

UNDERSTANDING THE CIVICS STANDARDS

The purpose of citizenship education is to contribute to the health of our democracy and to empower students “to translate their beliefs into actions and their ideas into policies.” We should find those meanings in the standards best suited to contribute to these ends.

The wording of the standards and benchmarks should not be interpreted as calling for knowledge of specific facts and concepts. The standards call for understanding the purposes, principles, and generalizations that infuse the concepts in the standards with their contextual meaning.

Goal Statements for the Civics Standards

The primary goal of the civics standards is student understanding of the purpose and means of authority and freedom and the relationship between them.

- Students will study the assumptions upon which governments are founded, and the organizations and strategies governments employ to achieve their goals.
- Students will learn the underlying principles of representative democracy, the constitutional separation of powers, and the rule of law, with specific respect to the United States.
- Students will develop the skills which citizens must possess in order to accept their responsibilities while protecting their rights and the rights of others.
- Students will learn to translate their beliefs into actions and their ideas into policies.

CIVICS STANDARD ONE: Students will examine the structure and purposes of governments with specific emphasis on constitutional democracy [Government].

Enduring Understandings

Students will understand that:

- Constitutional democracy as a structure of government developed from the tension between the need for authority and the need to constrain authority.
- Governments are structured to address the basic needs of the people in a society.

The key to understanding the purposes, principles, and generalizations called for in the standards is to begin with the question “Why?” For example, Standard One says “Students will examine the structure and purposes of governments with specific emphasis on constitutional democracy.” The purposes of governments, of course, are the “why” of governments. Beginning with the question “Why do we have government?” yields the question “What needs does government address?” The answer to this question is the foundational understanding for the benchmarks of the standard. The structure of governments are determined in part by history and custom, but mostly they grow from what reason and experience have taught societies about the organizational requirements for achieving the purposes of government.

You can derive the basic purposes of government by imagining a community and questioning what needs of a community might require authority to address. In fact, most famous political philosophers (Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, for example) have used the device of the imaginary community to explain their version of the purposes of the state in terms so simple that even grade school students can easily understand them. All governments invariably address basically the same needs: security, order, and the welfare of the commonwealth. They all make, enforce, and adjudicate law to meet the need for order, organize the common defense, and provide services to promote the welfare of the citizens. The structures of governments reflect the ways governments are organized to perform these functions.

The basic purposes and principles of government — including the responsibilities of “citizenship” in a general sense — can be illuminated with the experiences of the students. Families meet needs of security, order, and welfare with the principle of authority, as do schools and communities. The themes of authority, obedience, responsibility — and the very important *constraints* on authority for the protection and freedom of the ruled — are found in the social context of every student. If students can learn how to see the purposes, principles, and generalizations suggested by the standard in their own experiences, they become easier to understand and retain and more relevant.

The emphasis on constitutional democracy called for in the standard reflects the enduring human struggle to find a way to protect ourselves from our protectors. The tension between the need for authority and the need to constrain authority is a prominent theme of history and is an inherent condition of life. The historically remarkable rise and spread of constitutional democracy evolved from both the abuse of authority and a rekindled belief in the desirability of individual freedom. The embedded concepts of a higher law that constrains the makers and enforcers of law (constitutions), accountability of rulers (democratic processes), and civil rights arose from an abundantly justified distrust of power and a growing consensus that one of the purposes of the state is the protection and promotion of the freedom of its citizens. New structures of government were devised to better fulfill and secure this new purpose of government.

The need for authority and the need to constrain it is the foundational understanding called for by Civics Standard One. The structures of modern governments developed from the experiences of people trying to meet these twin needs.

Civics Standard One K-3a: Students will understand that leaders are sometimes chosen by election, and that elected officials are expected to represent the interests of the people who elected them.

Essential Questions:

- Should leaders be elected?
- How should an elected official represent the interests of the people?

To simply know leaders are sometimes chosen by election and expected to represent the people does not reflect understanding. Understanding begins with discovering why.

Elections are a means of democracy, thus they serve the purpose of democracy, which is to constrain government to serve the people.

There is more to the principle of elections than mere distrust of authority, of course. An embedded concept of democracy is “rule for the people.” Elections help insure that those who would lead us must first win the trust of a majority, and the continued prospect of elections keep the winners sensitive to the interests and views of their constituents. The concept of representation addresses the principle of “rule by and of the people.” At this grade level, students should not be expected to understand all the complexities and problems of representative democracy, but they should be introduced to the idea that representatives wear two hats. First, they are expected to vote the way the majority of their constituents want them to vote on an issue. The other hat often contradicts the first; they are expected to be leaders who vote for what they see as the best interest of their constituents even if a majority of them disagree. Both roles are necessary yet inherently in tension and the students should understand why.

Examples for teaching the above principles can come out of class or school elections. A teacher might use open-ended questions that have no definite right or wrong answers. Open-ended questions are best to invite the open debate and discussion that is most conducive to understanding. The example questions that follow here and for other benchmarks provide suggestions to spark classroom discussions:

- 1) Is it better for the students to elect a class president or the teacher to appoint one? Why?
- 2) What would you say to a class president who only helps her friends and ignores what everyone else in the class wants?
- 3) Jimmy is on the Student Council of his school. The students who elected him want him to vote to have candy machines in the halls, but he has heard too much candy is bad for people. How should he vote on the issue? Why?

