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Government Activators II

Simulations exploring participatory government



About the author

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Purpose and Overview

This second volume of *Government Activators* comprises six lessons on citizenship, the role of the media, special-interest groups, and the political parties and operation of the United States government. These lessons provide exciting experiences in “participatory government” for your students. Students will find themselves drawn into the study of civics and government and actively engage in lessons that become compellingly real for them. Historical perspectives on these topics are presented in the “Historical Background Essays” in all lessons. The first lesson explores what it means to be an informed and involved citizen at any level of government. The next two lessons look at aspects of the executive branch: the history and structure of the federal bureaucracy, and how and by whom the president is advised on emerging issues in foreign policy and attendant national security concerns. The next two lessons examine political entities: political parties in the context of election campaigns, as well as the role of special-interest groups in influencing changes in governmental policy. The last lesson looks at how the news media can not only report on political affairs and the public’s reactions to them, but also shape public perceptions themselves.

Activators possess three common elements:

1. The presentation of key academic concepts in civics and history that enhance and expand textbook learning
2. Multiple activities that can stand alone or be used in sequence to provide an in-depth examination of broad concepts and give teachers flexibility in instruction
3. Appeal to a broad range of learning styles—including visual, auditory, and kinesthetic—in order to allow students of different abilities to actively participate in their learning

Format

Each Activator highlights a key concept and presents it in four modular learning activities:

- A background essay and study of key words and terms
- A setup or content-building activity
- A main activity
- Debrief and assessment

Teaching Tools

Each Activator contains the following teaching tools:

- Historical Background Essay
- Word Bank
- Setup or Content-Building Activity
- Main Activity
- Assessment Methods

Historical Background Essay

Each lesson begins with a **historical background essay** that provides context and presents the key concepts of the lesson's main theme. Each essay contains focus questions and a graphic organizer for which answers can be found in the text. Information from the essay also provides important information for successfully completing the main activity.

Word Bank

Each lesson contains a **list of important words and terms** highlighted in bold in the historical background essay.

Setup or Content-Building Activity

The **first activity** in each unit builds on the points covered in the historical background essay and helps generate a solid understanding of concepts explored in the main activity.

Main Activity

Each **main activity** presents either full-class or small-group activities that engage every student. Methods include simulations, case studies, role plays, and presentations. These activities examine the fundamental concepts behind current issues of concern in U.S. government and civics and provide students opportunities to present them in innovative ways.

Assessment Methods

Each Activator incorporates authentic **assessments** and also contains **debriefing questions** constructed to help students conceptualize main points and prepare them for the assessment exercise. Two assessment options are available to accommodate a wide range of student abilities. Detailed rubrics are included when appropriate.

Daily Directions

Day 1: Provide Historical Context

Use the **Background Essay**, **Graphic Organizer**, and **Word Bank** to provide students with historical context for the activity. This can be done as homework or as an in-class activity. After students have read the essay and completed the graphic organizer, discuss what they learned, emphasizing the main points. The graphic organizer can help you check for understanding and be used for assessment as well. Students can refer to their completed graphic organizer during the main activity.

Prepare the Activity

Make copies of all the necessary handouts according to the list above. The activities in this unit provide student with the tools to plan their civic engagement project.

Day 2: Activity Instructions

In this activity, students review examples of civic engagement projects to get an idea of the different possibilities available to them. The activity helps students understand the need for such projects, why students like themselves become involved in them, and the details involved in developing such projects.

1. Divide the class into small groups of four or five students. Distribute the handout "Developing Your Civic Engagement Project" and have students review all the civic engagement project examples. (This can be assigned as homework the before you begin the activity.)
2. Assign one of the example projects to each group and have them review it by following the discussion questions on their handout.
3. Periodically check with the groups to answer any questions.
4. Allow time for students to debrief the activity, ask questions, and share ideas.
5. Next, have students come up with three possible civic engagement projects, following the activity questions on the handout. Have them present their ideas to the class.
6. For further ideas and information, assign groups to go to any of the community service Web sites in the "Resources" section (below).



Teaching tip

This can be done as homework or as an in-class activity.



Small group

Citizenship in a Democracy

Historical Background Essay

Being an American citizen. What does it mean to be a citizen of the United States? The passage of time shows that something as fundamental as **citizenship** has changed throughout America's history. When the Constitution was adopted in 1789, it was generally assumed that anyone born in the U.S. was automatically a citizen. However, in 1857 the U.S. Supreme Court challenged this view in the case of *Dred Scott v. Sandford*. The court ruled that an African American slave born in the U.S. was not a citizen and argued that the Constitution's framers never intended to include slaves as citizens. The ratification of the 14th Amendment in 1868 reversed this decision with the words, "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside." The purpose of the amendment was to extend the rights of citizenship to former slaves but also to all persons born on American soil. People born of parents who at the time were U.S. citizens but were living in another country are also considered U.S. citizens.



Even though the 14th Amendment defined citizenship, it didn't automatically provide all the "privileges and immunities" or "equal protection under the laws" to all Americans. African American citizens were still discriminated against, and this discrimination was virtually sanctioned in the Supreme Court's *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) ruling of "separate but equal." This wasn't overturned until the 1954 case

of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. Women were considered citizens, but denied the right to vote until 1920, when the 19th Amendment was ratified. Legal equality has been a slow, evolving process for both women and African Americans through the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

Requirements for naturalization.

