

Syllabus – United States Government – Fall 2015

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MATERIALS

In order to provide a rich and diverse dialogue of perspectives this course will incorporate materials from a broad spectrum of time and place. With this in mind we will use the assigned textbook sparingly as one of many resources of information. This class will operate from a classroom set of textbooks and students will have the opportunity to check-out a textbook if so they desire.

Much of the information utilized in this course will be of a digital nature and students will be expected to access this information both inside and outside of the classroom. Therefore it is essential that each student develop a reliable internet access plan for this course. All students should identify their primary (most convenient) and secondary internet access points (in case primary is not available) considering options within the school, their homes, and the community. A lack of internet access will not be a valid excuse for failure to complete coursework.

Finally, it is my opinion that the nature of any worthwhile government course must examine issues that many may consider personal and/or controversial. Students will be asked to identify and challenge their views on a number of these topics and will often have the opportunity to share these views with their classmates. We as a class will develop parameters of appropriate behavior which will be strictly observed and enforced. Consider it a requirement to bring an open mind to class each day.

TOPICS (For more information visit ksde.org's Social Studies Standards page)

Unit 1: Principles and Foundations of the U.S. Constitution (4 weeks)

The Constitution of the United States was written by a small number of men over a short period of time. The beliefs, values, and ideas worked into the fabric of that document developed and evolved over a long period of time and were influenced by a wide range of cultural and historical experiences. Students need more than a superficial knowledge of that background and will consider some of the world's greatest thinkers and their views on how we should live together.

Unit 2: The Structure and Function of the Federal Government (4 weeks)

While the government course deals with many important ideas that lend themselves to discussion and debate, there is also a certain amount of foundational knowledge students need to understand about how government is structured and functions. A detailed look at each of the three branches is necessary for deep understanding of the structure and processes of governing. In order for students to realize the relevance of what they are learning, an ongoing discussion of current political events should be incorporated into the course. Students should learn the names of key members of each branch of government, and be following some ongoing issues facing the nation and the state. Domestic and foreign policy issues should be discussed, as well as any current Supreme Court decisions.

Unit 3: Human and Civil Rights in American Democracy (4 weeks)

Students need to understand that American democracy evolved from the “tyranny of the majority” that could be found in ancient Greek democracy into a model based on individual rights, protection of the minority, and compatible with a culturally diverse society. Students need to know how concepts of rights have changed over time and how social and governmental institutions have responded to issues of rights and diversity. Key Supreme Court cases such as Dred Scott, Plessy, Brown, and Miranda, as well as the Bill of Rights, may be used as a foundation for class discussion. Students should know the basic outline of the history of the Civil Rights Movement, the struggle for women’s suffrage, and later movements for equality.

Unit 4: Media, Interest Groups, and Public Opinion (4 weeks)

Informed citizens need to understand how the political process works, the role of interest groups, and the role of media, in spreading information. Citizens thoughtfully evaluate evidence presented by media and interest groups in order to form their political opinions. Once an opinion has been formed, they actively engage in the political process.

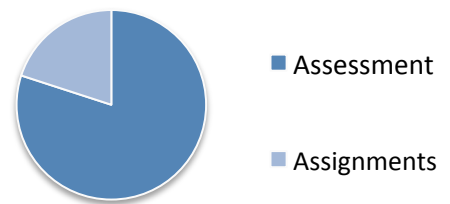
Unit 5: Domestic and Foreign Policy (embedded)

Students need to understand that in American democracy citizens are the “ruling class.” The level of understanding of complex political, economic, and social issues required of the informed, thoughtful, engaged citizen is as critical for the voter as for those elected. As students follow the issues, they can explore a variety of media from different perspectives. As students study past and current domestic and foreign policy issues, it is important that they learn information literacy skills to effectively research and evaluate sources, support their positions with evidence, and be able to take part in civil discourse over issues they may feel strongly about.

GRADING POLICY

As the twelfth-grade required Social Studies course, this class serves as the culmination of your public school Social Studies education. In this spirit I will hold the highest of expectations regarding student work and behavior. The grading policy for this course reflects these expectations.

Your grade will be weighted across two categories: the Assessment category will include grades on tests, quizzes, projects, and formal writings and will account for 80% of your overall grade; the Assignments category will include daily work, informal writing responses, homework assignments, and class participation and will account for 20% of the overall grade.



Late Work Policy: Given the emphasis on personal responsibility and digital access to class materials, very few excuses will be accepted in regards to missing and late assignments. Work that is not turned in the day that it is due (or the day a student returns after missing a deadline) will be accepted for 80% credit. All late work must be turned in by the end of the academic quarter in which it was assigned and will not be accepted after that point.

Finals: Included within the Assessment category will be a comprehensive final exam.

BOTTOM LINE: I believe this course to be very important in your education and development as a citizen of the United States. I guarantee that if you invest your time, effort, and thought into this course you will be handsomely rewarded.