

AMERICAN GOVERNMENT AND LAW CURRICULUM

DESCRIPTION OF COURSE

This course is designed to provide an in-depth look at the American Political System, along with an overview of the American legal system. Students are encouraged to participate in discussion and debate as we examine the founding documents, political culture and ideology, the role of the media, criminal and civil law, along with many other interesting and relevant topics. Further, students will be exposed to the operation of state and local government with the object of making them more responsible participants in the political process.

GOALS OF THE COURSE

1. To provide a framework for understanding the purposes, principles, and practices of American government and law as established by the Constitution of the United States.
2. To help students understand their rights and responsibilities as citizens and how to exercise these rights and responsibilities in local, state, and national government.
3. To provide a forum for informed political debate and discussion.
4. Allow students to utilize critical thinking skills while analyzing primary source documents, news, and electronic media.
5. To help students understand the legal system (both civil and criminal) and how it affects them as citizens in a democracy.

THEME QUESTIONS FOR AMERICAN GOVERNMENT AND LAW

1. What are the foundations of Government in the United States? (USG 2.1)*
 - Enlightenment influences
 - Colonial/Revolutionary Experience
 - Declaration of Independence
 - Massachusetts Constitution
 - United States Constitution
2. What are the purposes, principles, and institutions of government in the United States? (USG 3.3)
 - Federalism, separation of powers, checks and balances
 - Representative democracy
 - Executive, legislative, and judicial branches
 - Legislative process, judicial review, executive powers
 - Individual rights under the law

* *Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework, August 2003*

3. What are the responsibilities of citizens in the United States? (USG 5.2)

- Voting, volunteering, jury duty
- Monitoring through interest groups
- Taking an active role in public policy
- Understanding rights and responsibilities under the law

4. What is the nature, origin, and procedure of criminal and civil law in the United States? (USG 5.6)

- History of Laws
- U.S. Criminal Legal System
- Criminal trial simulation
- Civil law
- Rights and Responsibilities

AMERICAN GOVERNMENT AND LAW UNITS OF STUDY

- Constitutional Underpinnings of the United States Government
- Political beliefs and behaviors of individuals
- mass media and politics
- Elections and Campaigns
- Institutions of National Government:
- State and Local Government
- Criminal Law
- Civil Law

TEXTS AND OTHER SOURCES

AMERICAN GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS TODAY, WADSWORTH

WE THE STUDENTS: SUPREME COURT CASES FOR AND ABOUT STUDENTS,
JAMIN B. RASKIN, CQ

SPIN CYCLE, HOWARD KURTZ

In addition to these texts, supplemental readings, primary sources are given to students as handouts. These sources include written documents, photographs, and political cartoons. Also, numerous Internet resources, readings and assignments can be accessed through the class web page, as well as links to a variety of news and government sites with resources and information.

ASSESSMENTS AND EVALUATION

Tests and Quizzes

Term Papers

Video Presentations	Class Discussion
Projects	Self-Assessment
Peer Assessment	Document Analysis
Debates	Mock Trial
Journals	Homework
Attendance	MidYear and Final Exams
Presentations	Open Essays

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Teacher Directed Questioning	Lecture
Student Simulation	Research and Writing
Discussion	Library Skills
Photo/Cartoon Analysis	Graph Interpretation
Student Presentations	Cooperative Learning
Media Analysis	Field Work
Guest Presenters	Field Trips
Computer Learning	Case briefing

UNIT OF STUDY: CONSTITUTIONAL UNDERPINNINGS OF THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

ESSENTIAL GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- What contribution did the enlightenment make to the formation of our Constitution?
- What impact did the Colonial experience have on the writing of the Constitution?
- What early English/Colonial efforts contributed to the Constitution?

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Students will explain the impact of European political thought through the writings of Locke, Montesquieu, Hobbs, Rousseau, and Voltaire. (USG 2.3)
2. Students will identify the reasons why the colonists favored a limited federal government. (USG 1.7)
3. Students will explain the significance of the Magna Carta, English Bill of Rights, Mayflower Compact, and the Massachusetts State Constitution on the U.S. Constitution. (USG 1.9)

RESOURCES

Why Government? Lesson

Locke / Jefferson Plagiarism lesson
Locke's Second Treatise of Government
The Declaration of Independence
Federalist Papers #10 and #51
Massachusetts State Constitution

UNIT OF STUDY: POLITICAL BELIEFS AND BEHAVIORS OF INDIVIDUALS

ESSENTIAL GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- What factors influence Public Opinion?
- What factors influence one's political ideology?
- What trends have influenced voter participation in recent years?

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

1. Students will understand the role of the family, religion, the gender gap, education, occupation, race, and region in determining public opinion on political issues. (USG 5.5)
2. Students will approximate their own political ideology through a series of ideology tests discovering whether they tend to lean toward liberal, conservative, populist, or libertarian views. (USG 5.5)
3. Students will understand the factors which have led to a decline in voter participation in recent years (Generational replacement, attack ads, voter apathy, length of campaigns etc.) (USG 5.8)

RESOURCES

Readings on Pluralism and The Power Elite
U.S. Citizenship Test
Political Ideology Handbook Project
World's Smallest Political Quiz and other online ideology tests
Public Opinion and Ideology Chart
Questions from the National Council on Public Polls

UNIT OF STUDY: MASS MEDIA AND POLITICS

ESSENTIAL GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What role does the media play in helping citizen become informed/misinformed consumers?
- What has been the relationship between the White House, along with other government agencies and the media?
- What role does the media have in influencing the outcome of elections?

