United States Government: By the People, for the People

Coursebook

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Introduction

Why study United States government? Beyond fulfilling a graduation requirement, how might learning about government systems have value? We all, in a sense, govern our own lives, and we usually have more power to do so as we grow older. Government systems are an extension of self-government—a way to help improve the lives of individuals and society as a whole.

Education is often most meaningful when it can be applied for the betterment of the self and others. So, ask yourself this important question:

> **How will learning about the foundations and structure of the U.S. government help me change the world?**

Throughout the semester, you will be creating a long-term project that relates to this question. This course project goes beyond a simple slideshow and will have many more revisions and reflections than a research essay. The process of developing your project is as important as the outcome. You will find activities and instructions related to your course project in each lesson. It is important that your project be meaningful to you and be of use in the wider world. This type of project-based learning lets you contribute to the world as you conduct your studies.

What to Expect in This Course

This single-semester course is divided into 18 lessons, and each lesson is designed to take about one week to complete (approximately one hour per day). In the lessons, you will find the following sections (not every section will be found in every lesson):

An **Assignment Summary** is included at the beginning of each lesson; you can see all your assignments at a glance, and check off assignments as you complete each one. Assignments are fully explained in the lesson.

The **Learning Objectives** outline the main goals of the lesson and give you an idea of what to expect.

Information in the **Before You Begin** section provides context and important background knowledge about the lesson topic.

The **Reflect and Discuss** section provides ways to think deeply about relevant issues and discuss your ideas with others to help further your understanding of the lesson topics. You do not need to write anything down for these prompts.

Assignments are designed to help you understand key concepts and apply your knowledge.

The **Course Project** section includes step-by-step guidance through each phase of developing your course project.

Extend Your Learning activities offer additional ways to explore the topics you are studying. You can choose any that interest you (all are optional).

The **Share Your Work** section provides reminders and information for students who are submitting their work to a teacher.

This course is textbook independent, which means that you can use any relevant textbook or combination of resources. The bulk of your research will probably come from the internet. It is recommended that you also use your local librarian as a resource. Your local library will be able to get you connected with journals, videos, and specific websites (most of these services are available online as well). You will also find a list of resources on the Oak Meadow website at www.oakmeadow.com/curriculum-links.

This course is designed for independent learning, so hopefully you will find it easy to navigate. However, it is assumed you will have an adult supervising your work and providing support and feedback. If you have a question about your work, please ask for help!

When you begin each lesson, scan the entire lesson first. Take a quick look at the number of assignments and amount of reading. Having a sense of the whole lesson will help you manage your time effectively.

Academic Expectations

The appendix contains important information about academic expectations, original work guidelines, citing sources, and more. Take some time to familiarize yourself with the resources in the appendix. You will be expected to read and incorporate these guidelines into your work throughout the year.

A Note About the Workload

Students vary greatly in terms of reading speed, reading comprehension, and writing ability. Some may find the reading in this course takes longer than expected; others may find the writing assignments take a great deal of time. In general, you can expect to spend about five hours on each lesson. If you need more time to complete the work, you might modify some lessons to focus on fewer assignments, or you might arrange with your teacher to complete some lessons orally instead of in written form. Modifications like these can allow you to produce work that is of a higher quality. Each lesson in this course can be customized to suit your needs.

Keep an eye on the workload as you progress through the course, and make adjustments so you have time for meaningful learning experiences rather than rushing to try to get everything done. Please consult with your teacher when making adjustments to the workload.

Lesson

1

Inquiry

Learning Objectives

In this lesson, you will:

- Analyze elements involved in governing a group of people.
- Identify areas of civic concern.
- Reflect on personal strengths, experience, and interests.

ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- ☐ Read the Before You Begin section.
- ☐ Choose words to describe government.
- ☐ Describe the governing structure of a group you belong to.
- ☐ Course Project: Identifying Civic Concerns

Before You Begin

Why do we look back in time to learn how to move forward? How can looking at the history of government in the United States help us find new solutions to today's problems?

One of the main ways we learn is through inquiry. By inquiring or questioning, we not only explore the main topic but often journey into a diverse array of related topics. Learning in this way is like a treasure hunt—you never know what you might find!

However, you've probably already learned that there are effective and ineffective ways to ask questions, especially if you are trying to get a specific piece of information or are making a request. (Think about the last time you tried to find something on the internet and couldn't get the answer because of the search terms you used. Or think of a time you asked an adult for permission and didn't get what you wanted because of the way it was asked.)

This course is all about inquiry. What do *you* want to know? How do you articulate what you are curious about? What are the best questions to ask to get the information you seek? Where do you find the answers? If you can't find the answers, what do you do?

Often, the most intriguing questions are open-ended. There's not one answer. Answering them requires diving into information, thinking deeply, and reflecting; finding answers almost always means seeking sources from many different places.

Here are a few examples of open-ended questions that can lead to multiple answers:

- How can we overcome prejudice in my community?

- What are the ideals of a model society, and why are they important?
- What role do (or should) data and statistics play in shaping governmental policies and decisions?
- How can public art encourage change for social justice?

With this in mind, let's dive into our study of U.S. government and see where it leads.

Throughout this course, you will be creating a project that is designed to address a problem or issue that you are interested in. The form your course project takes is up to you, and as you learn about how societies are structured and governed, you will gather information that will help you refine your project's focus. Your project may be related to community service or to educating the public; it may be an innovative design, a community event, a creative work, or a grassroots political campaign. As you develop your project, you will become involved with others who are participating in similar work or working toward similar goals. The purpose of this course project is to somehow—in ways large or small—make the world a better place.

What groups do you belong to? How is each group organized? How is it governed?

(Image credit: NPS)

(Image credit: IUP Marching Band)

(Image credit: Pikist)

(Image credit: Northwestern High School Concert Choir/A. Bailey)

Assignments

1. Write down three or four words that come to mind when you think of government. For each word, give a short explanation of why you chose it.
2. Describe the organizational structure governing a group to which you belong. This could be a shared-interest group, a community-based group, an employee group, or an online group. It could be a sports team, music class, homeschooling co-op, summer camp, sustainability coalition, or book club. The group could be organized around a river cleanup, community garden, online gaming, religious activities, or camping.

