

Civic Virtue and Our Constitutional Republic

50 min

The United States Founders believed that certain civic virtues were required of citizens in order for the Constitution to work. Numerous primary sources—notably the Federalist Papers and the Autobiog...

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Guiding Questions

What is a virtue?

Why focus on virtues and not “values” or “character”?

How does virtue impact the function of government?

Objectives

Students will define civic virtue.

Students will learn and define some of the specific civic virtues that the United States’ Founders believe were required of citizens in order for the Constitution to function.

Materials

Educator Resources

[Handouts A, B, and C Answer Keys](#)

Student Handouts

[Civic Virtue and Our Constitutional Republic Essay](#)

[Handout A: Defining Civic Virtue](#)

[Handout B: Clarifying Civic Virtue](#)

[Handout C: Identifying and Defining Civic Virtues](#)

[Handout D: George Washington and the Temple of Virtue](#)

[Handout E: Self-Governance and American Self-Government](#)

[Handout F: Making Our Republic Work](#)

[Handout G: Real Life Portraits of Civic Virtue](#)

[Handout H: Excerpts from Washington's Farewell](#)

Key Terms

Virtue

Values

Character

Justice

Self-Governance/Moderation

Humility

Responsibility/Prudence

Perseverance

Courage

Respect

Contribution

Integrity

Warmup

Students complete a pre-assessment of their understanding of civic virtue using [Handout A](#).

Activities

Read and discuss the [Civic Virtue and Our Constitutional Republic Essay](#).

Complete [Handout B: Clarifying Civic Virtue](#).

Wrap Up

Assign students to small groups and assign each group a few of the civic virtues defined on [Handout C: Identifying and Defining Civic Virtues](#). Have students briefly discuss their assigned virtues to clarify the definitions. Then have each group complete the table to identify a person or character in history, literature, or current events who exemplified their assigned virtues. Include an explanation. Call on a few groups to share their results.

Homework

Assign [Handout D: George Washington and the Temple of Virtue](#) reading. In the next class, have students work in small groups to talk through the critical thinking questions. Use [Handout E: Self-Governance and American Self-Government](#) to reflect on the significance of civic virtue and to recognize the correspondence between virtue and specific constitutional principles. If desired, use [Handout F: Making Our Republic Work](#) to provide a writing prompt regarding self-governance.

Extensions

Use [Handout G: Real Life Portraits of Civic Virtue](#) to analyze a portrait of the Copley family and write a museum label for the portrait.

Analyze George Washington's Farewell Address using [Handout H: Excerpts from Washington's Farewell](#).

Keep a journal with the definitions of the U.S. Founders' civic virtues. As you complete each unit of study, reflect on how the virtues helped shape our constitutional republic.

Continue to delve into the topic with Heroes and Villains lesson: [George Washington and Self Governance](#).

Duration	50 min
Founding Principle	Civic Virtue, Natural/Inalienable Rights, Individual Responsibility, Representative / Republican Government, Limited Government, Liberty
Grade Level	9, 10, 11, 12
Topic	Civil Liberties, Inalienable Rights, Individual Liberties, Liberty, Personal Liberty

Student Handouts