Civics Standard One K-3b: Students will understand that positions of authority, whether elected, appointed, or familial, carry responsibilities and should be respected.

Essential Questions:

- Why is authority needed? What are the obligations of authority?
- Why is respect for authority conditional?

“Respect” is a loaded word when used in relation to authority in a democracy. We do not want people in positions of authority to be respected as superiors as was expected by aristocrats of a by-gone era. It is closer to the democratic meaning of the word to say that respect for those in positions of authority entails recognition of their right to make authoritative decisions consistent with the powers of their office. This implies recognition of the associated obligations of obedience and accommodation, which are, of course, limited in a democracy.

Understanding this benchmark requires knowing why such respect should be afforded those in positions of authority. Students should have had ample experience with the problems of disorder and indecision, so it should not be difficult to get them to understand the need. Understanding this benchmark calls for understanding the purpose of authority. Once the purpose of authority is understood, the need to respect it logically follows.

Examples can come out of the classroom. Which is better, a classroom where no one respects the teacher and ignores the teacher's rules or a classroom where students respects the teacher by obeying the teacher's rules? Why?

Civics Standard One 4-5a: Students will understand that governments have a variety of structures and exist for many purposes and that in America these are explained in the United States and State constitutions.

Essential Question:

- Why do different levels of government have different functions?

This benchmark implies a comparative perspective, but only a very basic knowledge of types of structures of government beyond the borders of the United States is necessary at this level. The deeper understanding called for is an understanding of the purposes of government. If students were given the task of organizing an imaginary community (a simple intellectual version of this exercise is found in Plato's *Republic*), they would discover needs that require some sort of authority to address. The specific purposes of the United States government are spelled out in the Preamble to the Constitution and include: to form a more perfect Union, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty.

Giving examples of how various societies have addressed the very needs the students identified in their imaginary communities would enhance their understanding. Explanations of the purposes and structures identified in the U.S. and the state constitutions will be more meaningful when the students see that they are attempts to address the same needs in the context of the American experience. At this level, students probably should not need more than a rudimentary knowledge about "forms" of government (presidential, parliamentary, etc.). "Structures" of government implies levels of government (i.e. national, state, and local) and functional divisions and specializations (i.e. executive, legislative, and judiciary.) Knowing the purpose of the levels and functional divisions of governments is the foundational knowledge for this benchmark.

Open-ended questions that teachers might ask in a classroom include:

- 1) Why does the federal government have the authority to fight wars, but Delaware's government does not?
- 2) Why can you only get a traffic ticket from state and local police, but not federal police?

- 3) Why does someone who wants to tear down a house in a city and build a new one need to get approval from city officials rather than state officials?

Civics Standard One 4-5b: Students will understand that the United States government is divided into executive, legislative, and judicial branches, each with specific responsibilities and powers.

Essential Question:

- Why should the responsibilities and powers of government be divided?

This benchmark calls for understanding why the U.S. government is divided into three branches. Each has a function that addresses a key aspect of fulfilling the purposes of government: make, administer, and adjudicate rules in order to provide for security, order, and welfare. Understanding the responsibilities and powers associated with these functions of government comes from understanding the purposes they serve. Once a student understands the purposes, the responsibilities and powers make sense and can be easily recalled or even derived. Of course, the divided branches also serve the purpose of checks and balances.

The list of central responsibilities and powers is relatively short. Responsibilities define the needs to be met; powers suggest the means to meet the needs. For example, the executive branch has the responsibility for national security. It is given the power to provide for the national defense, which includes establishing a military and conducting war. The responsibility of the judiciary is to adjudicate the law. It is given power to pass judgment on whether law was broken or not and decide punishments within the constraints of the law. The legislature, or Congress in the U.S. government, has the responsibility to make laws, which are the rules that keep order in society.

Open-ended questions that teachers might ask in a classroom include:

- 1) Why do we need Congress? Why not let the president make the laws?
- 2) Why do we need judges to interpret laws when they were not the ones who made the laws?
- 3) It would be easier for the government to get things done without the checks and balances of three branches. Why not put them into one big branch?

Civics Standard One 6-8a: Students will understand that governments have the power to make and enforce laws and regulations, levy taxes, conduct foreign policy, and make war.

Essential Question:

- Why does a government have certain powers?

The focus here is on understanding the need for these powers (the *why?*) and having a general knowledge of what these specific powers entail. The need for order and security within is addressed through the power to make and enforce laws and regulations. The need to promote national interests abroad, especially security and economic interests, is

addressed by the power to conduct foreign policy. The power to make war arises primarily from the need for security. The power to levy taxes arises from the need to pay for it all.

Open-ended questions that teachers might ask in a classroom include:

- 1) Why does the government enforce their laws with police rather than allow people to be free?
- 2) Why does the government take taxes out of our paychecks?
- 3) Why does the government fight wars?

Civics Standard One 6-8b: Students will analyze the different functions of federal, state, and local governments in the United States and examine the reasons for the different organizational structures each level of government employs.

Essential Question:

- What different needs should be addressed by the different levels of government?

The student should understand the general concept of **federalism**: a territorial division of power based on the overall sovereignty of the national government with constitutionally guaranteed powers for state governments within the boundaries of their respective states. In theory, this division of power is clearly delineated and distinguishable. In reality, however, the flow of power has shifted over time between the federal and state governments and has resulted in alternating periods of cooperation, conflict, and controversy throughout the course of American history. More than 200 years after the signing of the Constitution, Americans continue to disagree about the proper role for these levels of government.