   Here are a few of the questions you might address as you describe your group's governing structure:

   - Who organized the group? Who runs it? How were these leaders chosen?
   - Are there fees involved? What do you get in exchange for those fees?
   - Are there rules for the group, either written or unspoken? What is the purpose of these rules? Who made up the rules, and how are they communicated to members of the group?
   - How are conflicts within the group handled? Who is responsible for reporting and mediating conflicts? How are rule-breakers dealt with?
   - Is there a process for accepting members into the group or for removing members from the group?
   - What are the responsibilities of individual group members? What are the privileges?

   Write two or three paragraphs, presenting your thoughts and information in an organized way. Take the time to review what you've written, revise it to bring added clarity, edit it to ensure effective word choice and grammar, and proofread it after all the changes have been made. (Throughout the course, use this writing process to help you express your ideas clearly and produce your best work.)

Course Project

Identifying Civic Concerns

Do you want to change the world? If you had the power to make a positive change that would benefit others, what might that be? What sphere of living (such as food systems, social justice, health, politics and law, or environmental sustainability) might you like to influence?

As you begin your study of U.S. government, you might wonder how it relates to changing the world. That is the question you will explore in this course.

To begin, you'll answer two questions:

1. **What are some of the burning questions you have about the world?**

   Is there a topic you are interested in? Here are some questions you might be curious about:

   - Why don't more people recycle? Is recycling even useful?
   - Is there a place for me in the future world?
   - How can we best help people who are displaced from their homes or homeless?
   - Is illegal immigration a problem or are immigration policies the problem?
   - What would it take to eradicate hunger or poverty?
   - What actions are needed on a global level to stop climate change?

   Feel free to ask your friends or family members what burning questions they have. Sometimes the ideas of another person will help spark your own line of inquiry.

2. **What do you like to do?**

   Think about projects you've enjoyed doing in the past. Do you enjoy doing research, being involved in community service, engineering designs on paper or the computer, or building models? Consider what you might already be doing that you could connect to this course. Are you a musician? A traveling athlete? An older sister? A chef? A poet?

   Consider the question, "What do I want to be when I grow up?" Do you want to be a journalist? An advertising executive? A filmmaker or playwright? An app developer? A podcaster? A photographer?

   Spend some time pondering these questions before you write down your thoughts. These initial thoughts could help shape your course project and the experience of creating it. You'll learn and value the experience the most when you connect your interests, skills, and curiosity to create something useful or meaningful.

SHARE YOUR WORK

When you have completed this lesson, share your work with your teacher. Make sure each assignment is clearly labeled. Please proofread your work and make any corrections before notifying your teacher that it is ready to review.

If you are using a shared Google doc to submit your work, when you have finished adding your responses for this lesson, click on the File tab in the upper left corner, and use the Email Collaborators command to let your teacher know your work for lesson 1 is ready for review.

If you have any questions about your work, the lesson assignments, or how to share your work, let your teacher know.

Lesson

2

Media and Bias

Learning Objectives

In this lesson, you will:

- Track quotes back to their source.
- Search for corroborating evidence.
- Identify signs of false or misleading information.

ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- ☐ Read the Before You Begin section.
- ☐ Reflect on and discuss subjectivity and objectivity in news and other media.
- ☐ Read and respond to articles related to how young adults access news.
- ☐ Analyze a news item to determine its validity.
- ☐ Course Project: Asking Questions

Before You Begin

You might wonder what media and bias have to do with your study of government systems and the development of your project. However, as you consider in detail how various forms of government work and why different societies have put governing structures in place, it is vital that you simultaneously explore how we receive information when doing research. Not all information you find in your research is accurate, and some of it might have been designed to be intentionally misleading. Understanding media and bias means recognizing its power to disrupt society. If you think of government as a kind of powerful narrative that shapes our daily lives, you can begin to see how effectively false narratives can disrupt society. Developing the skills to analyze media is vital to the study of government.

At this point in your schooling, you have probably done quite a bit of research. Maybe you identified plant cells in a biology course, looked up the causes of the American Revolution in a history class, or reviewed different interpretations of a novel in English class. As a tech native—someone who has never known a world without computers—you have most likely searched online for answers to questions ranging from "When is the new movie opening at the theater?" and "Where's the nearest pizza place?" to "Is a light-year a measure of time or distance?" and "Which college is right for me?" It wasn't too long ago that all research was gathered from newspapers, books, and periodicals. (Ask your older friends and relatives about microfiche!)

These days, information is so easily obtained from our cell phones and laptop computers that we can have our questions answered in a few seconds. This is fantastic but also a cause for concern. When information is published in printed books, there are quality-control checks built in to try to make sure the writing is accurate. Publishing information is expensive, and making corrections is time-consuming. With the internet, online publishing is fast and easy; anyone can do it without any quality assurance at all. Far-fetched theories pop up in search results right alongside legitimate research. False information—sometimes unsupported claims and other times outright lies—is disguised as fact and is spread around the world without control. This creates a phenomenon known as the *illusory truth effect*, which is caused by hearing wrong information so often that we start to believe it must be true.

Media messages are continually bombarding us with biased opinions, persuasive rhetoric, and alarmist ideas that often encourage fear, prejudice, and behavior designed to benefit a certain cause, company, or individual. These messages seek to influence our behavior in every sphere of life: medical, educational, social, environmental, and political. Where and how we learn about what is going on in our government affects what we think about it, whether we desire change, and how we might seek it.

Media has such a powerful influence on the public's understanding about government, politics, and current events that it is sometimes called the Fourth Estate. Journalists take on the role of critical observers of politics and politicians, effectively forming an independent fourth system. This role is crucial to holding all branches of the government accountable and keeping the American public informed and involved. Election coverage, debates and political commentary, analysis of legislative bills, and supplying information to the voting public are just a few of the ways that media outlets affect government and politics.

