



## House United Academy

### Viewpoint Diversity and Critical Thinking A Social Studies Curriculum for High School

You can download a hard copy of this curriculum and other resources on [Truth in Between](#) (Twitter: @truth\_inbetween). You can find more discussion on these and other similar issues on the [Hold my Drink Podcast](#). For press inquiries email: [richmond@truthinbetween.com](mailto:richmond@truthinbetween.com).

#### Objective

This course is designed to help students learn how to communicate effectively across their differences, to generate empathy and understanding, and to advance their critical thinking skills through research, writing, debate and dialogue. We will explore the current political polarization in our society, gain greater understanding of the causes and history of polarization, and find ways to make our stark disagreements an asset through the free exchange of ideas.

As the course progresses, we expect students to ascend this staircase of engagement quality:

**COLLABORATION**  
**MUTUAL LEARNING**  
**MUTUAL RESPECT**  
**TOLERANCE**

#### Resources

The core text of the course is Lilliana Mason's book *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity*. Students will also read, view, and listen to analysis from points across the American political spectrum. These readings will form the common, shared literacy of the class.

The curriculum will also include a substantial research and writing component, moving each student toward additional resources that inform her or his chosen topics. In this way, all students will get access to a wider swath of information and commentary on our topics.

#### Class Culture

In order to create a classroom environment that supports respectful, critical inquiry through the free exchange of ideas, the following principles will guide our work:

- We treat other members of the class with respect, even if we disagree with their opinions.
- We commit to the conviction that reasonable minds can differ on any number of perspectives, opinions and conclusions.

- Because constructive disagreement sharpens thinking, deepens understanding, and reveals novel insights, we encourage and expect it.
- We welcome all constructive viewpoints, and no ideas are immune from scrutiny and debate.
- We do not grade on the value of any student's specific opinion or convictions, but on the way each student participates in the constructive conversation.

## **Requirements**

Within the semester we will engage three controversial issues/topics. The tempo of the class will follow our preparation for these conversations, featuring discussion, research/writing, and then debate.

Each student will prepare three five-page policy statements. For each paper, the student will be required to consult and document their work with 5-10 sources beyond assigned class reading.

Each student will also be responsible to prepare for debates and argue for their policy prescriptions.

Each student will show awareness of the various political perspectives, by regularly reading across the spectrum. (A list of conservative/liberal media sites is at the end of the page.)

## **Grading**

Policy Papers	60%
Class Participation	30%
Final Exam	10%

This course is designed sequentially to build momentum and is not merely a random assortment of topics. That puts a premium on students "keeping up" with the pace. To incentivize this diligence, we have built consequences for late work into the system. Late papers will be marked down 10% per day and may not be grade-improved, unless the student has faced an illness, injury, or emergency.

# CLASS SCHEDULE

## Introduction

### Framing the Problem of Polarization and Proposing its Solution

#### Week 1: Deciphering Division

Class Discussion – Current and historical trends of political divisions:

- What do conservatives believe?
- What do liberals/progressives believe?
- What has caused politics to become so contentious and polarized – both in Washington and in the wider culture of the U.S.?

Intake:

- Andrew Sullivan, “America Wasn’t Built for Humans” (*NY Magazine* 2017)  
<http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2017/09/can-democracy-survive-tribalism.html>
- Jonathan Haidt, “Moral Foundations” (Ted Talk 2008)  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/jonathan\\_haidt\\_on\\_the\\_moral\\_mind?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/jonathan_haidt_on_the_moral_mind?language=en)
- Chapter 1: *Uncivil Agreement*
- Ezra Klein Podcast with Lilliana Mason: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/the-ezra-klein-show/id1081584611?mt=2&i=1000410268072>

Output:

- Write a 300-word essay describing your own moral and political views and how you imagine you got them. (Due the last class session of the week.)

#### Week 2: Imagining a Way Forward

Class Discussion – Possible Strategies for Coming Together across Difference:

- Courageous Conversations/Debates on Controversial Topics
- Mixing Outside Political Tribes
- Empathy and Listening Strategies

Intake:

- Openmind.org curriculum: <https://openmindplatform.org/app-user>
- Three Strategies for Navigating Moral Disagreements:  
<https://heterodoxacademy.org/three-strategies-moral-disagreements/>
- Moral Foundations Questionnaire  
<http://yourmorals.org/haidtlab/mft/index.php?t=questionnaires>
- The Coddling of the American Mind:  
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/09/the-coddling-of-the-american-mind/399356/>

Output:

- Make a 2-minute video describing a person with whom you strongly disagree and ways that you might learn and understand that person's views from the inside.