Then the student should understand the United States has adopted a federal system for a variety of reasons including our negative experiences with unitary (as British colonies) and confederate systems (under the Articles of Confederation), the distrust of centralized power, the relative sensitivity of state or local governments to the particular needs and views of their citizens, and the relative efficiency of state or local governments in responding to these needs and views. Advantages to federalism include allowing a variety of “local” governments to deal with local problems while allowing local voters to hold local officials accountable; permitting more points of access and greater opportunities for political participation; better protections for individual rights; and fewer constraints on innovation.

The benchmark also explicitly calls for knowledge of the reasons for or responsibilities of the different structures of government at each level, which essentially arise from the differences in needs addressed. Generally stated, the functions of the national government include national defense, monetary policy, and foreign representation. Infrastructure, protection from crime, welfare, education, and other practical needs are more clearly the responsibility of state governments. Sewage, garbage, culture, urban development, and traffic control are usually the tasks of local government.

Example questions can come from turning the previous paragraph into “why” questions.

Civics Standard One 9-12a: Students will analyze the ways in which the structure and purposes of different governments around the world reflect differing ideologies, cultures, values, and histories.

Essential Question:

- What is the relationship between the political culture and experiences of a country and the form and structure of its government?

The key word in this benchmark is “structure.” While the basic purposes of national governments are essentially the same everywhere, the structures tend to vary. Structural distinctions include: unitary, federal, or confederate; presidential or parliamentary; authoritarian or democratic.

Countries adopt different structures of government because of the differences in their histories (e.g. colonial experience) and cultures (e.g. ethnic or religious diversity) as well as in their prevailing ideologies (e.g. classical liberalism, republicanism) and values (e.g. individual rights, justice, equality of opportunity).

Knowledge of the reasons for the structure of government in the United States is a good starting point. From there a teacher should point out some of the major alternatives to our federal, presidential, and democratic structures by examining some prominent examples of such alternatives. Great Britain, China, and Iran, for example, offer some clear alternatives. Distilling generalizations about why they differ is logically central to the standard, but is more speculative.

Unitary systems seem to have grown from monarchies in which all power flowed from the monarch, but there are counter-examples. Presidential systems predominate in the Western hemisphere due largely to the wave of 19th Century independence movements following the U.S. example. British and French colonialism spread the parliamentary system to the other continents.

Some observers see religion as a prominent influence on both structures and the degree of democracy. Religion also plays a role in the degree of secularism (the separation of church and state). Whether a country is poor or not seems to strongly influence its chances of achieving a stable democracy. Competition for power among ethnic groups is another variable that explains some differences in governmental structure.

Teachers might focus on helping students achieve an understanding of the general ways in which societies differ and how these differences tend to influence how they organize their governments.

CIVICS STANDARD TWO: Students will understand the principles and ideals underlying the American political system [Politics].

Enduring Understanding

Students will understand that:

- The principles and ideals underlying American democracy are designed to promote the freedom of the American people.

Fundamental ideals are enumerated in the introduction to this standard: individual liberty, freedom of religion, representative democracy, equal opportunity, and equal protection under the law. This is not a complete list of the main ideals of American democracy, but they are umbrella concepts. For example, the principles of limited government and civil rights are means to achieve individual liberty.

As with the previous standard, understanding requires answers to the question “Why?” Yet the standard calls for a more developed understanding of the meaning and issues involved with liberty and equality. An essential question for this standard as a whole might be “Why should people be free?” Fundamental assumptions about the value and competence of human beings and the importance of freedom to human purpose underlie these ideals. These ideals also have a dark side and involve serious tradeoffs and costs. This deeper understanding of American ideals belongs to the free minds of a free people and is required by Civics Standard Two.

Civics Standard Two K-3a: Students will understand that respect for others, their opinions, and their property is a foundation of civil society in the United States.

Essential Questions:

- Why should I respect others?
- What happens if there is no respect for property?

The understanding called for requires knowing *why* respect for others is a foundation of civil society. The answer involves the need for order, but also the need for tolerance and respect for laws if freedom and democracy are to prevail.

Philosophically, this benchmark points to what might be called the *Strategic Golden Rule*: Do unto others because it is the best way to get them to do unto you. It is the basic rule of reciprocity that makes society possible. The idea to be taught is that *your* freedom depends on the government and your fellow citizens respecting your dignity as a person, your right to express your opinions, and your right to own and control property. But the respect of others for you depends on showing the same respect for them. This is often called civility, which is depicted as a virtue of citizenship. The benchmark implies the need for tolerance of opinions, which means tolerance for the *expression* of opinions. The concept of property is simple in theory, but complex in practice due to competing claims and rights. At this grade level, it might be better to stress personal property.

How might respect be demonstrated in the classroom? Respect for others might be demonstrated by not butting up in the lunch line, by letting everyone have a chance to play in the playground, and by remaining quiet while others are trying to think or do their work. Respect for property might be demonstrated by not taking or damaging someone

else's school supplies without permission. Respect for the opinions of others might be demonstrated by allowing others to voice their opinions and by not laughing at those opinions.

Civics Standard Two 4-5a: Students will understand that the principle of “due process” means that the government must follow its own rules when taking actions against a citizen.

Essential Questions:

- Why should a government obey the laws it makes?
- How am I protected from those with authority over me?

