

# Civics Overview



The Civics Course focuses on several different aspects of U.S. citizens' rights and duties. Through their online readings, lesson extensions, and lesson activities, students explore the history of the founding of the U.S. government, principles of U.S. democracy, and the importance of civic participation. Sprinkled throughout the course are ten primary source lessons for students to analyze, including founding documents, pieces of legislation, speeches, or declarations.

Unit	Summary
<b>Civics 101</b>	This introductory unit focuses on different forms and systems of government.
<b>Founding Fathers and the Establishment of the U.S. Government</b>	In unit 2, students explore the origins of our “grand experiment” in democracy.
<b>Governing Documents—Declaration of Independence</b>	Unit 3 delves into the document that launched American democracy—the Declaration of Independence.
<b>Governing Documents—The Constitution</b>	It can often take more than one attempt at something to get it right. In unit 4, students see how this applied to the Founding Fathers while writing a governing document for the newly independent country.
<b>Striking a Balance—Separation of Powers</b>	In this unit, students gain a deeper understanding of the Founding Fathers' struggle to find a balance of power between a centralized national government and the individual states, as well as the powers and responsibilities of each of the three branches of government.
<b>Constitutional Rights, Part 1</b>	Unit 6 outlines the process for amending the Constitution and gives students a closer look at the Bill of Rights. This lesson also includes an analysis of the Louisiana Purchase and the Alien and Sedition Acts.
<b>Constitutional Rights, Part 2</b>	As a continuation of unit 6, unit 7 closely examines the rights provided and safeguarded by the Constitution.
<b>Power of the Court</b>	Unit 8 is an introduction to the American legal system.
<b>Supreme Court with Supreme Power</b>	In unit 9, students investigate several Supreme Court decisions that have had a profound impact on the lives and rights of Americans.
<b>The U.S. Government and You</b>	The 10th unit allows students to apply the Civics content knowledge they have gained so far to their individual selves, by addressing the ways that the U.S. government impacts the daily lives of Americans.
<b>Domestic and Foreign Policy</b>	Unit 11 focuses on how government works to serve and protect America's interests at home and abroad.
<b>U.S. Government and International Conflicts</b>	Previous units explored the balance of power between different branches of government. In unit 12, students take an even closer look at how the legislative and executive branches utilized their powers during international crises and other instances in American history.
<b>Citizenship</b>	Unit 13 is all about what it means to be a citizen of the United States of America.
<b>Voting—Your Civic Duty</b>	Unit 14 presents the responsibility that comes along with the right to vote.

# Civics Unit and Lesson Details

## Unit 1

### Civics 101

#### Summary

This introductory unit focuses on different forms and systems of government, including democracies, socialist governments, communist governments, oligarchies, monarchies, and autocracies. Students go on to study parliamentary, unitary, confederal, and federal systems to learn how various forms of government divide power.

#### Lessons

- Who Calls the Shots?
- Who Else Can Call the Shots?
- Power: To Divide or Not to Divide...

## Unit 2

### Founding Fathers and the Establishment of the U.S. Government

#### Summary

In unit 2, students explore the origins of our “grand experiment” in democracy. Each lesson traces the core ideals of American democracy—such as the separation of powers and individual rights—back to their origins. Influential thinkers and documents include: John Locke, the Enlightenment, Montesquieu, the Magna Carta, the English Bill of Rights, the Mayflower Compact, and Common Sense.

#### Lessons

- John Locke and Thomas Jefferson Get Enlightened
- Good Thinking: The Separation of Powers
- Looking Back to Move Forward
- Making Sense of What Comes Next

## Unit 3

### Governing Documents—Declaration of Independence

#### Summary

Unit 3 delves into the document that launched American democracy—the Declaration of Independence. Beginning with the Stamp Act, the Townshend Revenue Act, and the infamous Boston Tea Party, students investigate the events building up to the colonies’ fight for independence. Students also examine the meaning behind the often-quoted line from the Declaration, “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness,” before diving into the Declaration’s list of “grievances” against England. A lesson in this unit also presents the Lee Resolution, a primary source proposing independence from England, written a month before the Declaration of Independence was adopted by the Continental Congress.

#### Lessons

- All’s Fair in Love and War?
- Spilling the Tea
- Declaring Our Rights
- We’ve Had It, and Here’s Why!
- Primary Source: The Lee Resolution

## Unit 4

### Governing Documents—The Constitution

#### Lessons

- From Weakness Comes Change
- The Preamble Unpacked
- Keeping Government Power in Check
- Primary Source: The Virginia Plan

#### Summary

It can often take more than one attempt at something to get it right. In unit 4, students see how this applied to the Founding Fathers while writing a governing document for the newly independent country. Students begin by uncovering the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation before studying the Preamble to the Constitution. In addition, students learn about two pillars of the U.S. Constitution: the three branches of government and the system of checks and balances. This unit also gives students the opportunity to analyze the Virginia Plan, the document that framed the first draft of the U.S. Constitution.

## Unit 5

### Striking a Balance—Separation of Powers

#### Lessons

- The Battle Over the U.S. Constitution: The Federalists
- The Battle Over the U.S. Constitution: The Anti-Federalists
- Two Houses, One Legislative Body
- All the President’s Men (and Women)
- Making Supreme Decisions

#### Summary

Unit 5 introduces the battle between the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists over the ratification of the Constitution. In these lessons, students gain a deeper understanding of the Founding Fathers’ struggle to find a balance of power between a centralized national government and the individual states. The second half of the unit focuses on the powers and responsibilities of each of the three branches of government.