The press also has the power to sway public opinion. Politicians often use media outlets for their own purposes. Journalists have a code of ethics that most follow, which helps ensure that the majority of news stories strive to present unbiased information, letting readers make up their own minds. (Read the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics online to learn more.) The freedom of the press is embedded in the Constitution of the United States. It is, and always has been, a powerful voice in safeguarding the nation's democracy.

Throughout your study of U.S. government, you will be asking many questions and doing research to gain perspective and information. In this lesson, you will be writing and thinking about bias and research. You may have heard it before, but it is always worth remembering: be careful about what you read and believe.

What is the role of news media in government? (Image credit: Marcello Casal Jr/ABr)

Reflect and Discuss

Consider the difference between subjective and objective information. In the media, subjective opinion is often presented as objective facts. Do you think it is important for all news to be reported as objectively as possible? What effect does it have on the public when news is reported subjectively? Is this a problem?

Reflect on these thoughts, and form an opinion. Discuss these questions with someone else, such as a friend, family member, coworker, neighbor, or classmate. After considering their opinion, you might find your opinion changing somewhat. This is a natural part of learning—as we gather new information, experiences, and perspectives, our understanding grows and shifts to include this greater knowledge.

Terms to Know

The terms listed below represent important concepts and information. You will want to be able to define, understand, and use them in the context of your assignments and final project. Look up any concepts or words you don't know or would like to learn more about.

- Media bias
- Plagiarism
- Citations (MLA format) and works cited pages
- Subjective versus objective

Assignments

1. Read the following articles from Common Sense Media and National Public Radio.

   "Our New Research Shows Where Kids Get Their News and How They Feel About It"

   www.commonsensemedia.org/blog/our-new-research-shows-where-kids-get-their-news-and-how-they-feel-about-it

   "Students Have 'Dismaying' Inability to Tell Fake News from Real, Study Finds"

   www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/11/23/503129818/study-finds-students-have-dismaying-inability-to-tell-fake-news-from-real

   Do you think these articles accurately represent you and your peers? Why or why not? Write a brief response.

2. Public and college libraries are at the forefront of educating all of us about media bias. Read this article from Boston University:

   "Fake News and News Bias"

   library.bu.edu/fakenews

   Armed with information about spotting fake news, find a news article or tweet with false or misleading information. Using the signs listed in the article above and the box below, "Evaluating Online Sources," explain how you determined the information to be faulty.

Evaluating Online Sources

When evaluating an online source, here are some red flags that should make you question the validity of the source:

- Inflammatory language, such as name-calling or derogatory remarks
- Extreme emotions or appealing to emotions
- One-sided viewpoint, particularly one conveyed by criticizing or insulting an opposing viewpoint
- Unsupported claims that cannot be confirmed by a reliable source
- Vague or contradictory claims
- Short quotes that are unattributed or taken out of context
- Messages that are hard to believe, negative, or threatening

Always ask yourself: Who created this message? What is their primary objective?

Use the checklist below when evaluating a news source (adapted from Common Sense Media):

- ☐ **Look at the quotes in a story (or lack of quotes).** Most news reports have multiple sources who are professionals with relevant expertise. In articles about serious or controversial issues, there are more likely to be several quotes from multiple experts. Take the time to research these quotes by doing an internet search. Do you find the quote attributed the same way in other news articles?
- ☐ **Check other (reputable) sources** before trusting or sharing news that seems too good (or bad) to be true. Are other credible, mainstream news outlets reporting the same news? When a source is used to support a claim, do an internet search to evaluate the source. Can you find it? If so, does it seem to support what is being said in the article? Sometimes scientific claims are made in news items, but when you look up the actual scientific study being cited, the results or conclusions do not always back up what is being claimed.

- ☐ **Check a site's "About Us" section.** Find out who supports the site or who is associated with it. If this information can't be found, consider why they aren't being transparent. Who is behind it? Why was it produced? Who stands to benefit?
- ☐ **Look for signs of low quality**, such as words in all caps, grammatical errors, bold claims with no supporting evidence, and sensationalist images (such as revealing, unflattering, or compromising photos).
- ☐ **Beware of clickbait** lures that lead to ads or other sponsored sites.
- ☐ **Check your emotions.** Fake news strives for extreme reactions. If the news you're reading makes you feel angry, smug, indignant, or self-righteous, it could be a sign that you're being manipulated rather than informed. News organizations are in business to make money, and often news media can make more money by publishing extreme, inflammatory, or controversial views that do not represent what is actually happening or the views of the majority.

Course Project

Asking Questions

Continue to turn over ideas in your head about an issue or problem you would like to explore in your course project. If you have an idea for your topic, seek out someone who is currently working in this area. If you don't yet have an idea, find someone whose work you admire or are interested in.

Come up with a list of questions (at least three) that you would like to ask this person. For instance, if you are interested in creating a pocket park in your neighborhood, you might contact a member of your city council and ask if this has been done before, what permissions or permits might be involved, and if there are city regulations regarding this type of project.

If you have an idea for your project, you can ask very specific questions. If you don't yet know your topic, come up with questions that can be useful no matter what topic you choose. Here are some questions to get you started:

- If there was one thing you wish the general public understood better about this issue or your work, what would it be?
- What areas or issues are most in need of attention in this community?
- What resources to you regularly use in your work?
- Are you familiar with other groups (local, national, or international) that are doing similar work?

Come up with several more questions of your own. Write down your questions, who you contacted, and what you found out.

Extend Your Learning

(All Extend Your Learning sections are optional.)

Practice being a careful consumer of the news. Choose one issue or event, and find an article online or in a printed source, such as a newspaper, magazine, or professional journal.