This benchmark stresses an understanding of what *rule of law* means. Such understanding requires knowing the alternative: rule by whim of rulers. Implied in the concept of due process is that there are rules that constrain how those with government authority treat citizens, and that these rules are derived from explicit rights. A true understanding would require an appreciation of the difficulty in getting those who make the rules (laws) to make rules that constrain their power, and then forcing them to feel obliged to obey these rules. Students should understand that the rule of law is a rare and precious achievement and requires constant vigilance due to the inherent temptation to abuse authority.

Due process protects American citizens by requiring the government to pass and follow *fair* laws (substantive due process), and to treat people *fairly* (procedural due process). Due process is part of the American political system because history has shown that governments have a great deal of power and resources and have used them in ways that harm people and ignore individual rights. People need to be protected from those who have power and due process is one way to protect individuals.

Open-ended questions that teachers might ask in a classroom include:

- 1) Why should the police have to follow rules in how they treat someone they are pretty sure has broken the law?
- 2) Rather than a long and expensive court case, why not just have police look at the evidence and decide whether someone accused of a crime is guilty or not?
- 3) What are the limits of interrogation? Why not allow authority to use any means necessary to get information that could prevent criminal activity?

Civics Standard Two 4-5b: Students will understand that a society based on the ideal of individual liberty requires a commitment on the part of its citizens to the principles of civic responsibility and personal civility.

Essential Questions:

- What makes a good citizen? How do I know if I'm one? What happens if enough people aren't good citizens?

This benchmark introduces *civic responsibility*, which goes beyond the respect implied in personal civility. Civic responsibility implies *duties* of citizenship and requires engagement in civil affairs. The need for personal civility can be explained in terms of the reciprocity freedom requires.

Civic responsibilities refer to the things that a citizen is supposed to do, or not do, for the benefit of their community, state, and nation. A society based on the ideal of individual liberty aims to reduce the intrusiveness of government. Consequently, it relies on *individuals* to do certain things that advance the cause of liberty, promote the common good, and make government “by the people” possible.

Politeness and respect for others are required of people who live in a society based on the ideal of individual liberty because such a society aims toward maximizing the people’s happiness. Individual liberty requires a balancing of rights that involve the freedom to do certain things (e.g. express opinions) as well the right to be free *from* certain things (e.g. harassment, degradation). Personal civility is required so that members of a free society might be free *from* things that lower their chances of being safe, secure, and happy. Free expression of opinion is balanced by a responsibility to be “civil,” as inoffensive as possible in expressing one’s view while still getting a point across.

Open-ended questions that teachers might ask in a classroom include:

- 1) What is the problem if most people decide not to vote?
- 2) Why should citizens bother elected officials with their opinions about laws and decisions?
- 3) Why should people feel obligated to volunteer to help out in an emergency like a flood, hurricane, or fire?
- 4) Why should people with jobs be forced to serve on juries?

Civics Standard Two 6-8a: Students will understand that the concept of majority rule does not mean that the rights of minorities may be disregarded and will examine and apply the protections accorded those minorities in the American political system.

Essential Questions:

- How might the majority threaten individual and minority rights?
- Why are citizens protected by the Constitution?
- Should individual rights be limited?

Students should understand that democracy means rule by the people, and that majority votes are just an indicator of what the people want. Although that principle is central to the American political system, it is not absolute. People, including large numbers of them (i.e. majorities), sometimes act out of anger, prejudice, or ignorance and are not always well informed. By limiting the principle of majority rule, Americans have attempted to balance the interests of individuals with the common good.

Majority rule places a very important constraint on governmental authority, but it is completely insufficient to protect individual liberty. Every student destined to become an American citizen should understand that the majority can be as much of a tyrant as any dictator. They should understand that the addition of the Bill of Rights to the U.S. Constitution was motivated by the recognition that citizens need protection from abuse of governmental authority, even when the government is theoretically obedient to the will of the majority of the citizens.

There are many instances in American history where minority groups once did not receive the same protections as the majority. The benchmark is somewhat misleading in speaking of the “rights of minorities,” because minorities are not *now* accorded any more or less rights than members of a majority. What we now call the rights of minorities is founded on individual rights. The Constitution does not specify group rights. So understanding this benchmark really comes down to understanding the meaning and purpose of the Bill of Rights with the expectation that students should also appreciate how these rights protect minorities from discrimination. There are many examples of how minorities were served by political documents and court rulings that protected individuals from discrimination.

Open-ended questions that teachers might ask in a classroom include:

- 1) If most people follow one religion, why shouldn't the government pass a law that restricts the rights of people with other religious beliefs?
- 2) If most Americans are offended by people who protest a war, why not allow the government to declare protestors “unpatriotic” and put them all in jail?
- 3) Why might Americans be unable to prevent newspapers or websites from printing letters that insult other people?

Civics Standard Two 6-8b: Students will understand the principles and content of major American state papers such as the Declaration of Independence; United States Constitution (including the Bill of Rights); and the Federalist Papers.

Essential Questions:

- How do the principles of major American state papers guarantee liberty to contemporary Americans?

It would be a bit much to insist on an understanding of the whole content of these papers, especially the Federalist Papers, but students can well achieve an understanding of the main principles reflected in these documents. The overriding principle is individual liberty; most of the other principles concern the means to achieve liberty.

