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Unit Plan: Civic Responsibilities of a Teenager in a Democratic Society

Course: 12th Grade U.S. Government and Citizenship

Unit Length: 5-6 class periods of 40-50 minutes.

Objective:

To teach students the different factors that responsible citizens must learn in order to perform their civic duty well. Also, students will understand the importance they play in the political process.

Standards:

Standard 4: Students will understand the responsibilities of citizens in the United States.

Objective 1: Investigate the responsibilities and obligations of a citizen.

- b. Examine the election and voting process.
- e. Investigate the major political parties and their ideas.

Objective 2: Investigate ways in which responsible citizens take part in civic life.

- a. Evaluate the need for civic dialogue in maintaining a democratic society; e.g., public meetings, mass meetings.
- b. Participate in activities that promote the public good; e.g., the voting process, jury duty, community service.

Objective 3: Assess methods for respectfully dealing with differences.

- a. Analyze and evaluate conditions, actions, and motivations that contribute to conflict and cooperation.
- b. Develop an understanding of the role of civility in dealing with individual and group differences.

Day 1: What it means to be a Citizen

Students will write in a journal response answering the following questions:
What is a citizen? What is an America citizen? And, what is the difference?
(5 min)

Class discussion answering those questions and create a list of attributes of what responsibilities American citizens have to their country. (Voting, public service, knowledge about political parties and their platforms/issues.
(15-20 min)

Assessment

Hand out Citizenship test found in the resource section of this plan. Have students complete the test with the stipulation that they need to get a 60% to pass (naturalized citizens have to achieve that score to become a citizen).

Day 2: How Media affects the Citizen

Students will write in a journal response answering the following questions: How has media affected you? In what ways is the internet and technology been a positive in your life? In what ways could it be viewed as a negative? (5 mins)

Class discussion on the answers as well as how media affects us collectively as a citizenry. (10 min)

Hand out and read the article, "Is Google Making Us Stupid?" by Nicholas Carr

<http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200807/google>

(Note: Teachers may want to read the article and highlight the key paragraphs so that the students can understand the crux of the article and be able to answer the questions below. The text can be extremely dense, especially for the students that have a hard time synthesizing information or that struggle to stay engaged for long passages. Ironic, given the whole point of the article, but to be successful in the classroom it may need to be done. 10-15 min)

Assessment

To help them have talking points, students will write answers to the following 3 questions:

1. How is HAL like America pleading for its citizens to become better?
2. What does Mr. Carr suggest is the reason people have trouble reading long passages of writing? Do you agree or disagree with his reasoning? Why?
3. Do you think that the "immediacy" of the internet, text-messaging, and YouTube, has had a positive or negative affect on the way we read and get our information? Explain.

Class discussion on the questions and the article. (20 min)

Days 3 and 4: Understanding the Two-Party System

- Students will answer the following questions in a journal entry:
How has the media portrayed the Republicans? The Democrats? Do you think these are fair assessments? Why or why not? (5 min)
- Give a brief lecture on the history of the two party system and how it works.
- Students will go to the computer lab to do research on the parties' platforms. If you cannot go to the lab, bring in information regarding the topics below from each side of the aisle for the students to read and synthesize information.
- Explain to the students that they are not to go to any commentary sites, just the websites below.
- Divide students up into groups of 3. One student is in charge of finding the information on the website. One student is in charge of writing the answers to the questions. And one student is in charge of presenting their information. The students are to work collaboratively, but will be evaluated individually on their performance in their assigned responsibility.
- The students will be given 1 or 2 topics to research how their assigned party attempts to solve the topic in question (i.e. What is the Democratic view on should guns be allowed in school?)
- Here are some suggested topics
How can we improve the achievement in education?
How can we fix the current Health Care/ Health Insurance problem?
Do we cut programs or borrow money to build programs to fix the economy?
Should there be regulations on the Internet and other forms of media?

Assessment:

- Questions that students are to answer written and orally:
 1. What is your question and the party that you have been to given to research?
 2. In a few sentences, explain the position that your party has on the question/issue.
 3. Who are some of the main people that are addressing this issue from your party? How have they tried to address it? Be specific. (Specific bills? Speeches? Comments? Who, what, where, when, why, and how)
 4. What are three valid points that would attack the problems of the argument of the party?

5. Do you agree with the position of your party? Why or why not?
 6. Do you think that the party could be effective in their philosophy of the issue if they tried a different approach? Why or why not?
- The first day should be research driven, while the second day will be a presentation day with both the Republican and Democratic side of each issue presenting together.
 - Websites: Utah Democrats: <http://www.utdemocrats.org/>
Utah Republicans: <http://www.utgop.org/>
Democratic Party: <http://www.democrats.org/>
Republican Party: <http://www.gop.gov>
WhiteHouse: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/>

Day 5: The Importance of Voting

- Students will answer the following questions in a journal entry:
Do you think it is important to vote? Why or why not? (5 min)
- Class discussion discussing the answers (10 min)
- Hand out Every Vote Counts handout. Discuss the handout and the significance of those elections.
- Lecture on why it is needed to vote, which people are able to vote, how you go about registering to vote, how to become informed of the candidates' platforms, and the importance of getting involved at the grassroots level.
- During election years, you may want to have students learn about the candidates that are running for office, have them analyze each candidate's views on the issues, and then have them write a report or give an oral report on who they would vote for and why. During non-election years, you may want to "create" two candidates running for a particular office from the class and have them debate the issues in front of their peers and then have each person write down who they would vote for and what swayed them to that side. This could also work in conjunction with student body elections/class elections.
- Wrap-up unit.

Resources:

Citizenship Test:

<http://www.uscis.gov/newtest> then click on the "New U.S. History and Civics test" It will download a pdf. file that you can make copies of. Hint: The test also gives the answers to the questions so go in and erase those so the students won't be able to cheat. Also, it will cut down on the amount of pages the 100 question test will be.

Every Vote Counts Handout:

[http://www.activoteamerica.com/Home2/How Important is 1 Vote/how important is 1 vote.html](http://www.activoteamerica.com/Home2/How_Important_is_1_Vote/how_important_is_1_vote.html)