Unit 1: This is What Our Democracy Looks Like!

Content Area: **Social Studies**
Course(s):
Time Period: **Trimester 1**
Length: **5 Weeks**
Status: **Published**

Summary

The civics course prompts students to examine the fundamentals of our democratic republic, including institutions, founding documents, essential rights, and civic responsibilities. Students explore how they can become more civically engaged in different capacities and during different phases of their life. Problem-based learning is a hallmark of the course where students are encouraged to explore issues currently affecting the communities they operate in and how they might solve or address them. Students leave the course with greater civic competence needed to be a productive and proud citizen in their local, national, and global communities.

This unit is part of the larger aforementioned course sequence and specifically focuses on the pillars of our democracy where students will understand that the United States Constitution and Bill of Rights were designed to provide a framework for the United States system of government, while also protecting individual rights, Students will assess how debates about individuals' rights, states rights, and federal power shaped the development of the political and economic institutions and practices of the new republic. By the end of this unit, students will be able to evaluate how the three branches of government operate on a system of checks and balances and the ways in which they use their powers, how civil liberties are protected in the real world through the Bill of Rights, and how the federal government can both limit and extend civil liberties. Moreover, students will examine the functions and organization of state and local governments, investigating how their local government works in action and the extent to which these systems, as well as our federal government, work within a democratic republic. Students will gain these understandings by examining case studies, conducting independent and collaborative research, and analyzing primary and secondary sources.

Revision Date: August 2023

Standards

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.CivicsPI.2: Evaluate the extent to which different forms of government reflect the history and values of various societies (e.g., monarchy, democracy, republic, dictatorship).

6.3.8.CivicsDP.2: Make a claim based on evidence to determine the extent and the limitations of First Amendment rights (e.g., U.S. 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.

6.3.8.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.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.

6.3.8.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.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.7: Compare how ideas become laws at the local, state, and national level.

6.1.8.CivicsPD.3.a: Cite evidence to determine the role that compromise played in the creation and adoption of the Constitution and Bill of Rights.

9.1.8.EG.2: Explain why various sources of income are taxed differently.

9.1.8.EG.3: Explain the concept and forms of taxation and evaluate how local, state and federal governments use taxes to fund public activities and initiatives.

9.4.8.CI.3: Examine challenges that may exist in the adoption of new ideas (e.g., 2.1.8.SSH, 6.1.8.CivicsPD.2).

9.4.8.CT.3: Compare past problem-solving solutions to local, national, or global issues and analyze the factors that led to a positive or negative outcome.

9.4.8.GCA.2: Demonstrate openness to diverse ideas and perspectives through active discussions to achieve a group goal.

RH.6-8.1. Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

RH.6-8.2. Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions

RH.6-8.4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.

RH.6-8.6. Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).

RH.6-8.7. Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

WHST.6-8.1. Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content.

A. Introduce claim(s) about a topic or issue, acknowledge and distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically.

B. Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant, accurate data and evidence that demonstrate an understanding of the topic or text, using credible sources.

C. Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

D. Establish and maintain a formal/academic style, approach, and form.

E. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.

WHST.6-8.2. Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/ experiments, or technical processes.

A. Introduce a topic and organize ideas, concepts, and information using text structures (e.g. definition, classification, comparison/contrast, cause/effect, etc.) and text features (e.g. headings, graphics, and multimedia) when useful to aiding comprehension.

B. Develop the topic with relevant, well-chosen facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.

C. Use appropriate and varied transitions to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts.

D. Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.

E. Establish and maintain a formal/academic style, approach, and form.

F. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented.

WHST.6-8.4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, voice, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

WHST.6-8.5. With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed.

WHST.6-8.6. Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and present the relationships between information and ideas clearly and efficiently.