The principles of the major state papers are the principles and ideals of American democracy. The introduction to Civics Standards Two draws specific attention to the fact that “...[t]he American political system was intentionally created to rest on a foundation of individual liberty, freedom of religion, representative democracy, equal opportunity, and equal protection under the law.” Political equality, rights, limited government, checks and balances, and other principles of American government are pronounced,

asserted, and discussed in the state papers. The understanding of the principles called for by this benchmark is the understanding reflected in these papers, which requires some perspective on the times in which they were written. An analysis of what the authors really meant in their assertion of a principle and why they asserted them could help students achieve this benchmark. For example, what did “all men are created equal” mean at the time of the Declaration of Independence?

To truly understand a principle, one must be able to identify its practical applications. Such understanding is addressed more directly in Standard Three, but the focus there is on the Bill of Rights. Students should be able to identify the practical applications of the principles not included in the Bill of Rights. While these principles are sometimes in conflict and while disparities have always existed between the realities of daily life and the ideals of American democracy, the preservation and improvement of American constitutional democracy depends largely on the efforts of each succeeding generation to live up to these principles and narrow the disparities.

Open-ended questions that teachers might ask in a classroom include:

- 1) What is the meaning of “We the People?”
- 2) Why is the claim that “all men are created equal” important to American democracy? How has the meaning of the phrase changed over time?
- 3) Why was there a debate about whether we should have a strong federal government or not? Should the debate continue?

Civics Standard Two 9-12a: Students will examine and analyze the extra-Constitutional role that political parties play in American politics.

Essential Question:

- To what extent are political parties necessary to democracy? Why do two political parties dominate in America but other democracies have more?
- Under what conditions might political parties evolve or collapse?

This benchmark requires an understanding of the functions of political parties in a democracy. Political parties wield tremendous influence on the political life of the United States, despite the fact that they are sometimes viewed as forces of divisiveness and no formal provision has been made for them in the Constitution. It is notable that Framers of the Constitution viewed “factions” as dangers which needed to be controlled.

Students should understand that the competition for power in a democracy needs to be organized or it would be utterly chaotic and unworkable. Constantly emerging and evolving conflicts between infinite numbers of competing interests might atomize or splinter society without the unifying functions that political parties provide by encouraging compromise, blunting tensions, and marginalizing extremism. This helps to explain why political parties developed in every democracy, despite a lack of a constitutional basis for their involvement and an often-active distrust of their inherent partisanship. Political parties are essentially interest groups with the difference that they field candidates for public office.

Open-ended questions that teachers might ask in a classroom include:

- 1) How might political parties provide a bridge between the people and government?
- 2) How might political parties foster citizenship and participation?

Civics Standard Two 9-12b: Students will understand that the functioning of the government is a dynamic process which combines the formal balances of power incorporated in the Constitution with traditions, precedents, and interpretations which have evolved over the past 200 years.

Essential Questions:

- What problems would arise if a government failed to adapt to changing needs and desires of the people?
- To what extent do the structures and traditional processes of government minimize the dangers of change?

The key concept of this benchmark is *dynamic process*. The students should understand that any human enterprise is subject to constant change and revision. No government is so perfectly structured that it cannot be improved and better adapted to changing circumstances. Times of national crisis, when traditional ways of doing things proved inadequate and basic understandings were reinterpreted, teach the need for change, but students should also understand that the processes of legislating, implementing, and adjudicating law are *inherently* dynamic. Were this not true, we would have stopped making, revising, and interpreting laws a long time ago.

The separation of powers and checks and balances of the U.S. Constitution essentially constitute the structure that constrains the dynamic process of governance. They channel the political process to productive ends. Traditions, precedents, and interpretations further constrain the forces of change to render them more incremental and less disruptive. The filibuster in the Senate is an example of a tradition not grounded in the Constitution that is now considered important to the protection of minority interests. The long struggle for civil rights was strengthened by the precedents set by Supreme Court rulings. The judicial review powers of the Supreme Court grew out of reinterpretations of the powers given to the Court by Article III of the Constitution.

CIVICS STANDARD THREE: Students will understand the responsibilities, rights, and privileges of United States citizens [Citizenship].

Enduring Understandings

Students will understand that:

- Effective citizens are committed to protecting rights for themselves, other citizens, and future generations, by upholding their civic responsibilities and are aware of the potential consequences of inaction.
- Distinctions between a citizen's rights, responsibilities, and privileges help to define the requirements and limits of personal freedom.

Once again, the *why* of responsibilities, rights, and the distinction between rights and privileges is central. American citizens have the right to certain individual freedoms and liberties found in the U.S. Constitution. But, individual freedoms and liberties have limits imposed by the fact that others also have the same freedoms and liberties. Respect for the rights of others, for example, limits some individual actions. Suppose two neighbors are in dispute over a tree growing on one's lawn that extends shade over the other's lawn. The man who doesn't want the shade can't cut down his neighbor's tree, only that part of the tree that hangs over his property. His property rights end at the boundary of his property, and the boundary between the two neighbors extends to other rights as well.

American democracy imposes a cost on its citizens. For government to be effective, it must have an effective citizenry that understands what is required to maintain individual freedoms and liberties. Citizens have responsibilities that, if met, ensure the health of American democracy. Citizens should hold governmental officials accountable by voting and keeping informed; contribute to the common defense through military service if necessary; check the judicial powers of government and safeguard the rights of the accused by serving on juries; contribute to public safety and order by obeying the law and reporting violations of the law; and, perform public service when the need arises.