Another way people can become U.S. citizens is through **naturalization**, a multi-step process that, when completed, gives the applicant virtually all the rights and responsibilities of a native-born citizen. To be naturalized, applicants must be at least 18 years old, a **lawful permanent resident**, and have lived in the country at least five years. They then complete an application, and if approved, are interviewed by an immigration official. There they are asked to show they can read, write, and speak English. They also take a civics test to show basic knowledge of U.S. history and government. In the final step, applicants attend a ceremony in which they take the oath of allegiance to the U.S. and receive a certificate of naturalization.

Rights and responsibilities of a U.S. citizen. Citizens enjoy all the rights enumerated by the Bill of Rights' first ten amendments, from freedom of expression to freedom from cruel and unusual punishment, in addition to many other rights not designated in the Bill of Rights. These rights are also extended to people who are lawful permanent residents. Citizens living in the U.S. who enjoy the benefits of these rights have certain legal responsibilities, such as obeying the law and paying taxes. Citizens are also expected to serve on juries and appear in court when called upon. All males 18 and over—whether citizens, lawful permanent residents, or undocumented immigrants—must register for military service. This is true even though the U.S. currently has an all-volunteer army.



Civic virtue. Being a citizen in a democracy involves more than just voting, paying taxes, and obeying the law. It also requires that one practice what is known as **civic virtue**. The framers of the Constitution embraced this concept, drawn from ancient Greek and Roman civilizations, as a basic foundation of American society. Civic virtue is when

members of society set aside their personal interests to promote the **common good**. In his book, *Democracy in America*, the young French aristocrat Alexis de Tocqueville wrote that Americans in the 1830s engaged in civic virtue through local self-government and free association. He was most impressed with how American citizens banded together to address problems of common interest. While Europeans tended to rely on government, Americans relied on their own **civic engagement** to address public issues and problems through local volunteer groups, church groups, or local efforts.

Historical examples and methods of civic engagement. Throughout history, Americans have practiced civic virtue on a multitude of issues. Temperance movements, the abolition of slavery, women's rights, public education for all citizens, and prison reform were causes that Americans engaged in during the 19th century. The 20th century witnessed causes such as labor reform, civil rights, and protecting the environment. Though the causes change over time, the methods of civic engagement remain essentially the same: staying informed on current events, discussing issues with friends and family, volunteering with a community group, and writing to public

officials or the media to express your opinion.

Organizations and associations: The building blocks of civil society and the social capital networks between them. Over time, Americans have established a wide range of voluntary associations and institutions that have become the building blocks of **civil society**. These groups form a network of connections called **social capital**. Consider the organizations and associations you may be involved in at school or in your community: Boy or Girl Scouts; extracurricular activities in drama, music, or athletics; work-related activities; or informal associations of your friends. You attend classes at school or participate in organizations outside of school with other students, and through conversation you become aware of common interests. You discuss these interests and sometimes choose to work together to address them. You may bring in other friends who you know have similar interests or understandings of the issues you're addressing. In the process, you create new groups to deal with new issues and forge new connections to benefit the larger community.

Levels of civic engagement. There are several different levels of civic engagement, but most can be summarized as follows:

- **Activists** are people who get involved and take action on issues they care about. Activists believe they can make a difference, tend to be very persuasive, and make their voices heard.
- **Explorers** are people who want to know everything they can about issues, watch and read the news, and gather a lot of knowledge. They sometimes, but not always, take action.
- **Spectators** are people who get their news from others but do not usually keep up with current events or get involved in organizations that address issues.

- **Skeptics** are people who distance themselves from political and social issues and do not believe they are relevant to them. They tend to criticize the system but do not take action or even vote on issues or candidates to address their concerns.

People in the activist and explorer groups may become engaged in politics participating in elections and promoting the voting process. Others might be engaged in social concerns working to improve their communities and the individuals who live in them. These are often nonprofit, **social service** organizations or church groups. People active in civic engagement often get involved in both politics and social concerns because they find connections of influence between the two.

In the 1990s, political scientist Robert D. Putnam looked at the role of associations in modern American life. In his book, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Putnam wrote that Americans were far less civically engaged than in the past. In his research, he found that Americans contributed to civic organizations through their checkbooks much more than their actual participation. Putnam wrote, "We remain reasonably well-informed spectators of public affairs, but many fewer of us actually partake in the game."

The impact of the Internet, digital media, and social networks on civic engagement. Obviously, if Putnam's assertions are true this doesn't bode well for the future of American democracy. Studies over the past 50 years have shown that young people aged 15–25 are less inclined to be civically engaged and are more likely to be skeptical or disengaged. However, some political scientists feel this may be changing. A study conducted in early 2011 found that young people who

consistently use the Internet are more likely to be engaged in civic and political issues. The study found that many young people get their news from digital media on Web sites and blogs. They share this information between friends and associates through social networking tools such as Facebook and Twitter. This correlation between high levels of Internet engagement (**digital media** and **social networking**) and political involvement were evident in the 2008 U.S. presidential election, the relief and recovery efforts after the earthquakes in Haiti and Chile in 2010 and Japan in 2011, and in the uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East in early 2011.

Civic engagement is a vital element to the success of American democracy. The framers of the Constitution left it up to citizens to decide on their level of personal involvement. The framers created a government that has tremendous powers, but left it up to citizens to control that power and use it for the common good. How that is done is up to you.



Name: _____

Date: _____

Graphic Organizer: Citizenship in a Democracy

1. Describe how the concept of citizenship transformed between 1789 and 1868, and into the 20th century.

Understanding of citizenship in 1789	Understanding of citizenship after <i>Dred Scott v. Sandford</i>	Understanding of citizenship following ratification of 14th Amendment
Describe the extension of U.S. citizenship after the 14th Amendment		
For African Americans	For women	

2. List the requirements for naturalization.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____