Answer these questions:

1. Who is the author of the article? What is the news organization?
2. What are the sources of the facts in this article? Does the article cite interviews, research, scientific studies, or other sources?
3. Find another article on the same topic. Who is the author of the article? What is the news organization? What are the sources of the facts in this article?
4. Did you find any differences in the way the facts were reported? If so, what were these differences, and what do you think might have caused them?
5. Review the information on evaluating online sources. (It can apply to print sources as well.) Do you feel confident about the facts in the articles you read? Explain your answer.

SHARE YOUR WORK

When you have completed this lesson, proofread your work carefully. Are you showing what you've been learning and thinking about? You always can add more than is asked for.

When you are ready, share your work with your teacher, and include any questions you might have. Notify your teacher when your work is ready to be reviewed.

Lesson

3

Research and Resources

Learning Objectives

In this lesson, you will:

- Locate relevant and reliable sources related to the study of government.
- Demonstrate lateral reading by researching related articles and topics.
- Differentiate between paraphrasing and direct quotations.

Before You Begin

Media is not the only place we find bias. Research, too, can be biased. While all ethical scientists strive to be objective in their work, many times research results are reported in a way that highlights certain data (such as data supporting a certain stance or opinion) and downplays other data. Often, biased research reporting comes from those outside the scientific field; this is usually someone who has a commercial or political interest in skewing the data. Sometimes the studies themselves are inherently biased, such as when a group of study subjects are all from a particular demographic (college graduates, for instance, or those belonging to a certain income bracket). The study results may or may not be applicable to those outside the target demographic. For example, if a study finds that people who live in rural places tend to vote Republican and those in urban places tend to vote Democrat, but the majority of test subjects were white people over the age of 50, the research is biased and may not be representative of the general population. In order to become informed citizens, we need to have access to accurate, reliable sources of information. We need to learn to evaluate surveys, studies, experiments, and other sources of data to check for implicit or overt bias.

ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- ☐ Read the Before You Begin section.
- ☐ Compile a list of relevant resources.
- ☐ Create a navigational map showing the results of lateral reading.
- ☐ Summarize an article using paraphrasing, quotations, and citations.
- ☐ Course Project: Clarifying Your Focus

When conducting research, however, we often find only what we are looking for. *Confirmation bias* is when we look for, find, and understand information with which we already agree. Consider these statements:

- Swimmers are the most fit athletes.
- Chocolate is good for you.
- Vaping is more healthy than smoking cigarettes.

If you agree with these statements, you could find articles to prove all of them, which would confirm your own biases. If you disagree, you could find information to disprove them.

When searching for information, people often stop after they find something that agrees with their assumptions. If we find only what we're looking to confirm instead of searching out other, possibly differing information, we are missing the whole picture. Think about the competing beliefs over climate change, vaccinations, or government funding of health care. There are almost always multiple perspectives—many more than two sides—to every story. When we limit our research to what we already think, we are also limiting our education.

Of course, the point of research is not to end in a muddle with no perspective or conclusion. It is important to research many perspectives, but it is equally important to evaluate what you find and, based on the best information, make a judgment about what is right, true, or effective. For example, you might read 20 different articles on climate change written by verified climate scientists. There may be some variation in what you read, but on a whole, you can use your judgment to synthesize the material into a full picture of what is going on and make concrete decisions based on that. The ultimate goal, however, is not to end in a stalemate, such as, "Scientist A disagrees with Scientist B; therefore, I have no opinion." In such a case, more research is needed.

There is one more important element to conducting research: avoiding plagiarism. When students plagiarize, it is often because they need to save time, think it will be easier, or don't know how to write and cite from research. However, plagiarism is a serious concern in any academic or professional setting. It's up to you to learn how to use research with honesty and integrity.

But what about paraphrasing? You've been paraphrasing your whole life, often when repeating a story or conversation. But did you know that even when you paraphrase (using all your own words), you still might need to cite where the information came from? If the information is common knowledge and found in a wide array of sources, you do not have to cite a specific source. However, if you are paraphrasing information that is unique, new, or original to a specific person or source, you need to credit that source. When paraphrasing someone's research, for instance, the original work should be cited even if you are not using any direct quotes. If you are unsure of whether or not to credit a source, you should include a citation. One day, you may publish something that others will cite; you will want to be given credit for your work, and others feel the same way.

Smart Internet Searches

You can use smart internet searches to avoid biased search results.

- Rather than Googling everything, **think about where you might go for good information** on a topic. For example, are you looking for health information? Try the Mayo Clinic, the National Institute of Health, or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. For questions about atmospheric science, try NOAA or NASA.
- **Avoid asking questions that imply a certain answer.** Instead of "Why is butter bad for my health?" search for "What are the health benefits and concerns about butter?" Instead of "Is the electoral college outdated?" type "pros and cons of the electoral college."
- **Use different search prompts and compare the results.** As you sift through the results of an initial query, continue to reformulate your search using more accurate terms.

Assignments

1. Create a list of resources that you might use in your study of government. (You can start with the resources listed in the box "Important Research Sites.") You will continue to add to this list as you conduct additional research and work on your course project. Compile the online links in one computer file and/or bookmark them for easy access. You are encouraged to use print sources as well. (Any textbook related to U.S. government can be useful.)

   To begin your list, ask several adults you know where they would look for information about the U.S. government and civics issues in general. If, for example, someone says the town library or the library at the local university is a good place to conduct research, find out the library's hours. Write down this information on your resource list. Visit the library to talk to the reference librarian; add any recommended resource to your list.

2. Fact-checkers are people who review information to determine its validity. One of their main tools is *lateral reading*. Rather than reading one article, scrolling from top to bottom vertically, they scan information in the first article, and then they read multiple related articles, looking for places where there is agreement or contradiction.

   Practice lateral reading by choosing a topic to explore and then creating a map of where this topic takes you. Wikipedia is a popular starting point for an internet search, and the many related links that are included in most articles make it easy to branch out to get more information. However, you don't want to explore only one article and its related links; the process of lateral reading includes restarting the search repeatedly to find other relevant articles and sites.