### Phase I

#### Core Principle: Civility & Tolerance in Discussion and Debate

*The polarization of Congress; the decline of civility; and the rise of attack politics in the 1980s, the 1990s, and the early years of the new century are a blot on our political system and a disservice to the American people.*

Edward Brooke, Former U.S. Senator from Massachusetts

#### Week 3: Thinking Critically on Immigration

Class Discussion – History and Policy:

- History of Immigration in the U.S.
- Relevant Rules and Laws
- Safety and Security
- Impact on the Economy
- National Identity
- Humanitarian Purposes
- Budget

➤ Class is randomly sorted into pro/con working groups.

Intake:

- Top Ten Pro-Con List on the Immigration Issue  
<https://immigration.procon.org/view.resource.php?resourceID=000842>
- A Brief History of Immigration in the U.S. <https://www.sutori.com/story/a-history-of-immigration-in-the-usa--6VK5LSJrYq7RBcsdLoqqHciA>
- Pew Forum Stats on Immigration <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2018/09/14/facts-on-u-s-immigrants/>
- Debunking Immigration Myths  
[https://www.bushcenter.org/publications/resources-reports/reports/immigration.html?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIpP7DwPf83wIVmIrICh1e1gvoE\\_AAYASAAEgJ7XfD\\_BwE](https://www.bushcenter.org/publications/resources-reports/reports/immigration.html?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIpP7DwPf83wIVmIrICh1e1gvoE_AAYASAAEgJ7XfD_BwE)

Output:

- Policy Paper (500 Words)
  - Building Policy Paper #1 (See handout on Policy Papers.)
  - To get you started, several immigration resources can be found on our classroom Google Drive.
  - Students are expected to read 5-10 additional articles/books (chapters) in support of their policy position.

- Students are expected to read 5-10 additional articles in support of the opposition's policy position.

#### **Week 4: Immigration continued, policy papers due**

Class Discussion – Tensions between security and humanitarian purposes:

- Students discuss their research
- General debate research and principles discussed
- Review principles of civility and how to employ them in public speaking and debate
- Discussion on the economic impact of immigration

Intake:

- Read “What Is a Debate?” Handout
- Read opposing policy papers
- Intelligence Squared: Give Undocumented Immigrants a Path to Citizenship  
<https://www.intelligencesquaredus.org/debates/give-undocumented-immigrants-path-citizenship>
- The Case for Immigration <https://www.economist.com/open-future/2018/04/16/the-case-for-immigration>
- Andrew Sullivan, “Democrats Can’t Keep Dodging Immigration...”  
<http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2018/10/democrats-cant-keep-dodging-immigration-as-a-real-issue.html>

Output:

- Prepare for debate

#### **Week 5: Immigration Debate/Discussion**

*Debate Resolution: The U.S. should significantly decrease the Number of People It Allows To Become Citizens and Remain in the Country Undocumented*

- Every student will get the opportunity to participate in the debate/discussion
- A debate review and wrap-up

Intake:

- Read pgs 23-26/31-33/41-44: *Uncivil Agreement*
- Finish OpenMind curriculum

Output:

- Debates
- Debate cases submitted

**Phase II**  
**Core Principle: Persuasion and Mutual Learning**

*I do not dismiss the potential of the right speech, delivered by the right speaker, in the right way, at the right moment. It can ignite a fire, change men's minds, open their eyes, alter their votes, bring hope to their lives, and in all these ways, change the world. I know. I saw it happen.*

Ted Sorensen, advisor to JFK, in 'Counsellor' 2008.

**Week 7: Persuasion and Mutual Learning in Discussion and Debate**

Class Discussion – Persuasion and Mutual Learning:

- What is persuasion?
- What is moral reframing?

Intake:

- Persuasion as the Cure for Incivility (In Google Drive)
- Psychological trick to political persuasion: <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2017/02/the-simple-psychological-trick-to-political-persuasion/515181/>
- The Art of Political Persuasion: <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2015/06/the-art-of-political-persuasion/>
- Persuasion Through Moral Arguments: <https://freekeene.com/2016/11/06/persuasion-through-moral-arguments/>
- Read pgs 61-63, 70-77: *Uncivil Agreement*

Output:

- Write a letter to your parents persuading them to change a family rule, using moral reframing.

