

OPTIONAL CIVICS ACTIVITIES

Fostering Civic Responsibility

Structure

ACTIVITIES BY UNIT	p. 3
CIVICS CLUB IDEAS	p. 6
VOLUNTEERISM AND VIRTUE FORMATION IDEAS	p. 7

Encouraging Appropriate Civic Responsibility

Content knowledge and understanding through in-class conversations is the chief way that students learn of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. Their relationships, moreover, with their teachers and classmates provide the first formation in the qualities that make for responsible and dutiful citizens. For schools that require some form of activity to adjoin civics instruction, however, we have curated a handful of sound activities through which students may practice citizenship following a unit test, for extra-credit, in a club, or simply as part of their lives outside of school at their and their parents' discretion. It should be noted, however, that political activism, action civics, "new civics," et al., have no place in formal education, especially in taxpayer-funded schools, and that the risk of bias on the part of the teacher even in these activities must be assiduously guarded against. Still, we do recognize that the following activities, mock civics, clubs, community service, and genuine apolitical volunteerism may be encouraged and prudently administered.

In concert with sound learning, rational thinking, and virtuous character, civic participation by each person upholds the American republic of self-government. Affording extracurricular opportunities to practice civic participation without politics or activism may be an appropriate part of an American student's civic education.

Optional Extracurricular Civics Activities by Unit

UNIT 1 | THE PRINCIPLES OF AMERICA

Arrange with teachers of younger students, either at the same school or at a neighboring school, to have high school government students visit their classrooms and teach the younger students about America's principles as studied in this unit. Students may adapt the lessons they have learned to the younger audience, adapt existing teacher materials, lead an activity, or read aloud a trade book story that conveys the principles of America to younger students at the appropriate grade level.

UNIT 2 | A CONSTITUTION OF PRINCIPLES

Have groups of students conduct research into certain issues in the political affairs of other countries that are or have recently been in the news. Have students apply the principles of the Constitution to the form of government that their researched country has and explain how the principles of the Constitution are present or absent in that government. Students should explain how the principles of the Constitution may be able to prevent or resolve the issue in the researched country. Remind students that as important as the form of government is to political liberty and justice, a people must also be practiced in self-government for it to be successful. Have students present their arguments briefly as a group.

UNIT 3 | GOVERNING IN THE CONSTITUTION

Set up a mock government among the students, assigning at random students to be representatives, states (representing legislatures and/or governors), local governments, senators, president, vice president, cabinet members, generals, Supreme Court justices, presidential electors, and voters. Based on the original structure, processes, and intentions of the Constitution, walk through the acts of governing that students learned in this unit and the principles they learned in the previous. Ask students plenty of comprehension questions about their requirements or roles given their office along the way.

UNIT 4 | EQUALITY IN AMERICA

Engage the class in mock political challenges aimed at abolishing and restricting slavery, the slave trade, and discrimination. Choose some or all of the efforts named below to abolish or restrict slavery. For each effort, explain to students that their goal is the same as those who attempted to abolish or restrict slavery at the time. As they propose ideas on how to do so in each situation, play devil's advocate by posing the political reality or philosophical principle that was encountered at the time. Students should be able to see some paths forward, ranging from complete success to the more common partial victories, but they should also learn of how challenging and unlikely these efforts would be without a conversion in the hearts and minds of many slaveholders and the adherence to certain founding principles by the opponents of slavery—obstacles the Founders and Abraham Lincoln well understood. Students should feel free to cite the actions or words of these historical figures in the process. Students should compare what they have been able to accomplish with what the anti-slavery figures were or were not able to achieve, being mindful that they are operating in a situation far removed from the actual circumstances in which these efforts were attempted. Teachers should be aware that this activity will require the students to acquire a deeper understanding of

the issues and politics surrounding these efforts; the Hillsdale College Online Courses can assist teachers in this.

Efforts to abolish or restrict slavery, the slave trade, and/or discrimination that students can attempt to navigate may include any of the following:

- in the colonies (compare to each colony prior to 1776)
- at the time of declaring independence (compare to the Declaration of Independence, both drafts)
- in drafting the Constitution (compare to the Constitution)
- in the Northwest Territory (compare to the Northwest Ordinance)
- in the Louisiana Territory (compare to the Missouri Compromise)
- in lands annexed following the Mexican-American War (compare to the Compromise of 1850)
- in the wake of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, arguments for popular sovereignty, and *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (compare to Lincoln's speeches and the efforts of abolitionists Garrison, Douglass, and Stowe)
- from Lincoln's election through the first months of the Civil War (compare to the secession of Southern states, Lincoln's first inaugural address, and the retention of the border states)
- during the Civil War (compare to the Emancipation Proclamation)
- during Reconstruction (compare to the Reconstruction acts and amendments)
- after Reconstruction (compare to the Compromise of 1877)