   Start with a search question/prompt. It can be related to an issue or area you are considering for your course project, or it can be related to politics or government on the local, national, or international level. Choose one of the top search results (choose wisely!), and read some or all of the

article. Click on related links, keeping track of each site. Go back to your original search prompt—you can keep it the same or change the wording to refine the search—and choose another article. Repeat the process until your lateral reading covers at least three text sources and one video.

For each site you click on, record the following:

- Author (if known)
- Title of article
- Website name
- Date published or posted
- URL

Use this information to create a citation in MLA style. (See the appendix for details on citation formats for online websites, articles, and videos.)

As you navigate your research sources, create a map, outline, or other graphic organizer to show how the sites relate to one another. For instance, in outline form, your map might look like this:

Site 1

1. Related link in article
2. Related link in article
    a. Link from there

Site 2

1. Related link in article
    a. Link from there

On your map, include the article or website name for each site. You will share both your works cited list and your navigational map with your teacher.

3. From the research you conducted for assignment #2, choose one article and paraphrase the information in it. In your summary of the article, make sure to explain the concepts, ideas, or events in your own words. If you use any specific phrases or sentences, be sure they are in quotation marks with an in-text citation. Include a link to the original article, and credit the source in your summary. (You may want to review the sections on plagiarism and citing sources in the appendix of this coursebook.)

Important Research Sites

Visit the following websites to become familiar with what they offer and how to navigate them:

National Archives: www.archives.gov

U.S. Government Services and Information: www.usa.gov

The White House: www.whitehouse.gov

Supreme Court: www.supremecourt.gov

Congress: www.congress.gov

Your state government's website

In addition, there are many websites that present multiple sides of an issue and can help you determine the accuracy of a claim. Check out these websites:

www.procon.org

www.factcheck.org

www.politifact.com

www.snopes.com

Bookmark these sites, and add them to your resource file.

Course Project

Clarifying Your Focus

As you think about how you might like to work for change in your community or beyond, it can help to see what others have done. Read the following:

"6 Student Stories on Change-Makers in Their Communities"

www.yesmagazine.org/education/2020/06/11/6-student-stories-on-change-makers-in-their-communities

Read/view all six projects. Do any spark your interest? You might find inspiration in the issues these students addressed or in the format they used to share their work.

Afterward, complete one of the following steps.

If you have an idea of the general focus of your course project:

Write a few sentences about what draws you to this issue. Then, write a list of questions you have, information you'd like to know, or possible areas you'd like to explore.

If you are still unsure of the general focus of your course project:

Ask three to five people you know this question: "If you could change something in the community, nation, or world, what would it be?" Or perhaps ask this question: "What do you see as the most pressing problems facing our community, nation, or world?"

Write down their responses. If one response appeals to you, write a few sentences about what draws you to this issue.

SHARE YOUR WORK

When you have completed this lesson, share your work with your teacher, and include any questions you might have. Notify your teacher when your work is ready to be reviewed.

Lesson

4

Foundations of Civilization

Learning Objectives

In this lesson, you will:

- Analyze the similarities and differences between types of government.
- Present information in a chart.
- Compare news items from local, national, and international newspapers.

Before You Begin

Why do we have governments? Human beings began organizing themselves into groups in ancient times for the same reasons we do today: for protection, mutual assistance, and cooperation. When humans shifted from hunter-gatherers to settled farmers, control of land and water became important. Some of the earliest civilizations formed in the river valleys of the ancient Middle East, Egypt, and India. How would creating an agrarian civilization also have required the need for government? We can learn a lot about where we are today by looking back in time.

Many early cultures practiced some form of participatory democracy, including ancient India, Greece, and the Iroquois Confederacy in pre-Columbian North America. Democracy is a system where citizens are involved in deciding issues related to the laws and policies governing their lives.

Throughout history, many societies have been governed by a single person who made all the decisions for the people. In Mesopotamia, Hammurabi ruled Babylon around 1790 BCE. He created a set of nearly 300 laws known as the Code of Hammurabi. The laws

ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- ☐ Read the Before You Begin section.
- ☐ Reflect on and discuss how laws relate to values.
- ☐ Reflect on the purpose or benefit of studying government.
- ☐ Watch a video on reasons for studying government and politics, and explain key elements.
- ☐ Create a chart that compares different types of government.
- ☐ Course Project: Identifying Current Events, Concerns, and Issues

addressed community life, religion, family relations, and business, and they imposed fierce punishments for those found guilty of a crime—a son who struck his father could have his hand cut off; if a man destroyed the eye or broke the bone of another, they could destroy his eye or break his bone; anyone caught committing a robbery was put to death.

In 522 BCE, the Persian Empire was governed by Darius the Great. He divided his huge empire into smaller provinces that were ruled by local officials. The government built roads to connect the provinces, which facilitated trade and the movement of soldiers. Darius introduced a common currency and a consistent system of weights and measures, which further facilitated trade and strengthened the wealth and status of the Persian Empire.

Africa, India, Asia, and other regions around the world have a long history of complex governing structures and powerful rulers. Many ruled by primogeniture: the firstborn son inherited the family estate and title. For instance, China was ruled by a system of dynasties for thousands of years. When one king died, his eldest son became ruler.

One example of democracy, or governance by the people instead of an all-powerful ruler, is found in ancient Greece. The Greeks divided their land into city-states, each with its own laws and government. Many city-states practiced some form of democracy, placing the rule of the land in the hands of the citizens rather than one individual or select group. Athens chose a form of direct democracy around 460 BCE. Athenians believed that all citizens should be treated the same way in terms of the law, regardless of their financial status. (Citizenship was only granted to free males, who accounted for about half of the population, so it was not a true democracy by today's standards, but it was advanced for its time.) Citizens took turns acting as judges, public officials, and council members. When not serving in an official governmental capacity, they participated in regular assemblies where they discussed, debated, and voted on issues related to running the state, such as public policy, taxes, and military matters.