**Week 8: Thinking Critically on the Separation of Church and State**

Class Discussion – Church and State Facts:

- Interpreting the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution:  
Congress shall make no law respecting an **establishment** of religion, or prohibiting the **free exercise** thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.
- The History of the Church-State Issue
- Popular Opinion Now and in U.S. History
- Supreme Court Cases
- Philosophy and Legal Interpretation

➤ Class is randomly sorted into pro/con working groups

Intake:

- Supreme Court Cases on Church and State <https://billofrightsinstitute.org/cases/>
- Summary of polling about the Christian identity of the U.S. <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/07/06/nyregion/beliefs-behind-concept-separation-church-state-scholar-finds-some-unsettling.html>
- History of Popular Opinion on Church and State <https://www.patheos.com/resources/additional-resources/2010/12/america-has-always-been-a-christian-nation>
- Founders' Employment of Christian principles <http://www.heritage.org/political-process/report/did-america-have-christian-founding>
- Peter Seinfeld, "Beliefs Behind the Concept of Separation of Church and State – A Scholar Finds Some Unsettling Origins" <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/07/06/nyregion/beliefs-behind-concept-separation-church-state-scholar-finds-some-unsettling.html>

Output:

- Policy Paper (500 Words)
  - Building Policy Paper #1 (See handout on Policy Papers.)
  - To get you started, several immigration resources can be found on our classroom Google Drive.
  - Students are expected to read 5-10 additional articles/books (chapters) in support of their policy position.
  - Students are expected to read 5-10 additional articles in support of the opposition's policy position.

**Week 9: Church and State continued, policy papers due**

Class Discussion – Church and State Opinions

- Religious Pluralism and Its Impact on the Debate
- The Construction of Religious and National Identity
- Civic Religion versus Public Religion

Intake:

- Read opposing policy papers
- Intelligence Squared: America is Too Damn Religious <https://www.intelligencesquaredus.org/debates/america-too-damn-religious>
- Both Sides of the Political Question at the Founding of the US <https://www.forbes.com/sites/billflax/2012/09/25/was-america-founded-as-a-christian-nation/#7cc586e84e7b>
- Lathan Watts, "The Left is Wrong about Separation of Church and State" (<https://www.newsweek.com/left-liberal-church-state-thomas-jefferson-opinion-885838>)

Output:

- Prepare for debates

## **Week 10: Church and State Debate/Discussion**

*Debate Resolution: The United States should prioritize stripping all public and government entities of any religious language or leaning.*

- Every student will get the opportunity to participate in the debate/discussion
- A debate review and wrap-up

Intake:

- Read Chapter 6: *Uncivil Agreement*

Output:

- Debates
- Debate cases submitted

### **Phase III Core Principle: Collaboration**

*One point of view is too small for the whole truth.*

Author Unknown

*Perspective-Diverse teams make better mousetraps.*

Scott Page, *The Difference*

## **Week 11: Introduction to Collaboration**

Class Discussion: Collaboration and Compromise

- The Challenge of Participating in Perspective-Diverse Teams
- The Advantages of Perspective-Diverse Teams
- Making Difference an Asset, Rather Than a Threat

Intake

- Jim Dethmer, *15 Commitments of Conscious Leadership*, Commitment 10: Exploring the Opposite. (pp. 224-235)
- History of Bipartisanship: The Bipartisan Compromises That Have Shaped Our Nation <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/history-of-bipartisanship-2/>
- Scott Page, *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies*. Prologue and Introduction (pp. xix-23)
- The Roots, Hip Hop Song: “No John Trumbull” (The Hamilton Mixtape)

Output

- Partner with a student whose position was opposite yours to co-write a new position paper for immigration or Christian nation.
- Create an art project that illustrates collaboration and capitalizing on strengths.



## Week 12: Thinking Critically on Gun Control

Class discussion – Policy and History:

- A history of guns in America
- What is “common sense” gun control?
- A review of recent shootings and the debates in America

➤ Class is divided into pro/con working groups

Intake:

- Top 15 pro/con arguments: <https://gun-control.procon.org/>
- Leah Libresco, “I Used to Think Gun Control Was the Answer”  
[https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/i-used-to-think-gun-control-was-the-answer-my-research-told-me-otherwise/2017/10/03/d33edca6-a851-11e7-92d1-58c702d2d975\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.d7b632230f42](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/i-used-to-think-gun-control-was-the-answer-my-research-told-me-otherwise/2017/10/03/d33edca6-a851-11e7-92d1-58c702d2d975_story.html?utm_term=.d7b632230f42)
- Andrew Exum, “America has a Gun Culture Problem”  
<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/03/american-gun-culture/554870/>
- Rubin Report: Parkland Survivor on Why We Still Need Gun Rights  
<https://youtu.be/cNi089rmj-4>
- Rubin Report: Before and After the Parkland Shooting <https://youtu.be/mnh-kJf38fU>

Output:

- Policy Paper (500 Words)
  - Building Policy Paper #1 (See handout on Policy Papers.)
  - To get you started, several immigration resources can be found on our classroom Google Drive.
  - Students are expected to read 5-10 additional articles/books (chapters) in support of their policy position.
  - Students are expected to read 5-10 additional articles in support of the opposition’s policy position.

