

Understanding Government

Teacher's Guide

Grade Level: 3–5

Curriculum Focus: Social Studies

Lesson Duration: 2–3 class periods

Program Description

What is Government? (5 min.) – Learn about the U.S. government and see how it creates laws and regulations that all citizens must follow. *Values* (5 min.) – Explore values that unite Americans: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. *Creating a Classroom Constitution* (6 min.) – Learn about the U.S. Constitution and visit a classroom that creates one of its own. *Living History* (4 min.) – Visit the Historic Village at Allaire to learn about life in 19th-century America.

Onscreen Questions

- What is one role of the government?
 - What does the American flag symbolize?
 - What rules would you choose for a classroom constitution?
 - What did Dionna learn about American history during her trip to Allaire Village?
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Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

- Describe the American flag and what it symbolizes.
- Create a classroom flag that symbolizes the shared values of their classroom.

Materials

- *Understanding Government* video
- Chart paper
- Black felt tip marker
- White construction paper, one sheet per student
- Computer with Internet access (optional)
- Pencils and erasers
- Crayons, markers, or colored pencils

Procedures

1. Discuss the shared values presented in *Understanding Government*. Ask students: What are some important American values? How did these values come to be? What rules and laws that help uphold these values?
2. Discuss the flag and other symbols of American values presented in *Understanding Government*. Ask students: What does the U.S. flag look like? What does it symbolize? What do the stripes, stars, and colors represent? What does the Lincoln Memorial remind us of? What are some other important American symbols? What do they represent?
3. Explain to students that, like the United States, their classroom is a community that has shared values. Ask them to identify some of those shared values. Are there rules about how you should treat one another? How should the teacher or other adults be treated in the classroom? What responsibilities do you have as students? Why are these responsibilities important and how do they help the classroom function? What are some freedoms or rights that students have?

Write the classroom values on a piece of chart paper and display it so students can refer to it later in the lesson.

4. Discuss the list of classroom values. Ask students: How do the classroom values compare with the American values in the video? Add any new classroom values identified during the discussion to the list.
5. Give each student a piece of construction paper and crayons, markers, or colored pencils. Tell students they will be designing a unique and colorful flag that represents all the classroom values on the list. Then they will write a paragraph describing their flag and what it symbolizes.

Allow students to look at images of flags in reference books or on the Internet. The following Web sites that have images and information about flags of the world:

<http://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/>

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/docs/flagsoftheworld.html>

<http://www.plcmc.org/forkids/mow/>

Have students work on their flags and descriptive paragraphs in class and as homework.

6. When the flags and descriptive paragraphs are finished, have each student share their flag and paragraph with the class. Compare the flags: Do any of them look similar? What did students like best about particular flags? Which flags seemed to best symbolize the classroom values?
7. Display the flags in the classroom.

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- **3 points:** Students clearly and correctly described the American flag and the American values it symbolizes; created unique and colorful flags that clearly represented the shared values of the classroom; and wrote thoughtful paragraphs describing their flags and what they symbolize.

- **2 points:** Students adequately described the American flag and were able to identify a few American values it symbolizes; created somewhat unique and colorful flags that mostly represented the shared values of the classroom; and wrote somewhat thoughtful paragraphs describing their flags and what they symbolize.
- **1 point:** Students were unable to describe the American flag and the values it symbolizes; created incomplete flags that did not represent the shared values of the classroom; and wrote incomplete paragraphs that did not adequately describe their flags and what they symbolize.

Vocabulary

civics

Definition: A social science that deals with the rights and duties of citizens

Context: Civics describes government and the rights and duties of citizens.

constitution

Definition: A document that outlines the principles and rules of a political or social organization

Context: The students worked together to create a classroom constitution.

rule

Definition: A defined guide or principle for conduct or action

Context: Students must follow many rules when they come to school.

symbol

Definition: Something that stands for something else by association, resemblance, or convention

Context: Our country's flag is an important symbol for American citizens.

value

Definition: A principle, standard, or quality considered worthwhile or desirable

Context: Americans come from diverse backgrounds, but they are united by common values.