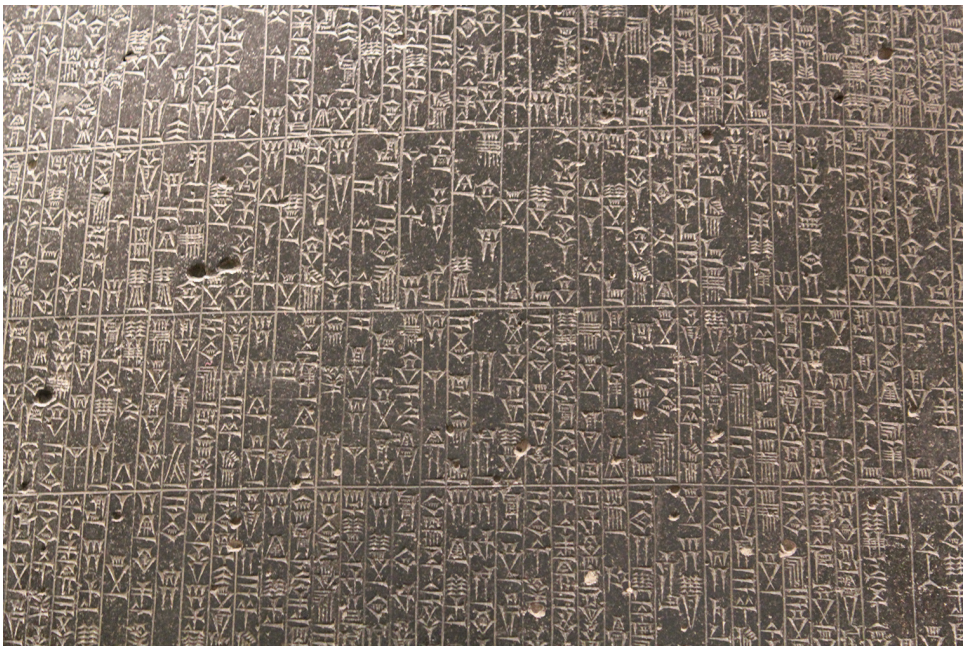
In ancient Rome, a republic was formed to protect citizens from being ruled by a single individual (a king or queen). In the Roman Republic, authority was shared by elected officials, a senate that served in an advisory capacity and controlled finances, and assemblies, which represented the general populace. The Romans' practice of impartial justice was based on the Twelve Tables, which was developed around 450 BCE and focused on civil law, the rights of individuals or civilians. Nearly 1,000 years later, around 527 CE, Romans developed the Justinian Code that declared specific rights:

- No one is compelled to defend a cause against his will.
- No one suffers a penalty for what he thinks.
- No one may be forcibly removed from his own house.
- Anything not permitted the defendant ought not be allowed the plaintiff.
- The burden of proof is upon the party affirming, not on the party denying.
- A father is not a competent witness for a son, nor a son for a father.

Some of these rights are remarkably similar to ones common in the United States today.

Throughout history, there have been rulers who governed their citizens with intelligence and wisdom while others acted out of greed and a desire for power. Often, citizens would have little or no voice in how they were treated or what was expected of them. Establishing laws like those in the Justinian Code was literally life-changing for ordinary citizens.

In addition to being influenced by the laws of ancient cultures around the world, the democratic government of the United States was influenced by Native American forms of government. In the 1100s, the Iroquois League of Five Nations was formed by the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca tribes. This political body was so successful that 600 years later, in 1751, Benjamin Franklin recommended the League's Constitution as an example of a union that "has subsisted Ages and appears indissoluble." In 1754, Benjamin Franklin proposed an initial plan for the United States modeled on the Iroquois Confederacy ("Tribal Nations and the United States: An Introduction," National Congress of American Indians, ncai.org).



The Code of Hammurabi (Image credit: theachernar)

Reflect and Discuss

Have you ever thought about how laws relate to values? For example, many people value their health. One law that supports that value is the law that prohibits people from smoking cigarettes in public places (and subjecting others to secondhand smoke). Think about or discuss with others the connection between values and laws. What is something you value? Is there a law that supports it?

Terms to Know

Below are some terms that you will need to know on your journey to understanding how government works. These provide important points of difference in how humans have participated in government as a system.

- Authoritarianism
- Totalitarianism
- Dictatorship
- Theocracy
- Monarchy
- Absolute monarchy
- Constitutional monarchy
- Aristocracy
- Autocracy
- Oligarchy
- Democracy
- Direct democracy
- Representative democracy
- Social democracy
- Republic
- Communism
- Socialism
- Anarchy

Assignments

1. Why study government? Write down your thoughts. Do not research this question. What do you think?
2. Watch the following video:

   "Introduction: Crash Course U.S. Government and Politics"

   www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrk4oY7UxpQ

   Based on the many reasons given in the video regarding the importance of learning about government, what do you think are the most important reasons? Why?
3. There are many ways to organize a government, leadership, rules, and the consequences of breaking those rules. Each government system has a different ratio of democracy versus absolutism. Research the following types of government, and create a chart that explains the differences and similarities between them:
   - Dictatorship (autocracy, authoritarian, totalitarian)
   - Monarchy (absolute monarchy, constitutional monarchy)
   - Oligarchy (aristocracy, theocracy, corporatocracy)

- Democracy (direct democracy, representative democracy, social democracy, republic)
- Communism and socialism
- Anarchy

Your chart should include a brief definition (written in your own words) of each type of system and subsystem.

Course Project

Identifying Current Events, Concerns, and Issues

> *"What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make."*
>
> **—Jane Goodall**

An essential element of your course project is that it be useful to others. A good place to start is by reflecting on questions like these:

- What kind of help do people need?
- What concerns do they have?
- Are there particular concerns, problems, or issues related to your community or region?

To gain an understanding of current issues, you'll refer to newspapers.

Browse at least five newspapers on Newseum:

"Today's Front Pages"

www.newseum.org/todaysfrontpages

Begin with a newspaper that represents your geographic location. Diversify your search by including newspapers from big cities and small towns. You can focus on a single region in the United States or widen your search to include other countries. Browse the headlines to look for common issues or themes. Pay attention to which articles are emphasized with big, bold, front-page headlines and which are relegated to a lower position on the page and smaller headlines.