## Week 13: Gun Control continued, policy papers due

Class discussion – Current events and increased tensions:

- Students discuss their research
- Review principles of collaboration
- Discuss opportunities to develop a collaborative civic action plan

Intake:

- Reading opposing policy papers
- Intelligence Squared: Guns Reduce Crime  
<https://www.intelligencesquaredus.org/debates/guns-reduce-crime>

Output:

- Students work together to create a single, collaborative policy paper to present to various government officials
- Students identify and work with instructor to set up meetings with key government and policy officials

### **Week 14: Gun Control Policy Presentation**

Class discussion – How to find compromise and collaborate on sensitive topics:

- Students share their discussions with key policy-makers and stakeholders
- Guest speakers join in the discussion

Intake:

- Read pgs 121-126, Chapter 8: *Uncivil Agreement*

Output:

- Prepare for final exam

## **News Sites/Organizations Examples**

### Progressive News Sites/Organizations

- MSNBC – msnbc.com
- New York Times – nytimes.com
- Democracy Now – democracynow.org
- Truth Out – truthout.org
- The Guardian – theguardian.co.uk
- Crooks and Liars – crooksandliars.com
- Truth Dig – truthdig.com
- The Nation – thenation.com
- Mother Jones – motherjones.com
- Michael Moore – michaelmoore.com
- Counter Punch – counterpunch.org
- The Young Turks – theyoungturks.com
- AlterNet – alternet.org
- Think Progress – thinkprogress.org
- Tom Hartmann – tomhartmann.com
- The Huffington Post
- Move On – moveon.org
- Salon – salon.com
- Forward Progressives – forwardprogressives.com
- Daily Kos – dailykos.com
- The Progressive – theprogressive.org

### Conservative News Sites/Organizations

- Fox news – foxnews.com
- Wall Street Journal – wsj.com
- Breitbart – breitbart.com
- Conservative Tribune – conservativetribune.com
- The Hill – thehill.com
- Drudge Report – drudgereport.com
- Western Journalism – westernjournalism.com
- Zero Hedge – zerohedge.com
- Daily Caller – dailycaller.com
- Daily Wire – dailywire.com
- The Blaze – theblaze.com
- National Review – nationalreview.com
- News Max – newsmax.com
- Washington Examiner – washingtonexaminer.com
- Independent Journal Review – ijr.com (red/blue)
- Young Conservative – youngcons.com
- The Federalist – thefederalist.com
- National Interest – nationalinterest.org

- American Thinker – [americanthinker.com](http://americanthinker.com)
- Cato Institute – [cato.org](http://cato.org)
- Hoover Institute – [hoover.org](http://hoover.org)

### **Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills**

This intensive class meets the objectives of several Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) requirements in several disciplines, including:

#### **Debate:**

- Examination of the role of debate in decision-making and democratic processes
- Analysis of critical issues
- Critical thinking, logic and reasoning
- Argumentation and refutation
- Communication skills
- Evaluation

#### **Communication Applications:**

- Interpersonal communication skills
- Group communication skills
- Presentation

#### **Public Speaking:**

- Invention – planning speeches
- Speech organization
- Skills in oral language
- Presentation
- Evaluation

#### **English, Language Arts and Reading:**

- Developing and sustaining foundational language skills: listening, speaking, discussion, and thinking--oral language/vocabulary/self-sustained reading.
- Inquiry and research: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts.
- Developing and sustaining foundational language skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking--self-sustained reading.
- Comprehension skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts.
- Response skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts.
- Author's purpose and craft: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts.
- Composition: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts--writing process.

**United States Government:**

- History. The student understands the roles played by individuals, political parties, interest groups, and the media in the U.S. political system, past and present.
- Economics. The student understands the relationship between U.S. government policies and the economy.
- Government. The student understands the role of political parties in the U.S. system of government.
- Citizenship. The student understands rights guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution.
- Citizenship. The student understands the difference between personal and civic responsibilities.
- Citizenship. The student understands the importance of voluntary individual participation in the U.S. constitutional republic.
- Citizenship. The student understands the importance of the expression of different points of view in a constitutional republic.
- Culture. The student understands the relationship between government policies and the culture of the United States.
- Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology.
- Social studies skills. The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms.
- Social studies skills. The student uses problem-solving and decision-making skills, working independently and with others, in a variety of settings.