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Students will identify ways in which advertising is used to influence the general public. (USG 3.13)
2. Students will learn to examine all forms of media as critical, informed consumers. (USG 3.13)
3. Students will identify ways in which the media (particularly television) has influenced the outcome of some elections (Kennedy/Nixon debates) (USG 3.13)

RESOURCES

Informed Consumer Activity
 Political Landscape Map
 Interest Group Study and Influence Activity
 Film “Wag the Dog”
 Book “Spin Cycle”
 Video “Seeing is Believing” Media responsibility
 Media Ethics lesson
 Kennedy-Nixon Video vs. Radio tapes

UNIT OF STUDY: ELECTIONS AND CAMPAIGNS

ESSENTIAL GUIDING QUESTIONS

- To what extent does money and interest groups affect the election process?
- What role has elections played in party realignment throughout 19th and 20th century?
- What efforts can be made to control the influence of money in elections?

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Students will explain the difference between hard money and soft money donations. (USG 5.3)
2. Students will analyze the elections of 1800, 1828, 1860, 1896, and 1932 to show the effects of party realignment. (USG 3.7, USG 5.4)

3. Students will cite examples of attempts to control campaign financing (Buckley v. Valeo, Campaign Finance Reform Act 2002). (USG 5.3)

RESOURCES

Campaign Finance Board Games (Project)
Opensecrets.org
The Bottom Line an where it came from (Handout)
Film “Primary Colors”
Video Documentary “Taking on the Kennedys”
Election/Campaign Role play
War Room Project
Election Term Paper

UNIT OF STUDY: INSTITUTIONS OF NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

ESSENTIAL GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What are the purposes, organization, and functions of the institution of the national government?
- What is the role of both the national and state governments in the federal system?
- What is the place of law in the American constitutional system?

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Students should be able to describe the purpose, organization, and functions of the three branches of the federal government (legislative, executive, and judicial). (USG 3.3)
2. Students should describe the limits of powers (Federal vs. State) as well as protections that the States have from the federal government (i.e. 10th Amendment). (USG 3.3)
3. Students should give examples of how the rule of law protects the basic rights of citizens (life, liberty, property), and how it establishes limits on both those who govern and the governed. (USG 1.5)

RESOURCES

Online Congressional Committee assignment
Who’s Who in Congress (handout)
School House Rock Video
Write a letter to your Rep. or Senator (assignment)
CSPAN Presidential Leadership survey
JFK inaugural address
Presidential Crisis Leadership

Film clips “13 Days” “Nixon” discussion questions
Text: We the Students: Supreme Court cases for and about students
Landmark Supreme Court Cases (RESEARCH PROJECT)
Supreme Court Justices (handout)
Video “Your court system and you”

UNIT OF STUDY: STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

ESSENTIAL GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What are the powers most commonly associated with State Governments?
- What is the organization and responsibilities of the Massachusetts state government ?
- What is the organization and the responsibilities of the local government?

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Students should identify and give examples of reserved powers as well as concurrent powers. (USG 3.2)
2. Students should describe and analyze the powers of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches at the State and local levels. (USG 3.3)
3. Students should be able to describe the powers and organization of the towns of Dover and Sherborn. (USG 3.8) (USG 3.10)

RESOURCES

State and local Maps
Massachusetts State Constitution
Town Charters (Dover and Sherborn)
Field Trip to State House

UNIT OF STUDY: CRIMINAL LAW

ESSENTIAL GUIDING QUESTIONS

- How are individuals accused of crimes protected by due process of law?
- How are your rights as students in a high school different from outside the school setting?
- What is the nature and purpose of law?
- What are the general legal proceedings in a criminal trial?

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Students should be able to identify and explain the significance of habeas corpus, Presumption of innocence, trial by jury, right to counsel, right against self-incrimination, protection against double jeopardy, and the right of appeal. (USF 3.11)
2. Students should understand the implications of important school-related cases such as New Jersey v. TLO, Tinker v. DeMoines, Abington Township v. Schempp, and others. (USG 3.11)
3. Students will demonstrate an understanding of the nature and origin of laws as well as the criminal and trial process. (USG 3.4)

RESOURCES

You and the Law exercise
Case Briefing
Case simulations
Mock Arrest activity
Guest Lecture: Dover/Sherborn Police
Mock Trial Project/Competition

UNIT OF STUDY: CIVIL LAW

ESSENTIAL GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. What are the major differences between the U.S. criminal system and Civil proceedings?
2. What are your rights and responsibilities as a consumer/tenant in regard to civil law?
3. What are the guiding principles of tort and contract law?

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Students will understand the concept and scope of negligent behavior (both intentional and non-intentional) (USG 3.4)
2. Students will demonstrate an understanding of the law in regard to customer relations.
3. Students will understand the rights of tenants and the responsibilities of property owners. (USG 3.4)

RESOURCES

Guest lecture by Attorneys

A guide to Consumer Relations

Real Estate Contracts

Case Studies in Civil Law

O.J. Simpson Case (Criminal vs. Civil)

Better Business Bureau of Massachusetts