Privileges may be defined by what they are not; they are not rights, and thus a citizen has to earn a privilege and show responsibility in order to continue exercising it. For example, it is not a birthright to drive a car. Driving responsibly benefits society and the driver, continues the privilege, and costs the driver and thus all other drivers less in insurance. Driving poorly or dangerously costs more insurance and may even cause loss of a driver's license. A classroom discussion with students could elicit other examples.

Civics Standard Three K-3a: Students will understand that American citizens have distinct responsibilities (such as voting), rights (such as free speech and freedom of religion), and privileges (such as driving).

Essential Questions:

- What is the nature of a privilege? What do you have to do to earn or lose a privilege?
- What is the relationship between my rights and my responsibilities?

This benchmark stresses understanding the meaning of responsibilities, rights, and privileges and the distinctions between them. The benchmark also implies the students should be able to identify examples of these dimensions of citizenship. The students should also understand why these distinctions are necessary. It is a good foundation for understanding the ideal at the heart of our democracy. Citizenship might be viewed as an office of government similar to any other office in that it involves responsibilities or duties that flow from the nature of the office.

At this grade level, teachers might develop classroom rules or patterns (with the help of the students) that involve a beginning awareness of the requirements and limits of freedom within the classroom. What must a student do? What is a student allowed to do, but might be taken away if he or she violates a rule? What can a student do to make the classroom learning environment function more smoothly for all?

At the K-3 level, the two requirements of freedom most applicable to a student are: contributing to public safety and order by obeying the law and reporting violations of the law; and, performing public services when the need arises. Teachers could find examples of these two requirements in daily classroom activities and have discussion with the students about why these two requirements are important.

Civics Standard Three 4-5a: Students will identify the fundamental rights of all American citizens as enumerated in the Bill of Rights.

Essential Questions:

- Why are the rights in the Bill of Rights important to American citizens?
- To what extent are the rights of American citizens limited?

The rights enumerated in the U.S. Constitution are so fundamental to American democracy and the freedom of Americans that one can understand why they are stressed in three of the four civics standards. This standard requires students to know the enumerated rights, which requires some understanding of the purpose and application of the rights.

History and experience suggested to the Founding generation that power and those who held it posed a constant threat to liberty and individual rights. The ratification of the Constitution depended partly on some assurances that the increased powers that were delegated to the new national government would be limited in a manner that respected the fundamental rights of a free people.

The Constitution guarantees many different rights to everyone in the United States, but those rights are relative, not absolute. Does one person's right to a speedy trial infringe on another person's right to a fair trial? To what extent might freedom of speech threaten public order? Under what conditions might freedom of the press conflict with the right to a fair trial? Does the Second Amendment grant the *individual* right to bear arms? Do property rights forbid sharing of music online? Effective citizenship depends on an understanding of the limits as well as the scope of rights.

Of course, there is some ambiguity and resultant controversy about each of the rights, but that is addressed in the next benchmark. At this grade level, students should know the enumerated rights, understand the reasons for them, and be aware of some of the ambiguities and controversies.

Rights are essentially freedoms, and a knowledge and understanding of specific rights leads to a further elaboration of the ideal of freedom.

Open-ended questions that teachers might ask in a classroom include:

- 1) Why should people be allowed to criticize the president?
- 2) What does freedom of expression mean?
- 3) Is defacing a national symbol expression and should it be allowed?
- 4) Are there any limits to religious practices?

Civics Standard Three 4-5b: Students will apply the protections guaranteed in the Bill of Rights to an analysis of everyday situations.

Essential Questions:

- In what ways is the Bill of Rights applied in everyday life?

The application of the Bill of Rights to “everyday situations” obviously calls for a deeper understanding than *what* and *why* of the enumerated rights. The student is asked to understand the principles behind major rulings of the Supreme Court and the ambiguities and controversies that adhere to every right in the Bill. What are the limits to freedom of expression and religion? How does the First Amendment allow citizens to inform government leaders of what they think? How can a student protest what he or she considers an unfair situation?

This benchmark calls for a deeper understanding of the nature of rights, and thus the nature of freedom. The application of the rights to specific cases should lead to a further elaboration of the understanding that the rights of one are necessarily constrained by the rights of others and the needs of public order and welfare. The student should gain a growing appreciation of the conflicts and tradeoffs between values involved in freedom. By examining the principles expressed in the specific rights in their practical application, students should learn to discriminate between situations where rights are relatively clear and secure and situations where they are not. Teachers might use online news services to scan for articles that show controversy or application of the Bill of Rights to use as a starting point for discussion.

Civics Standard Three 6-8a: Students will understand that civil rights secure political freedom while property rights secure economic freedom and that both are essential protections for United States citizens.

Essential Questions:

- In what ways are citizens protected from the government? From each other?
- How might shared rights lead to conflict between citizens or citizens and the government?
- To what extent do property rights define an individual’s freedom?

This benchmark calls for a further elaboration of the ideal of freedom by making a distinction between political and economic freedom. At this stage, a student should understand the connection between civil rights and the requirements of democracy, which is the means by which political freedom is secured. Freedom of expression, the right to

vote, the right to due process, etc., are clearly necessary to democracy, and thus to the securing of freedom. Yet the lack of property rights would make even these rights precarious, blurring the distinction between political and economic rights in practice. Some basic property rights can be considered essential protections for political as well as economic freedom. The enormous powers and resources that governments possess pose considerable threats to a relatively defenseless individual. Civil and property rights impose reasonable limits on those who hold power and create the conditions in which fundamental individual liberties might be protected and enjoyed.