Academic Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit <http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Historical Understanding – Understands the historical perspective
- Civics – Understands ideas about civic life, politics, and government; Understands the sources, purposes and functions of laws, and the importance of rule of law for the protection of individual rights and the common good; Understands the importance of political leadership, public service, and a knowledgeable citizenry in American constitutional

democracy; Understands the importance of Americans sharing and supporting certain values, beliefs and principles of American constitutional democracy

- U.S. History: Era 3 – Understands the institutes and practices of government created during the Revolution and how these elements were revised between 1787 and 1815 to create the foundation of the American political system based on the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)

NCSS has developed national guidelines for teaching social studies. To become a member of NCSS, or to view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands/>.

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Culture
 - Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
 - Time, Continuity, and Change
 - Power, Authority, and Governance
 - Global Connections
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Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the Discoveryschool.com Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>
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DVD Content

This program is available in an interactive DVD format. The following information and activities are specific to the DVD version.

How To Use the DVD

The DVD starting screen has the following options:

Play Video – This plays the video from start to finish. There are no programmed stops, except by using a remote control. With a computer, depending on the particular software player, a pause button is included with the other video controls.



Video Index – Here the video is divided into sections indicated by video thumbnail icons; brief descriptions are noted for each one. Watching all parts in sequence is similar to watching the video from start to finish. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the remote for TV playback; on a computer, click once to highlight a thumbnail and read the accompanying text description and click again to start the video.

Curriculum Units – These are specially edited video segments pulled from different sections of the video (see below). These nonlinear segments align with key ideas in the unit of instruction. They include onscreen pre- and post-viewing questions, reproduced below in this Teacher's Guide. Total running times for these segments are noted. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the TV remote or click once on the Curriculum Unit title on a computer.

Standards Link – Selecting this option displays a single screen that lists the national academic standards the video addresses.

Teacher Resources – This screen gives the technical support number and Web site address.

Video Index

I. What is Government? (5 min.)

The government creates laws and regulations that all citizens must follow.

II. Values (5 min.)

Explore values that unite Americans: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

III. Creating a Classroom Constitution (6 min.)

Learn about the U.S. Constitution and visit a classroom that creates one of its own.

IV. Living History (4 min.)

Visit the Historic Village at Allaire to learn about life in 19th-century America.

Curriculum Units

1. Follow the Rules

Pre-viewing question:

Q: How would your life be different without rules to follow?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question:

Q: Why did the American people want to choose their leaders?

A: The American people wanted to have some control over their government, and choosing leaders is an effective way to participate.

2. Government Responsibilities

Pre-viewing question:

Q: What is democracy?

A: A democracy, such as the United States, refers to government by the people.

Post-viewing question:

Q: Why is it important for a government to make and enforce laws?

A: The government's laws keep communities safe and productive.

3. Shared Values

Pre-viewing question:

Q: What are some of your values?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question:

Q: What values do Americans share?

A: Americans believe in equality, or that all citizens have the same rights; the right to freedom, such as to express opinions openly; and the pursuit of happiness, which allows every citizen to work toward goals that make them happy.

4. Exploring American Values

Pre-viewing question:

Q: What symbols remind you of something special?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question:

Q: What rights were set forth in the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution?

A: The Declaration of Independence guarantees equality, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The U.S. Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, speech, and the press, among other rights.

5. Creating Laws and Rules

Pre-viewing question:

Q: What rules would you change if you could?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question:

Q: What is a constitution?

A: A constitution is a document that outlines the basic principles and laws of a group.

6. Living History

Pre-viewing question:

Q: What do you know about life in 19th-century America?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question:

Q: What did you learn about 19th-century America from the visit to Allaire Village?

A: Answers will vary.

