# Unit 2: Domestic Issues

Content Area: **Social Studies**
Course(s):
Time Period: **Marking Period 2**
Length: **6.5 weeks**
Status: **Published**

## Summary

Current Issues is a dynamic, interactive course that examines the pressing political, social, economic, and environmental challenges shaping both domestic and global communities today. The course emphasizes civil discourse, collaboration, and problem-solving, helping students develop a deeper understanding of the complexities of modern society. To do so, students analyze and discuss contemporary events from multiple perspectives, fostering critical thinking, informed decision-making, and media literacy. By engaging with current events and trends, students build their awareness of local and global issues, preparing them to be active, informed citizens in an ever-changing world.

In this unit, students investigate pressing domestic issues facing the United States. Using The Juice and World A-Z, students will explore current headlines, examine policy debates, and critically analyze issues from multiple perspectives. They will develop and deliver presentations, craft thought-provoking questions for discussion, and engage in respectful debate and civil discourse. The unit fosters civic awareness, research and media literacy skills, and global citizenship by helping students understand how domestic issues impact broader societal systems.

The ability to make informed and reasoned decisions as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an increasingly globalized world is essential to students' post-secondary success. The skills and content of this unit and the curriculum as a whole encourage students to think critically about important issues, engage in the processes of problem solving, and develop civic competence as part of preparation for college, career, and/or civic life.

Revision Date: August 2025

## Standards

- 6.3.12.CivicsPD.1: Use a variety of sources to analyze current public policies and propose and defend a position.
- 6.3.12.CivicsPI.1: Evaluate the effectiveness of major political institutions and processes.
- 6.3.12.HistoryUP.6: Use diverse sources to analyze the impact of media and propaganda.
- 9.4.12.IML.2: Evaluate digital sources for accuracy, perspective, credibility, relevance, and bias.
- 9.4.12.CI.1: Demonstrate the ability to reflect, analyze, and use creative skills and ideas.
- 9.4.12.CT.2: Explain the potential benefits of collaborating to enhance critical thinking and problem solving.

- RH.11–12.7, 8, 9 – Integrate and evaluate multiple sources in diverse formats, and assess claims, reasoning, and evidence
- RI.PP.11–12.5 – Analyze an author's purpose and rhetoric, including how style and content convey information and advance a point of view
- RI.MF.11–12.6 / RL.MF.11–12.6 – Synthesize complex information across multiple sources and formats to develop interpretations or resolve conflicts
- RI.AA.11–12.7 – Describe and evaluate reasoning in seminal U.S. and global texts, including premises, purposes, and arguments
- RI.CT.11–12.8 / RL.CT.11–12.8 – Analyze and reflect on documents of historical or scientific significance for themes, purposes, and rhetorical features
- W.AW.11–12.1 – Write arguments on substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and evidence (including precise claims, counterclaims, logical sequencing, tone, and coh
- W.IW.11–12.2 – Write informative/explanatory texts on complex ideas—organizing and analyzing content effectively

This unit further reflects the goals of the Holocaust Education mandate where students are able to identify and analyze applicable theories concerning human nature and behavior; understand that genocide is a consequence of prejudice and discrimination; understand that issues of moral dilemma and conscience have a profound impact on life; and understand the personal responsibility that each citizen bears to fight racism and hatred whenever and wherever it happens.

In accordance with New Jersey's Chapter 32 Diversity and Inclusion Law, this unit includes instructional materials that highlight and promote diversity, including: economic diversity, equity, inclusion, tolerance, and belonging in connection with gender and sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, disabilities, and religious tolerance.

The standards in this unit reflect a developmental progression across grade levels and make interdisciplinary connections across content areas including the humanities, technology, career readiness, cultural awareness, and global citizenship.

## Essential Questions

Essential Questions:

- What are the most pressing domestic issues facing Americans today?
- How does the media shape our understanding of domestic problems?
- To what extent does government policy reflect the will and needs of the people?
- How can civic participation influence domestic change?

Enduring Understandings:

- Domestic policies and issues affect each citizen and community differently.
- Understanding multiple perspectives is key to respectful dialogue and informed action.
- Civic engagement is essential in addressing public challenges.

