, state and national level
- 6.3.8.CivicsPI.4: Investigate the role of political, civil, and economic organizations in shaping people's lives and share this information with individuals who might benefit from it
- 6.3.8.CivicsPD.1: Deliberate on a public issue affecting an upcoming election, consider opposing arguments and develop a reasoned conclusion
- 6.3.8.CivicsPD.2: Propose and defend a position regarding a public policy issue at the appropriate local, state or national level
- 6.3.8.CivicsDP.1: Identify an issue of inequality, develop multiple solutions and communicate the best one to an appropriate government body
- 6.3.8.CivicsPR.4: Use evidence and quantitative data to propose or defend a public policy related to climate change
- 6.3.8.CivicsPR.6: Seek the perspectives of multiple stakeholders with diverse points of view regarding a local budget issue and take a position on proposed policy
- 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
- 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

Topic	Inquiry Questions	Supporting Questions
Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship	What is a citizen?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who is a citizen? How does an immigrant become a citizen? What rights and responsibilities does a citizen have that non-citizens (resident aliens) do not have?
Local and state government	How do the three branches of government function at the local and state level in New Jersey?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do ideas become laws or rules at local, state and national levels? How does government function in New Jersey and in your local community and school district?
Public policy-making	How can individuals and civil society influence public policy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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?

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 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?
Citizen Action: Identifying a problem or issue	What are the challenges facing my community and how can I help?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How can I identify problems that are important to be addressed at the local, state, national and/or global level? ● What public policy issues matter to me and why? ● 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 human rights important? ● Why are issues involving climate changes and the environment critical? ● How do issues of economic justice involve human rights?
Citizen Action: Developing and proposing a solution	What are the skills necessary for effective, informed citizenship?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How can I identify the appropriate branch or agency of government with authority to address my important issue? ● How can I research an important problem and develop the best solution? ● How can I assess the credibility of online or printed information? ● How can I determine whether a source is biased? ● Why is it important to research and carefully listen to opposing viewpoints? ● How can I investigate my issue and find high quality information? ● How can I work collaboratively with my classmates? ● How should I use social media for civic participation? ● How can I determine what is the best solution to the problem that I have identified? ● Why should I carefully consider several alternative solutions? ● How can I develop a written and/or oral presentation advocating your solution?
Civic Participation: Active Citizenship and democracy	<p>What is the value of civic engagement?</p> <p>What is the balance between individual freedom and the common good?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Why do democracies fail? ● What might happen if citizens did 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? ● What are the benefits of citizenship in a democracy?
UNIT FOUR ASSESSMENT: <i>E.g., Project Citizen, Generation Citizen, YPAR</i> or other citizen action activity.		

Ideas for classroom activities, suggested lessons and links to resources to be added
Bibliography

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