## Unit 6

### Constitutional Rights, Part 1

#### Lessons

- Changing with the Times
- Primary Source: The Louisiana Purchase
- I Can Say What I Want!
- Primary Source: The Alien and Sedition Acts
- Second Through Fifth Amendments: The Right to Privacy and More
- Sixth Through Tenth Amendments: Rights of the Accused and More

#### Summary

Life changes. It evolves and transforms from one generation to the next, and the Founding Fathers knew it. That is why they devised ways to amend the Constitution. Unit 6 teaches the process for amending the Constitution and gives a closer look at the Bill of Rights. The unit lessons also include an analysis of the Louisiana Purchase—in which executive power was used instead of proposing an amendment—and the Alien and Sedition Acts—which first tested Americans’ right to free speech.

## Unit 7

### Constitutional Rights, Part 2

#### Summary

Unit 7 continues a close examination of the rights provided and safeguarded by the Constitution. Students learn how the different branches of government protect individual rights, but they also discuss some cases when the government puts limits or restrictions on those rights. Lessons explain how slavery was abolished; citizenship was defined; voting rights were given to people of color, women, and young people; and poll taxes were outlawed, all through constitutional amendments. Additionally, this unit includes an analysis of the Emancipation Proclamation.

#### Lessons

- Who's Got the Right?
- You've Got No Right to Do That!
- Beyond Individual Rights
- Setting a Wave of Civil Rights in Motion
- Primary Source: The Emancipation Proclamation
- Fight for Your Rights

## Unit 8

### Power of the Court

#### Summary

Building up to an investigation into landmark Supreme Court decisions, unit 8 introduces the American legal system. Students learn to differentiate between various types of law—constitutional, case, civil, juvenile, and military, and then explore the workings of the federal court system. At the end of the unit, students study the difference between civil and criminal trials, and what happens when court decisions are appealed.

#### Lessons

- Not All Laws Are Created Equal
- Order in the Court
- Trials and Tribulations

## Unit 9

### Supreme Court with Supreme Power

#### Summary

From segregation in schools to the rights of the accused, and from judicial review to presidential elections, unit 9 presents a case study of several Supreme Court decisions that have had a profound impact on the lives and rights of Americans. Cases discussed in this unit include *Marbury v. Madison*, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, *Brown v. Board of Education*, *In re Gault*, *Gideon v. Wainwright*, *Miranda v. Arizona*, *Tinker v. Des Moines*, and *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier*. Students also delve into the Keating-Owen Child Labor Act at the primary source level, to discover how the ruling paved the way for future child labor laws.

#### Lessons

- Landmark Supreme Court Cases: Civil Rights Rulings
- Landmark Supreme Court Cases: More Civil Rights Cases
- Primary Source: The Keating-Owen Child Labor Act
- Landmark Supreme Court Cases: Rights of the Accused
- Landmark Supreme Court Cases: Rights of Students
- Landmark Supreme Court Cases: Presidential Proceedings

## Unit 10

### The U.S. Government and You

#### Lessons

- How a Bill Becomes a Law
- Breaking Down the Levels of Government
- Government Obligations and Services: What's in it for You?
- Primary Source: The National Interstate and Defense Highways Act
- Putting the Public Into Problem Solving

#### Summary

Unit 10 addresses the ways that the U.S. government impacts the daily lives of Americans. First, students learn how laws are made at the federal level. Then, they explore lower levels of government and how they serve their citizens. This unit also includes an analysis of the National Interstate Defense Highways Act.

## Unit 11

### Domestic and Foreign Policy

#### Lessons

- Home and Away: American Domestic and Foreign Policy
- Foreign Policy: A Closer Look
- Showing Some Love and Working Together
- Primary Source: The United Nations Charter

#### Summary

The focus of unit 11 is on the ways the government works to serve and protect America's interests, both at home and abroad. After learning the basics of American domestic and foreign policy, students learn about the jobs that help the government carry out its foreign policy aims. Then, students look at some international organizations that the government supports or that individual American citizens can participate in. Included in this unit is an analysis of the United Nations Charter.

## Unit 12

### U.S. Government and International Conflicts

#### Lessons

- When Declaring War Seems the Only Answer
- Primary Source: Joint Address to Congress Leading to War with Japan
- Congress, Commanders in Chief, and a Tale of Two Conflicts
- The Iranian Hostage Crisis: American Diplomacy's Great Test

#### Summary

In unit 5, students learned about the separation of powers among the three branches of government outlined in the Constitution. Unit 12 gives an even closer look at how the legislative and executive branches utilized their powers during international crises and other instances in American history. The unit brings the example of the attacks on Pearl Harbor, using the primary source of President Franklin Roosevelt's joint address to Congress leading to war with Japan.

## Unit 13

### Citizenship

#### Lessons

- Welcome to America!
- Obligations of Citizenship: The Must Dos
- Responsibilities of Citizenship: The Should Dos
- Primary Source: Rep. John Lewis’s “Let Freedom Ring” Ceremony Remarks

#### Summary

Unit 13 explores what it means to be a citizen of the United States of America. Students define citizenship according to the Constitution and learn the process for an immigrant to become citizens. Then, students learn about the obligations and responsibilities that come with that status. This unit also includes an analysis of the March on Washington, a moment when thousands exercised both their rights and their responsibilities as citizens.

## Unit 14

### Voting—Your Civic Duty

#### Lessons

- Party Time!
- Multiple Views, Multiple Actions
- America’s Watchdog: The Role of the News Media in America
- Bias, Propaganda, Symbolism: Do They Affect What YOU Think and Do?
- Your Right to Vote: Choosing Among the Candidates

#### Summary

One of the most important but underutilized rights guaranteed to citizens by the Constitution is the right to vote. Unit 14 focuses on this critical right-- and responsibility-- of citizenship. Students learn about political parties represented in elections, the multiple views represented by special interest groups, the role of the media as a “watchdog,” bias, and eligibility to vote. Students also examine how to weigh lots of information before making a final voting decision.