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

WHST.6-8.8. Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

WHST.6-8.9. Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

WHST.6-8.10. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, metacognition/self correction, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

This unit is aligned to the English Language Development (ELD) standards for kindergarten through grade 12

since multilingual learners develop content and language concurrently, with academic content in a classroom where the language of instruction is English. As a result, language learning and language as a means for learning academic content are interchangeable. The following ELD standards are relevant for this unit and course of study:

- Standard 1: Language for Social and Instructional Purposes: English language learners communicate for social and instructional purposes within the school setting.
- Standard 5: Language for Social Studies: English language learners communicate information, ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of Social Studies.

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 and Enduring Understandings

Essential Questions:

- What are the characteristics of a democratic government?
- How is power divided and shared in the United States government (federal, local, state and in the three branches)?
- How have Supreme Court decisions expanded or restricted personal rights and responsibilities?

Enduring Understandings:

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

Objectives

Students will know:

- Terms, concepts and individuals (including, but not limited to): Constitution, Bill of Rights, Democratic Republic, Division of power among local/state/federal government, Check and Balances, Separation of Powers, Living Document, Federalism, Shared Powers, Taxes, Discretionary Spending, Mandatory Spending, Fiscal Budget, Citizenship, Due Process, Judicial Review, Majority vs.

Dissenting Opinion, Supreme Court, Congress, Branches of Government (Judicial, Executive, Legislative), Popular sovereignty, Republicanism, Limited government, express/Implied Powers.

- The pillars of the Constitution and its main principles.
- State and National governments help create a democratic republic.
- The Bill of Rights protects the rights of the individual and the state.
- Federalism is the shared powers between the national and state governments.
- Taxes at the local, state, and national level are used to support programs in service of the citizens - there is debate over the extent to which taxes should be collected and used for these programs.
- The Court system plays an important role in interpreting the Constitution and establishing precedents that affect the lives of Americans.
- The process of assessing if the Constitution has been violated is called judicial review.
- Checks and balances exist to prevent one branch from gaining too much power.
- The Constitution is a living document and can be amended.
- The process of Constitutional amendment is complex.

Students will be skilled at:

- Understanding how our local, state, and federal governments work and applying those ideas to current issues.
- Understanding why and how the different branches of the government work together to create a system of checks and balances to prevent one branch from becoming too powerful.
- Explaining the necessity of the Bill of Rights.
- Assessing the extent to which civil liberties are checked and protected by the Bill of Rights.
- Explaining the structure, function, and powers of the U.S. government as established in the Constitution.
- Defining federalism and explaining the division of power between states and the federal government.
- Identifying the strengths and weaknesses of federalism.
- Explaining the government's reasoning for taxation and use of tax money.
- Explaining how federal, state, and local taxes support the economy as a function of the U.S. government.
- Interpreting the cause and effects of taxation and if the individual or government benefits from them.

- Identifying and Explaining the role of the court system in the United States and how it establishes precedents that affect the lives of Americans.
- Analyzing current cases in the court system and writing opinions based on precedents.
- Understanding our local and state government structure and laws and how they compare to the federal structure.
- Analyzing the amendment process and how it makes the Constitution a living document.
- Creating a claim in response to a prompt.
- Writing with evidence to support an original claim.
- Applying content understanding to current events to assess the short and long term impacts of government decisions.

Learning Plan

This unit includes, but is not limited to, the following learning strategies:

- **Democracy vs. Democratic Republic Simulation:** Students will identify the difference between a democracy and a democratic republic through an in-class simulation. Students will be presented with issues that they face in their current lives in school and attempt to solve them through "democratic" means. Students will then attempt to address the same or similar issues through a democratic republic lens. Students will debrief the differences between the two processes, as well as the benefits and detriments to each, highlighting how the United States serves as a Democratic Republic.
- **Three Branches Analysis**: Students will be broken up into groups to analyze the three different branches of the government. Groups will each focus on one branch, where they will read an excerpt of the Constitution and create a "quick guide" to the powers their branch holds. Students will then meet with members representing other branches of the government, where together they will be presented with scenarios in which they have to determine who has the power to complete different governmental tasks.
- **What's in the Constitution?:** Students will gain an overview of the structure and function of the U.S. Constitution through a secondary source reading. Students will learn about the duties and powers of the three branches, the amendment process, due process, and how federal power is shared with states. Students will then assess the extent to which the Constitution is balanced based on their findings.
- **Living Document Analysis/Gallery Walk:** Students will work in groups to examine how the Constitution acts as a living document by studying the amendment process. Groups will focus on either examples of amendments added to the Constitution or ones that did not pass. Students will assess "To what extent is the Constitution a living document? To what extent are citizens' rights protected through the amendment process? Should the amendment process be changed?" based on their investigation.
- **How a Bill Becomes a Law Analysis**: Students will identify and analyze the process of how a bill becomes a law. Students will be able to explain and order seven basic steps for how a bill becomes a law. After students gain a background in how a bill becomes a law, they will analyze a previously

passed law and record the exact steps and who was involved. FInally, students will complete a graphic organizer based on a law that is currently being debated in Congress and the steps it has gone through so far.

- **Bill of Rights Analysis:** Students will analyze the Bill of Rights and why they were created. Once students create their own definition for each one, they will connect it to examples they have seen in their everyday life.

- **Do I Have a Right?:** Students will first examine the rights guaranteed by the Bill of Rights and other constitutional amendments. Then, students will apply their understanding of their constitutional rights by playing "Do I Have a Right?" through iCivics where they act as lawyers and have to assist individuals who believe their rights have been violated. Students will determine whether or not civil liberties have been violated, and apply their knowledge of the amendments to justify why someone has the right.

- **Understanding Federalism:** Students will learn about federalism and its role in civic life. Students will then assign which powers the states hold, which the federal government holds, and which powers are concurrent through the creation of a Venn Diagram. After, students will connect their understanding of federalism to one historical example and one current day example of the debates surrounding federalism.

- **Comparing Constitutions:** Students will analyze the structure of the New Jersey Constitution to assess the extent to which it reflects the same structure of the U.S. constitution. Students will note ways in which the two are similar and different, assessing why differences may exist, such as New Jersey's highlight on public schools.

- **State Power Storyboard**: Students will use a cheat sheet to examine the powers of state governments. Using their cheat sheet, students will create an 8-frame storyboard which connects eight powers of the state government. Students may extend this activity by connecting it to present-day New Jersey state laws and regulations.

- **Constitutional Issues Today:** Students will pick one aspect of the Constitution to analyze (one of the branches of government, the Bill of Rights, States Rights, Current Court Cases) and research a current event related to their chosen topic. Students will create an argument in relation to their current event, using evidence and original analysis to support their claim. Students will connect their research to their understanding of the Constitution.

- **Taxation!:** Students will learn the basics of taxes: what they are, who pays them, what kinds exist, and what they're used for. Students will discuss how people's income is taxed, how much revenue taxes generate, and how taxes and government services are related. Students will then act as the federal government and attempt to create a fiscal budget by examining the factors of discretionary spending and deciding with a group what to fund using tax dollars. Students will simulate how the federal government frequently goes "over budget" and try to prioritize what spending should go towards.

- **How Cases Move through the Courts:** Students will examine the judicial process through a case study of the case *Tinker v. Des Moines* where students will see how a case goes through the local and state courts before being brought to the U.S. Supreme Court. Students will use this as an introductory activity to their Supreme Court Case Study.

- **Supreme Court Case Study:** Students will review the process of judicial review and how decisions can establish precedents or overturn former decisions. Students will work in pairs to examine past and present cases and reflect on how the Supreme Court used the Constitution to defend their

majority/dissenting opinions. Students will consider to what extent the landmark cases exemplify the checks and balances of the branches of government, and to what extent the Supreme Court has been used to uphold citizens' rights. Cases students may reflect on include but are not limited to: (*Brown v. Board of Ed., Miranda v. Arizona, Obergefell v. Hodges, United States v. Wong Kim Ark, Loving v. Virginia, PGA Tour, Inc. v. Martin*)

- **Local Governments Structure:** Students will read about the different types of local governments that exist and who makes up local governments. Students will reflect on the ways in which our local government structure compares to state and federal government structures and reflect on the differences amongst them.

