

Department: History

Course Name: Civics

Course Description:

This course approaches civics not as a static set of institutions to memorize, but as an ongoing, contested human project — one that Virginians have been central to from the very beginning. Students trace a continuous arc from the first English attempts at self-governance in the New World through the founding era, the Civil War and Reconstruction, the Civil Rights Movement, and into the post-9/11 constitutional debates of the 21st century. By grounding every civic concept in its historical origins, students come to understand that the structures of American democracy were invented by real people solving real problems, and that the work of expanding and defending those structures continues today. Virginia's outsized role in this story makes this an especially powerful course for Virginia students.

The course spans two semesters:

Semester 1 — Building the Republic: How American Self-Governance Was Invented (1607–1791)

Semester 2 — Making the Promise Real: Expanding Citizenship and Confronting Failure (1791–Present)

Content:

Semester 1: Building the Republic (1607–1791)

Unit 1: Jamestown and the Roots of Self-Governance

The Virginia Company charter, the House of Burgesses (1619), arrival of the first Africans, and Bacon's Rebellion. Introduces the foundations of representative government and the citizenship-exclusion question.

Unit 2: Colonial Virginia and the Maturing of Representative Government

Growth of the House of Burgesses, the English constitutional tradition (Magna Carta, English Bill of Rights), and the limits of colonial democracy.

Unit 3: The Road to Revolution

Escalating conflict with Britain through Virginia voices — Stamp Act Resolves, the Virginia Association, Fairfax Resolves, and Virginia Declaration of Rights (1776).

Unit 4: Virginia and the Revolution

Virginia's constitutional experience, including the Virginia Constitution of 1776, the Declaration of Independence, and the contradictions of liberty in a slave society.

Unit 5: The Articles of Confederation and Why They Failed

Trade disputes, war debt, Shays' Rebellion, and Madison's pre-convention diagnosis of the Articles' failures.

Unit 6: The Constitutional Convention and Ratification

The Virginia Plan, the Great Compromise, the Three-Fifths Compromise, the Federalist Papers, and the Virginia Ratifying Convention debate between Madison and Patrick Henry.

Semester 2: Making the Promise Real (1791–Present)

Unit 1: The Bill of Rights and Early Stress Tests of the Republic

Walking through each amendment, the Alien and Sedition Acts, the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions, and *Marbury v. Madison*.

Unit 2: The Civil War Era and Reconstructing Citizenship

The Reconstruction Amendments (13th, 14th, 15th), Reconstruction in Virginia, the collapse of Reconstruction, and the birth of Jim Crow.

Unit 3: The Progressive Era and Expanding Democracy

The 16th through 19th and 21st Amendments, the women's suffrage movement, and the rise of the regulatory state.

Unit 4: The Civil Rights Movement

Brown v. Board of Education, Massive Resistance in Virginia, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and Loving v. Virginia.

Unit 5: The Bill of Rights Revolution

The incorporation doctrine, Gideon v. Wainwright, Miranda v. Arizona, Engel v. Vitale, and Tinker v. Des Moines.

Unit 6: Vietnam, Watergate, and the Limits of Government Power

The Vietnam War, the 26th Amendment, the War Powers Resolution, the Pentagon Papers, and the Watergate constitutional crisis.

Unit 7: 9/11 and Civil Liberties in the Modern Era

The PATRIOT Act, surveillance, and the Fourth Amendment, and the ongoing tension between liberty and security.

Skills:

Primary source analysis
Reasoning and argumentation
Constitutional literacy
Comparative document analysis
Historical empathy and perspective-taking
Connecting history to current events
Socratic seminar and discussion skills

Text and Materials:

The Constitution of the United States of America
The Declaration of Independence
Various skill development handouts
Primary and secondary sources provided by the teacher

Methods of Instruction:

Lecture
Debate
Simulations/Games
Nearpod
Group Activities
Independent Work
Notes

Methods of Evaluation:

Daily homework assignments
Projects
Pop quizzes
Sectional quizzes
Socratic dialogue
Unit tests
Semester and end-of-year capstone projects