

Instructional Vocabulary

Government

Unit 1: Foundations and Constitutional Principles

- **Constitution** – a written instrument that puts forth the basic principles and laws of a nation, state, or social group. It determines the powers and duties of the government and guarantees certain rights to the people.
- **Federalism** – the distribution of power between a federal government and the states within a union
- **Limited government** – the Constitution is a framework to protect individual citizens from an abusive government and overbearing or misguided majorities
- **Rule of Law** – protects people from “tyranny of the masses;” government is defined by law and serves the people
- **Checks and balances** – each branch of government is subject to a number of constitutional restraints by the other branches
- **Separation of powers** – division of government powers into different branches so no one branch has too much power
- **Popular sovereignty** – the people are the only source of power for any and all government actions

Unit 2: Celebrate Freedom Week

- **Constitutional rights** – rights given or reserved to the people by the U.S. Constitution, and in particular, the Bill of Rights
- **Individual rights** – the individual rights protected in the Bill of Rights include economic rights related to property, political rights related to freedom of speech and press, and personal rights related to bearing arms and maintaining private residences; also includes the right to a fair trial, to vote, to practice one’s religious beliefs, and others

Unit 3: Political Behavior

- **Civic responsibility** – obligations of a citizen to be active, peaceful, loyal, and supportive to the community (includes participation in government)
- **Point of view** – a position or perspective from which something is considered or evaluated
- **Consent of the governed** – when people agree to establish and abide by a government, they consent to be governed. The philosophy of natural rights articulated in the Declaration of Independence set the standards for the U.S. government that the only legitimate government is one based on the consent of the governed.

Unit 4: Legislative Branch: The Congress

- **Congress** – the Legislative Branch of the US government, composed of the House of Representatives and the Senate
- **Legislative** – having the function of making laws: a legislative body; of or pertaining to the enactment of laws: legislative proceedings; legislative power.
- **Policy** – a course of action adopted and pursued by a government, ruler, political party, e.g., our nation's foreign policy.

Unit 5: Executive Branch: The President and the Bureaucracy

- **Bureaucracy** – a body of non-elective government officials, an administrative policy-making group. Major independent agencies like NASA are part of the general government bureaucracy
- **Executive** – of or relating to the execution (carrying out) of the laws. The Executive branch ensures the laws are carried out. The Legislative branch passes the laws; the Judicial branch reviews the constitutionality of laws passed by Congress.
- **Department** – one of the principal executive divisions of the federal government of the United States, headed by a cabinet officer
- **Foreign policy** – the policy of a sovereign state in its interaction with other sovereign states. Foreign policy includes plans or actions of government affecting a country's relations with other countries. It includes policies about trade and national security issues. Foreign policy is affected by domestic policy and the system of authority related to trade outlined in the U.S. Constitution. *(from Merriam Webster Online Dictionary and The Social Studies Center)*

Unit 6: Judicial Branch: The Courts and Civil Liberties

- **Judicial system** – the system that administers justice through courts of law; the judicial branch of government
- **Judicial activism** – the process of issuing judicial decisions to shape national policies. Those who support judicial activism believe the courts should be aggressive in applying the U.S. Constitution to address social and political issues. |
- **Judicial restraint** – self-imposed limitation by judges to issue judicial decisions that address social and political questions but not to use the decisions to bring about change. Those who support judicial restraint believe that it is not the role of the courts to make policy and that the courts should uphold legislative acts unless they violate the Constitution
- **Judicial review** – the judicial branch is responsible for interpreting and applying laws and ensuring that they are constitutional. The concept of judicial review dates back to the 1803 decision *Marbury v. Madison* when Chief Justice John Marshall, acting within the powers of Article III, ruled that “the Constitution is superior to any ordinary act of legislature. . . and must govern,” thus strengthening federal authority over state and private authority when an issue threatens rights established in the Constitution
- **Jurisdiction** – the power, right, or authority to interpret and apply the law; the limits or territory within which authority may be exercised (from Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary)

Unit 7: State and Local Government

- **Political system** – a system is a group of parts or elements that work together to form a complex whole. A political system is a system of politics and government. The U.S. is a federal system, which means that power is divided between a central/national government and the states. There are three branches to the government, each with powers that are checked and balanced against one another. Power in the U.S. originates in the people; consent of the governed” is a key belief in the U.S. system
- **Constitutionalism** – the idea that the basic principles and laws of a government should be organized and administered through compliance with a written or unwritten constitution. The constitution effectively restrains the powers of the government and guarantees certain rights to the people. In the U.S. the national

Unit 8: Government and American Culture

- **Participation** – the act of taking part or sharing in something. In order to function, the U.S. political system allows and requires that its citizens participate in the processes of government.