- **Cranford's Government Investigation:** Students will investigate issues/projects within Cranford Township to analyze how our local government works in action. Students will identify the role of the mayor, city council, and boards to assess "How does my local government bring about change in the community? To what extent are they fixing issues within the township?"

Note: Other strategies to address the learning objectives may include, but are not limited to direct instruction, primary and secondary source analysis (including annotations, critique, questioning and close reading strategies), self and peer review, think-pair-share activities, creating visual representations, debates, film analysis, Socratic seminars, small group discussions, simulations, mapping activities, jigsaw activities, gallery walks, web quests, and/or inquiry or problem based learning projects.

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 Assessments:

- Analysis of the Constitutional principles and how they relate to today.

- Simulation activity where students understand checks and balances by creating a lunch menu to understand each branch's responsibilities.

- Comparison of the different branches of government and their roles.

- Graphic organizer with student created definitions of the Bill of Rights. Students will also connect the 10 Amendments to real life issues today.

- Constitution analysis and the role it plays in our everyday lives.

- Analysis of Federalism and case studies of it in action throughout history.

- Analysis of taxes in the United States and its uses.

- Comparison of the state/local/federal government structures.
- Current bill graphic organizer.

Summative Assessments:

- Amending the Constitution: Students will work in groups to address one aspect of the Constitution that they believe could be amended. Students will research who would support this change, make an argument on why it should be changed, and draft a proposal for the amendment to be "voted" on. Students will also note challenges they may face in ratifying their amendment and the extent to which they think their amendment could realistically be ratified by today's governing bodies.

Benchmark Assessments:

- Analytical Writing Responses:
    - What principle of the Constitution is most necessary in creating a democracy?
    - To what extent are the powers equal?
    - To what extent are our rights protected?

Alternative Assessments:

- Civics Concepts Curation Project - Throughout the course, students can select key artifacts from various forms of media to highlight key concepts as related to the unit. For each artifact, they must compose a narrative explaining how the curated piece reflects the assigned concept.

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:

- Civics Curriculum from Rutgers w/ Lessons

- Scope and Sequence iCivics
- 6 Big Ideas of Constitution via National Archives
- NewsELA (articles can vary and be leveled)
- Separation of Powers - iCivics
- Bill of Rights - iCivics
- Bill of Rights - Bill of Rights Institute
- Current Events in the Constitution- Bill of Rights Institute
- Court Packing Debate- ProCon.Org
- Do I Have a Right?- iCivics
- Anatomy of the Constitution - iCivics
- Federalism - iCivics
- State Power: Got a Reservation?- iCivics
- Federalism - National Archives
- Taxes (basics, types, history) - iCivics
- Taxes and Regulations - Bill of Rights Institute
- Overview of Judicial Branch - iCivics
- Judicial Branch Plans - iCivics
- A People's Pie: iCivics
- All About the Courts - uscourts.gov
- Landmark Library (Landmark Supreme Court Cases): iCivics
- Landmark Cases: Landmarkcases.org
- Types of Federalism - thoughtco.com
- The Amendment Process: Constitution Center
- New Jersey Constitution: NJ.gov
- Unratified Constitutional Amendments: archives.gov (DC Voting Rights, Equal Rights Amendment, Regulating Child Labor, Titles of Nobility, Protection of Slavery)
- All the Constitutional Amendments- Summaries, Changes, Significance: History.com

- Cranford Government Website
- Local Governments
- How a Bill Becomes a Law - C-Span

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.

Suggested Strategies for Modification

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:

- Highlighter for close reading and annotation strategies
- Bolded terms in directions
- Reading texts aloud for students to assist in comprehension and analysis
- Providing opportunities for text-to-speech for written responses.
- Use visual presentations of all materials and include graphic organizers for writing.