Compile a summary of your findings, and then use your results to answer the questions listed above.

Extend Your Learning

To gain a better understanding of issues people face today, expand your search to national and international newspapers. Look for trends that are regional or specific to a certain place. Explore further to find out what, if anything, is being done to address these concerns.

SHARE YOUR WORK

When you have completed this lesson, share your work with your teacher. If you have any questions about your work, the lesson assignments, or how to share your work, let your teacher know.

Lesson

5

Philosophies of Government

Learning Objectives

In this lesson, you will:

- Explain key concepts in primary source documents.
- Discuss political philosophy based on the writings of a historical figure.
- Identify essential elements for governing a new colony.

Before You Begin

If you have studied U.S. history, you may be familiar with the Mayflower Compact, the Declaration of Independence, and the Articles of Confederation, all of which led to the creation of the U.S. Constitution. The Articles of Confederation were a precursor to the Constitution; they called for giving the states most of the power, thus giving less power to the federal (national) government. The Articles of Confederation were ratified in 1781 but later replaced by the current U.S. Constitution in 1789 after it became clear that a stronger central government was necessary.

A nation's constitution is a document outlining the principles and laws of the nation. What are some elements of the U.S. Constitution that you are familiar with? Perhaps you know about the freedoms of speech, religion, and the press. Perhaps you know about the right to vote or the right to a fair trial. Maybe you are familiar with the three branches of government that provide checks and balances or the separation of church and state. All these concepts are cornerstones—essential elements of the U.S. government.

In the decades leading up to the colonists declaring independence from England, the American Revolution, and the creation of the U.S.

ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- ☐ Read the Before You Begin section.
- ☐ Reflect on and discuss balancing individual freedom and the public good.
- ☐ Read and reflect on the Mayflower Compact and the Declaration of Independence.
- ☐ Research a historical figure, and use direct quotes to write a philosophical conversation.
- ☐ Course Project: Refining Your Essential Question

Constitution, the idea of "natural rights" was very much on people's minds. Enlightenment philosophers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries spent a lot of time debating how people should govern or be governed.

Here is a brief introduction to some of the influential thinkers whose ideas had a profound impact on the formation of the U.S. government:

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), English philosopher

"During the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition called war; and such a war, as if of every man, against every man."

Thomas Hobbes believed that humans are, by nature, selfish and self-serving; they are prone to fear, immoral acts, and war. In order to save human beings from themselves, Hobbes asserted that a strong government was necessary (and a monarchy was best). He introduced the idea of a social contract in which citizens would unite and accept a central authority figure or structure. Hobbes believed that only when people agreed to and followed common rules would they be protected from the chaos that would result if everyone selfishly followed their own desires ("the war of all against all" that would happen without strong government leadership).

John Locke (1632–1704), English philosopher known as the "Father of Liberalism"

"All mankind . . . being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions."

John Locke promoted the idea that government should be based on the consent of those being governed. He believed the purpose of government was to protect the essential rights of "life, liberty, and estate." These ideals, as well as Locke's ideas about religious tolerance and the separation of church and state, had a profound impact on the Declaration of Independence and the formation of the U.S. government.

Montesquieu (1689–1755), French judge and political philosopher

"The tyranny of a prince in an oligarchy is not so dangerous to the public welfare as the apathy of a citizen in a democracy."

Montesquieu was a French baron whose ideas detailed in *De L'Esprit des Lois* (*The Spirit of the Laws*) influenced governments around the world. He wrote about the importance of the separation of powers into independent branches of government: legislative, executive, and judicial. He reasoned that this separation of power would guard against despotism or oppressive rule. Montesquieu's ideas influenced many people around the world, including those writing the constitution for the newly formed United States of America.

Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790), American statesman, political philosopher, and inventor

"Justice will not be served until those who are unaffected are as outraged as those who are."

"It is the first responsibility of every citizen to question authority."

Benjamin Franklin is famous for so many accomplishments that it is easy to forget he was also a driving force in the American Revolution and the formation of the U.S. government. In 1754 in Albany, New York, Franklin presented his vision of a national congress, the Albany Plan (modeled on the Iroquois Confederacy), which influenced the creation of the U.S. Constitution. In 1776, he helped write the Declaration of Independence. Seven years later, he negotiated the treaty that ended the Revolutionary War.

Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797), English philosopher and women's rights advocate

"I do not wish them [women] to have power over men; but over themselves."

"Slavery to monarchs and ministers, which the world will be long freeing itself from, and whose deadly grasp stops the progress of the human mind, is not yet abolished."

***Mary Wollstonecraft* by John Opie, circa 1797 (Image credit: National Portrait Gallery)**

Mary Wollstonecraft was an outspoken advocate of women's rights and sought educational reform in England that would allow girls to be educated the same as boys. She believed that better education would open opportunities for women to be more productive members of society. Wollstonecraft felt the educational system should be changed through political action at the national level, which would be beneficial for everyone, not just women. Her work inspired later women's rights advocates in Europe and America.

Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826), American statesman, lawyer, and philosopher

"Sometimes it is said that man cannot be trusted with the government of himself. Can he, then, be trusted with the government of others? Or have we found angels in the form of kings to govern him? Let history answer this question."

"History, in general, only informs us of what bad government is."

Before Thomas Jefferson became the third president of the United States, he was instrumental in the birth of the nation. He served in the Continental Congress, during which time he wrote the Declaration of Independence (aided by a committee that included John Adams and Benjamin Franklin). Jefferson believed in limiting the powers of government to allow citizens greater liberty. The importance of individual rights and freedoms is a prominent feature of the Declaration of Independence, as eloquently expressed in this passage: *We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain*

unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. (At the time it was written, however, "all men" referred to only white male landowners, and Jefferson himself was a slave owner while advocating for liberty as an unalienable right; in the past 250 years, many people have fought to secure the same rights for all people.)