The center of gravity in this benchmark is the understanding of the connection between property rights and freedom in general. Citizens, by applying civil rights, can acquire property or make economic decisions freely. The student will have to understand the concept of “economic” freedom to see how property rights relate to the subset of human activities we label economic. In essence, economic freedom is the right to own, use, and dispose of property, but it also involves the right to sell one’s labor. A well-developed understanding would include the realization that property rights can also conflict with freedom, and that they are subject to the same conflicts and tradeoffs as other rights or values and may actually curtail or even deny other people’s liberties (e.g. claiming slaves as property or attempting to keep minorities out of neighborhoods).

Open-ended questions that teachers might ask in a classroom include:

- 1) Why is private ownership of businesses and homes seen as important to freedom?
- 2) How might the property rights of a business owner threaten the freedom of others?
- 3) Which is more important: Making sure everyone has a job or allowing everyone to choose their job? Why?

Civics Standard Three 6-8b: Students will understand that American citizenship includes responsibilities such as voting, jury duty, obeying the law, service in the armed forces when required, and public service.

Essential Question:

- Why should American citizens perform certain civic duties?

Responsibilities is the word that dominates this benchmark. The benchmark lists examples of what citizenship in a democracy requires, and understanding why each is necessary elaborates the understanding of the general purpose of citizenship responsibilities. The general purpose, of course, is to meet the requirements of freedom. Demands for freedom create the potential for great disorder unless citizens of a free society act responsibly. Students should explore responsibilities like those listed in the benchmark and understand how and why citizens meet the challenges presented in them.

Open-ended questions that teachers might ask in a classroom include:

- 1) How can people be free if they have responsibilities like jury duty and possibly military service?
- 2) Why are people responsible for obeying the law even if they don’t agree with it?

- 3) These days, many citizens do not vote in most elections. Is there reason to be concerned?

Civics Standard Three 9-12a: Students will understand that citizens are individually responsible for keeping themselves informed about public policy issues on the local, state, and federal levels; participating in the civic process; and upholding the laws of the land.

Essential Question:

- What are the consequences of citizens not participating in democracy?

This benchmark is a further elaboration of the responsibilities of citizenship with emphasis on participatory responsibilities. Students are called to understand why citizens need to inform themselves on issues involving all levels of government, why they need to participate in the civic process, and why they should help uphold the laws of the land. This requires understanding the consequences of failing to fulfill these responsibilities.

Open-ended questions that teachers might ask in a classroom include:

- 1) Why should people take time out of their busy lives to learn more about candidates for office?
- 2) Should people just trust their elected officials to do what is best without trying to tell them what to do?
- 3) Why should people get involved if they know someone is breaking the law?

CIVICS STANDARD FOUR: Students will develop and employ the civic skills necessary for effective, participatory citizenship [Participation].

Enduring Understandings

Students will understand that:

- Effective citizens can research issues, form reasoned opinions, support their positions, and engage in the political process.
- Effective governance requires responsible participation from diverse individuals who translate beliefs and ideas into lawful action and policy.

There is a change in focus from understanding to skills with the fourth standard, but understanding is necessary to show evidence of such skills on the test. *Why* is still important, but *how* and *what* have equal billing on this standard. Why does a citizen participate? How does a citizen participate in democracy? What does a citizen do?

Civics Standard Four requires students to demonstrate and use effectively the skills of a citizen. Such skills include, but are not limited to: registering to vote; interacting successfully with government agencies; organizing and working in civic groups; researching and advocating a position; or serving in an office of public trust. Teachers should use activities in the classroom which simulate or model the skills.

Civics Standard Four K-3a: Students will acquire the skills necessary for participating in a group, including defining an objective, dividing responsibilities, and working cooperatively.

Essential Question:

- How should people work in groups to get things done?
- Is working in a group better than working alone?

The focus of this benchmark is clear: participatory group skills. Though not inclusive, the benchmark enumerates the key skills as defining an objective, dividing responsibilities, and working cooperatively. Understanding these skills means understanding why they are necessary or effective and how they might be accomplished.

Teachers at this grade cluster who use a group setting in a classroom could ask students to define how best they might work together to achieve common goals. Are there other skills necessary besides those above? What characteristics do people who work cooperatively have in common?

Civics Standard Four 4-5a: Students will understand that in order to select effective leaders, citizens have to become informed about candidates' qualifications and the issues of the day.

Essential Questions:

- For whom should I vote? Why? What is most important to me when I make this decision?
- How do I find out what a candidate thinks? How do I know if the candidate is right?

The focus here is on becoming informed about candidates for elected office. One reason is provided: electing “effective” leaders. Other reasons are avoiding leaders opposed to one’s interests and views, providing an indication of one’s policy preferences by being aware of the candidates’ policy stances, and keeping office holders in check with awareness of an attentive public. In other words, keeping informed about candidates serves as a means to communicate preferences and keep elected officials in check. Examples that illustrate the dangers of voters failing to stay informed about candidates would contribute to the understanding called for by the benchmark.

The means for becoming informed are also important to the benchmark. Attending candidate events and paying attention to stories in the media (TV, radio, newspaper, magazines) are traditional means, but the Internet is fast becoming an important means of becoming informed about candidates.