## Integrated Accommodation and Modifications

This link includes content specific accommodations and modifications for all populations:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Pp6EJOCsFz5o4-opzsXpQDQoa6aClW-bkRGPDRHXVrk/edit?usp=sharing

These additional strategies are helpful when learning Social Studies content and skills:

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- Choice in topics and presentation style
- Scaffolded graphic organizers for research and argument building
- Sentence stems for panel discussions
- Modified readings or audio summaries for complex issues
- Peer and teacher modeling of discourse and debate

## Objectives

Students will know:

- Key domestic issues in areas such as health, education, environment, economy, and civil rights.
- The role of media, public opinion, and government in shaping domestic policy.
- The core beliefs and policy positions of major political parties and interest groups related to current domestic issues.
- The functions and responsibilities of federal, state, and local governments in addressing domestic challenges.
- The role of the media in shaping public understanding and perception of domestic issues.

- The rights and responsibilities of citizens in a democratic society when responding to national issues.
- Historical context that informs current domestic debates and policy decisions.
- The impact of domestic policy decisions on different communities, social groups, and economic classes.
- The relationship between U.S. domestic policy and constitutional principles such as federalism, separation of powers, and civil liberties.

Students will be skilled at:

- Analyzing an issue from multiple viewpoints.
- Conducting research using reliable news and academic sources.
- Crafting and delivering presentations on public issues.
- Leading and participating in respectful civic discourse.
- Analyzing news articles and identifying central claims, supporting evidence, and potential bias.
- Evaluating the credibility and reliability of media sources and distinguishing between fact-based reporting and opinion.
- Synthesizing information from multiple sources to develop informed viewpoints on domestic issues.
- Crafting and presenting evidence-based arguments in both written and oral formats.
- Generating and posing thoughtful, open-ended questions that encourage deeper discussion and critical thinking.
- Participating in civil discourse by listening actively, responding respectfully, and acknowledging multiple perspectives.
- Using digital tools (i.e. The Juice, World A-Z, Google Workspace) to research, organize, and present information.
- Making connections between current domestic issues and broader historical, social, and political contexts.
- Reflecting on perspectives and considering how background, identity, and values influence views.
- Collaborating with peers to explore complex topics and develop collective understandings.

## Learning Plan

This unit invites students to dive deep into the most pressing social, political, and economic issues facing the United States today. Through structured investigations, student-led lessons, and respectful dialogue, students will analyze domestic challenges from multiple perspectives using credible sources. This unit prioritizes civil

discourse, critical thinking, and student ownership, using resources such as The Juice, Ethics Bowl scenarios, and multimedia tools.

## "What's Happening Now?" Weekly News Dive with The Juice

At the beginning of each week, students select a U.S.-based article from The Juice that relates to a current domestic issue (ex: education, healthcare, elections, housing, policing, labor). In small groups, they read, annotate, and summarize the article's main idea, supporting evidence, and tone. Each group presents a quick news update and facilitates a short Q&A to practice clarity, listening, and question development. This routine builds current events awareness and presentation skills.

## "The Issue I Care About" Student-Led Mini-Lessons

Each student selects one U.S. domestic issue they feel passionate about (ex: minimum wage laws, immigration reform, reproductive rights, climate policy). They create a 5–8 minute mini-lesson that includes:

- A clear explanation of the issue
- At least two different perspectives or sides
- A visual aid (slide, infographic, or chart)
- Two discussion questions for peers
  Students deliver their lesson to the class and receive peer feedback on clarity, fairness, and engagement. These presentations occur throughout the unit and form the basis for many class discussions.

## "Voices of America" Source Analysis Activity

Students examine three different texts—such as a news article, opinion editorial, and a political speech or public statement—about the same domestic issue. Using a guided worksheet, students analyze bias, source reliability, author intent, and persuasive techniques. After analyzing the texts individually, students participate in a jigsaw group discussion where they compare what each "voice" contributes to the public conversation.

## "Multiple Perspectives Carousel" Discussion Activity

Using controversial domestic issues (ex: police reform, universal healthcare, student loan forgiveness), the classroom is set up in carousel format. At each station, students read a short case or scenario and then respond on a posted chart paper from a particular stakeholder's point of view (ex: politician, small business owner, activist, teacher). After rotating through each station, the class debriefs by discussing how values, experiences, and roles influence how people view issues.