Abigail Adams (1744–1818), American advocate of women's rights and the abolition of slavery

"If we mean to have heroes, statesmen and philosophers, we should have learned women."

Abigail Adams played a vital role as confidante and advisor to her husband, President John Adams. She was deeply involved in the political landscape of the new nation and was an avid supporter of women's rights (including the right to a comprehensive education) and the abolition of slavery. As the colonists were deciding whether or not to declare independence from Great Britain in 1776, Adams wrote to her husband, "*. . . in the New Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make, I desire you would Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors . . . If particular attention is not paid to the Ladies we are determined to foment a Rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no Voice, or Representation.*"

Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859), French sociologist and political theorist

"There are many men of principle in both parties in America, but there is no party of principle."

After visiting the United States in 1831, Alexis de Tocqueville wrote Democracy in America, in which he shared his observations of Americans and American politics, especially the concepts of equality and individualism. Tocqueville pointed to the United States as a prime example of a society of equals. At the same time, he warned about the potential risk to individual rights if the majority rule silenced individual voices, writing, "*In the United States, the majority undertakes to supply a multitude of ready-made opinions for the use of individuals, who are thus relieved from the necessity of forming opinions of their own.*"

Many of the ideas of these influential people are reflected in the U.S. Constitution.

All governments are an experiment. Those forming a government must grapple with difficult questions, such as:

- Can humans be left to figure things out for themselves without a strong authority?
- What if citizens don't agree with one another or with their leaders?
- Does might (or military strength) make right?
- How are liberty and equality related? Can a society have true liberty without equality?
- How can societies ensure that minority points of view are heard?
- What happens if people don't feel their needs are being met by government policy?
- What happens if the public loses confidence in or no longer supports their elected leaders?

Most of us want our individual needs met while ensuring that others also have what they need. How we go about this is always up for lively debate, which can lead to conflict, confrontation, and even war.

Reflect and Discuss

Tocqueville raised the issue of the risk to individual rights under majority rule (rules established and approved by the majority of—but not all—citizens). Balancing an individual's rights with what those in power believe to be the good of the society is an ongoing challenge. The global COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 is a good example of a time when individual rights were curbed for the good of the many.

What would be the benefits of allowing individuals complete freedom? What would be the drawbacks? What is the role of government in determining individual freedoms? How does this role change during times of crisis like a global pandemic?

Discuss your thoughts with someone who is your age and with someone who is much older. What are their thoughts about balancing individual freedom and the public good?

Terms to Know

Here are the key terms to understand:

- Social contract
- Separation of church and state
- Separation of powers
- Mayflower Compact
- The Declaration of Independence
- The Articles of Confederation
- The Constitution of the United States of America

Assignments

1. Read the Mayflower Compact (found in the appendix of this coursebook). Reflect on the phrase "civil body politic." Think about why this agreement was so significant.

   Then, read the Declaration of Independence (also found in the appendix). Write a brief reflection. What did you find surprising or significant? Why do you think this document was so influential, not only at the time it was written but long afterward as well?

2. Choose one of the key figures listed in the Before You Begin section. Do some additional research about that figure's political philosophy. (You will find several good online links for starting your research at www.oakmeadow.com/curriculum-links.)

   Imagine you are having a conversation with this person. To open the conversation, pose this question:

   > *How will learning about the foundations and structure of the U.S. government help me change the world?*

   If you have an idea about what you'd like to address in your course project, feel free to replace "change the world" with something more specific to your interests (such as, "How will learning about the foundations and structure of the U.S. government help me address illiteracy in the United States?" or "How will learning about the foundations and structure of the U.S. government help me fight cyberbullying?").

   Based on their beliefs and historical writings, what advice might this person give you in the pursuit of change? Be creative in your response, but base it solidly in their philosophy of government. If the conversation evolves into a discussion about internet safety or another topic that relates to something that wasn't yet invented, just use your imagination, combined with what you have learned about that person. Long before modern times, political philosophers thought about harassment, injustice, and how people should behave.

   In your conversation, include at least two direct quotes from the writings or speeches of the person you choose. Note these quotes by underlining or highlighting them. When read aloud, your conversation should take several minutes—this gives you plenty of time to debate and elaborate on the ideas and issues you are discussing.

   You can choose how you'd like to share this conversation. It can be in audio or video form. (Make sure the two people in the conversation have different voices, and make it clear who they are portraying.) It can be written as a play, in story form, or in graphic novel/comic book style. Take your time to polish the writing so the conversation flows smoothly and with purpose.

Course Project

Refining Your Essential Question

Now that you've had several weeks to consider your course project, it is time to develop the essential question that will guide your work. First, take the time to go over the steps you've taken so far in your course project.

Think about the questions in lesson 1:

- What are some of the burning questions you have about the world?
- What do you like to do?

Review your answers to these questions, and then consider ways you might implement them in your course project. Think about the person you talked to in lesson 2 and what they had to say about making change in the world. Think about the questions you came up with (and the answers from others) in lesson 3. Consider the themes or trends you noticed when surveying current events in the news in lesson 4.

Finally, consider the essential question posed at the beginning of this course:

> **How will learning about the foundations and structure of the U.S. government help me change the world?**

Now, rewrite this question to include the issue or change you'd like to address. Here are some examples:

> How will learning about the foundations and structure of the U.S. government help me . . .

- create a new park for neighborhood kids?
- educate people about how to help keep the local rivers clean?
- encourage more young voters to be involved in policy-making and political campaigns?
- reduce the number of nuclear weapons on the planet?
- promote the cause of eradicating hunger?

As you consider what you'd like to accomplish with your course project, you might write several versions of this essential question. As your project develops, the focus may shift and narrow, so having several versions to begin with may help you see the different avenues you can take.

Extend Your Learning

For a greater challenge, research two or more of the historical figures listed in the Before You Begin section, and create a conversation between them. Have them debate the success of the U.S. Constitution based on the nation's history since it was written.

SHARE YOUR WORK

When you have completed this lesson, share your work with your teacher. If you have any questions, let your teacher know.