An open-ended question that a teacher might ask in a classroom would be:
How might technology change the way a candidate campaigns for public office?

Civics Standard Four 4-5b: Students will identify and employ the formal and informal methods by which democratic groups function.

Essential Questions:

- Should groups choose to make decisions democratically when it would be easier if one person made all the decisions and assignments?

“Identify” and “employ” imply understanding the principles of the methods used by democratic groups. The heart of such methods is the means groups use to make and implement decisions. The election of officers with defined responsibilities is an almost universal means for organizing both decision-making and implementation. Committees and project directors are also common. These hardly exhaust the list of methods used by democratic groups, but the list should stick to the more common methods rather than including all possible permutations.

The benchmark requires some understanding of how groups make and implement decisions, which in turn requires understanding why groups should operate on a democratic basis. The *how* would be unnecessary, of course, if a person in authority simply made the decisions and dictated how they should be implemented. Democratic methods are far more cumbersome, but there are persuasive reasons why they are preferred, and these reasons are usually the same as those for preferring democracy in general.

In addition, students should understand the organizational needs that give rise to the methods. If a group is based on the principle of everyone having a say in what it does and how it does it, what process allows such input while arriving at a definite decision? Many groups adopt some form of parliamentary procedure to ensure order. How can such a group then assign tasks and responsibilities? What are the advantages and disadvantages of such rules?

To demonstrate the difficulty in making group decisions in which all participants have a voice, construct a scenario for a classroom of students (a group) in which it is asked to make a decision. The teacher might choose to refrain from interrupting the consensus-building process as much as possible. Let the students uncover the methods by which groups function for themselves. Debriefing on the scenario would include questions like:

1. How difficult was it? How might the decision-making have been made easier?
2. Should the group have first agreed on rules that might help it make decisions more easily? Is it right to do it the “easy” way?
3. Did leadership evolve from within the group? Have students comment on the characteristics of communication, deliberation, and compromise within the group.

Civics Standard Four 6-8a: Students will follow the actions of elected officials, and understand and employ the mechanisms for communicating with them while in office.

Essential Questions:

- Which means for communicating with office holders is usually more effective and why?
- Why is it important to know about the person and circumstances when communicating with an officeholder?

This benchmark moves from *becoming* informed about candidates to *staying* informed about elected officials. Student understanding of participation is expected to spiral at the grade 6-8 level so that students acquire the skills and understandings needed to monitor the actions of, and communicate effectively with, officials *after* they have been elected to office.

Understanding the mechanisms for communicating with office holders involves why citizens should communicate and awareness of the available means to communicate and their relative effectiveness. What is an effective method of communication depends on the person in office and circumstances. For example, a citizen just can't walk to the front door of the White House and ask to see the President (at least not anymore). But a citizen could (and often will) call a school board member or other local official at home to discuss issues of importance. A representative democracy is supposed to function at its best when informed citizens communicate a range of ideas, opinions, desires, and concerns to their representatives so that they might enact prudent public policies and serve in ways that honor and promote the common good. Failure of citizens to communicate with officials tends to give unwarranted weight to the views of those who do take time to contact them.

Civics Standard Four 9-12a: Students will develop and employ the skills necessary to work with government programs and agencies**Essential Question:**

- How should private citizens and interest groups most effectively communicate with government?

There are numerous situations in which an individual intends to participate but is unable to do so because he or she lacks the knowledge and skills needed to proceed. For example, one might intend to testify at a public hearing but be frustrated because he or she did not understand parliamentary procedures, understand how to research or advocate a position, or get placed on an agenda. Those who wish to participate benefit from an understanding of how government agencies operate and from a set of skills that enable one to advance beyond intent.

The focus here is government programs and agencies, which are usually made up of bureaucrats rather than elected officials. This benchmark requires understanding the most prominent means for communicating with government programs and agencies, with emphasis on the means for influencing them. These would include the most common lobbying techniques. Students should understand what they are and why they work.

The benchmark specifies working with, not working against, government agencies. Opposing the plans and decisions of such agencies may be a common motive for political engagement, but it is not what the benchmark calls for.

Civics Standard Four 9-12b: Students will understand the process of working within a political party, a commission engaged in examining public policy, or a citizen's group.

Essential Question:

- How should groups engaged in political activities organize to accomplish their goals?

Much of the understanding this benchmark calls for should come through experience. There may be some basic processes common to working with parties, commissions, and citizen's groups, but such processes are just the requirements for working within any group of people.

The processes of local party organizations vary widely due to personalities and different local traditions. Many workers in a political party are volunteers, as in other special interest groups. Why would someone volunteer for a political party? How are political parties organized?

The process of working within commissions usually involves the processes of information gathering. An example would be the recent discussions in Delaware about recycling and the plans offered by Delaware Solid Waste Authority. An environmental group would want to prepare information relative to their point of view about recycling to present to a recycling advisory board, the state legislature, or the DSWA. Teachers might ask of their students: How is a commission formed? What is the purpose of a particular commission examining public policy?

Citizen's groups are the loosest of the three categories when it comes to organization, but there are some organizational and communication skills and processes common to such groups. Teachers might examine contemporary issues, preferably local, to give the students the experience of working within a citizen's group. Invite to the classroom leaders of a local environmental action group or a business group promoting economic development. Perhaps schools already have citizen's groups composed of students (e.g. Students Against Drunk Driving). Students might examine how different citizen's groups have engaged in protest against a government or other official group.