UNIT 5 | PROGRESSIVISM AND THE STATE

Review with students how governing worked in the Constitution during the last mock government. This time, set up a mock government among the students that reflects the Progressive ideas of politics and administration. Assign at random students to be representatives, states (representing legislatures and/or governors), local governments, senators, president, cabinet members, Supreme Court justices, and voters. Add the new offices of civil employees/bureaucrats/experts who often will have had a prior career in a certain business sector. Based on the Progressive structure, processes, and intentions regarding government, walk through the acts of governing that students learned in this unit and connect them to the Progressive ideas behind them. Ask students plenty of comprehension questions about their requirements or roles given their office along the way, drawing distinctions between politics and administration, and between the Progressive and founding ideas and processes of governance.

UNIT 6 | INSTITUTIONS AND POLICY

Have students attend, watch virtually on their own, or visit as a field trip any one of a variety of government meetings, sessions, hearings, etc. Students should attempt to find out what each gathering intends to address and conduct some research on the topic if possible beforehand. Students should then write or present brief reports of the meetings and connect the governing body or official to what they have learned in this unit. If the student is attending in person apart from a school field trip, have the student receive the signature of an official as proof that the student did indeed attend.

Potential meetings may include:

- Township Trustee Meeting
- County Commissioner Meeting
- School Board Meeting
- City Council Meeting
- State Legislature Session or Hearing
- U.S. House of Representatives Session or Hearing
- U.S. Senate Session or Hearing
- Court Hearing

Alternatively, teachers may invite certain officials to visit their classrooms for a presentation. In addition to representatives from the abovementioned civic bodies, other guests may include a law enforcement officer, firefighter, EMS worker, etc.

UNIT 7 | POLITICS IN PRACTICE

Have students choose and research an issue connected to America's founding principles as studied in class. Each student may write a letter about the issue to some person or organization in a related field of government and public policy. The letter should not advocate for the student's position, but rather should ask for the recipient's own stance on the issue and their reasons for their stance. Students should explain that they are students and kindly ask for a response to their questions. The goal is not to be confrontational but rather to cultivate the habit of engaging in civil dialogue and civic participation in a respectful and constructive manner.

Recipients may include the following:

- a local or state political party
- an elected official
- a journalist or reporter
- an interest group or lobbying firm
- a newspaper or other news outlet (this may take the form of a letter to the editor, in which case questions would be rhetorical)

UNIT 8 | LATE 20TH CENTURY GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

Assign to each student specific sections from the first two and final paragraphs of the Declaration of Independence, the Preamble to the Constitution, the Gettysburg Address, Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address, the 13th Amendment, and the "I Have a Dream" speech by Martin Luther King Jr. Each student should learn by heart his or her assigned part. On a specific day, have students recite their parts in this order. When finished, show students the entire video of King's speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. By completing this exercise, students should see the efficacious arc of America's founding principles at work through American history.

Civics Club Ideas

- Debate/Forensics
- Historical Documentary/Movie Club
- History Club
- Mock Trial
- Political Thought Club
- School Newspaper
- Student Ambassador Program
- Student Government

Optional Volunteerism and Virtue Formation Ideas

- Adopt an American sister school
- Ask questions and listen to those with whom you disagree
- Assist neighbors, especially the elderly or those who could most use assistance, with lawn care, errands, etc.
- Care for parents and siblings
- Clean up litter when you see it
- Coach a sports team for younger children or lead a club for younger students
- Conduct a community cleanup of a park, waterway, street, etc.
- Contribute to a club, civic association, or religious association
- Create care packages for deployed service members, local law enforcement, EMS, medical staff, firefighters, prisoners, etc.
- Hold open the door for someone
- Hold an apprenticeship in a trade, starter job, or internship
- Lead and contribute to a food, clothing, backpack, coat, school supplies, toiletries, or baby supplies drive
- Let someone in while driving
- Recycle and be a generally good steward of water, electricity, etc.
- Shop and work at thrift stores and companies that respect the human dignity of their workers and freedom generally, as reflected in America's founding documents and the 1st Amendment
- Save some money to keep on hand for when asked for a donation
- Say "Please" and "Thank you"
- Serve in the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC), as a firefighter auxiliary, as a police auxiliary, EMS auxiliary (depending on age requirements)
- Use time intentionally
- Tutor younger students
- Visit the lonely
- Volunteer at a local food bank, homeless shelter, medical facility, family center, historical site, or museum
- Volunteer at a camp, after-school, or vulnerable youth program