## "Ethics Bowl: U.S. Edition" Case Discussions

Students participate in small-group Ethics Bowl case analysis using domestic ethical dilemmas (ex: Should schools require facial recognition for security? Should incarcerated individuals be allowed to vote?). Students are guided through a collaborative structure that includes a presentation of the issue, clarification questions, response preparation, and respectful rebuttals. Cases change weekly, and students rotate roles (presenter, questioner, responder, moderator) to build diverse skills. Students will complete reflections to see how their opinions have changed as a result of the activity.

## "The Bubble Effect" Media Bias Mapping Project

Students begin by taking a media bias quiz to assess their personal media ecosystem. They then research where different U.S. news outlets fall on the political spectrum using tools like Media Bias/Fact Check. Students create a "Bias Map" of how Americans may receive vastly different versions of the same news story depending on their news source. In their reflections, students consider how the information "bubble" may impact voting, discourse, and unity.

## "Policy Pitch" Group Simulation Project

In this multi-day project, student teams develop a policy proposal to address a specific U.S. issue (ex: affordable housing, college affordability, mental health in schools). Their final deliverable includes:

- A written brief summarizing the issue, data, and existing policies
- A proposed solution with pros/cons
- A 3–5 minute "pitch" to the class or mock town hall
  Students answer questions from their classmates and defend their policy with evidence. Rubrics evaluate clarity, evidence, feasibility, and presentation.

## "Blue vs. Gold" Civility Circle Debate

After being assigned a domestic issue, students are divided into “blue” and “gold” teams that must research their assigned side. Each side presents their arguments using student-created position statements, then engages in a structured debate. Students are evaluated not just on content, but also tone, respect, and use of evidence. A third group acts as moderators and fact-checkers, offering live feedback and corrections where needed.

### “The American Lens” Reflection Journal

Throughout the unit, students maintain a reflective journal (digital or paper) where they respond to daily or weekly prompts such as:

- “What’s one thing I learned this week that challenged my assumptions?”
- “What voices or perspectives were missing from our class discussion today?”
- “How has my opinion on [issue] evolved?”
  The final entry asks students to write a reflective piece titled “The America I See,” incorporating journal excerpts, current events, and personal values.

### “Your Voice, Your Platform” Multimedia Civic Project

As a culminating activity, students choose how to communicate their perspective on a U.S. issue through a multimedia platform of their choice (ex: podcast, PSA video, infographic campaign, editorial article, or short documentary). Students must include research, analysis of opposing views, and a clear call to action. Projects are presented in a “Civic Showcase Gallery,” and peers give constructive feedback using a rubric.

## Assessment

When taking a Social Studies course, students demonstrate differentiated proficiency according to their ability to answer the essential questions through formative and summative assessments. Many of the performance tasks below can be implemented as formative and/or summative assessments. As teachers strive for students to demonstrate proficiency, they will need to create additional or alternative assessments based on demonstration or absence of skill.

Formative

- Current event analysis journals
- Peer feedback sessions on presentations
- Issue timeline creation

Summative:

- Student-led panel or debate
- Final Presentation: “Why this issue matters to me”
- Group Project: Public awareness product

Alternative:

- Podcast or video blog on issue research
- Interactive website or social media campaign
- Editorial letter to a local policymaker

## Materials

The design of this course allows for the integration of a variety of instructional, supplemental, and intervention materials that support student learners at all levels in the school and home environments. Associated web content and media sources are infused into the unit as applicable and available In addition to the materials below, the following link connects to district approved textbooks and resources utilized in this course: Core Book List.

The following are approved resources that teachers can include to further unit related objectives:

- The Juice
- World A-Z
- NHSEB Ethics Bowl Resources
- C-SPAN Classroom
- Pew Research Center
- NPR’s Throughline podcast

Any additional resources that are not included in this list will be presented to and reviewed by the supervisor before being included in lesson plans. This ensures resources are reviewed and vetted for relevance and appropriateness prior to implementation.