

AMERICAN GOVERNMENT: THE LAW AND YOU CURRICULUM



Grade Level(s): 10-12

Curriculum Author(s): Kyle Brennan and Rebecca Trzaski

Course Description: American Government: The Law & You is a half year course that provides students with the opportunity to examine civic topics within our governmental process. Students will analyze citizens' rights, the criminal justice process, and the civil law system. Various viewpoints and perspectives on civic topics and the exploration of active citizenship will be incorporated throughout the course. *This class fulfills the civics requirement for graduation. (Humanities, .5 credit)*

Year At A Glance

Unit Title	Overarching Essential Question	Overarching Enduring Understanding	Vision of A Learner "I Can" Statements
Rights, Responsibilities, and the Constitution	How do laws both shape and reflect characteristics of a society?	The U.S. Constitution, federal laws, state laws, and local laws establish and reflect the changing values of society.	TCC2(9-12), CCE4, DE4, TI1(9-12), P2, AA2(9-12)
The Criminal Justice System	To what extent is the criminal justice system effective?	The criminal justice system continues to evolve as lawmakers and advocates search for ways to make the system more effective.	TCC2(9-12), CCE4, DE4, TI1(9-12), P2, AA2(9-12)
Civil Law	To what extent is the civil law system effective?	The civil law system continues to evolve as lawmakers and advocates search for ways to make the system more effective.	TCC2(9-12), CCE4, DE4, TI1(9-12), P2, AA2(9-12)



Unit 1 - Rights, Responsibilities, and the Constitution

Desired Results - Goals, Transfer, Meaning, Acquisition

Established Goals:

Connecticut Secondary Social Studies Frameworks

- **CIV 9–12.1** Distinguish the powers and responsibilities of local, state, tribal, national, and international civic and political institutions.
- **CIV 9–12.2** Analyze the role of citizens in the U.S. political system, with attention to various theories of democracy, changes in Americans' participation over time, and alternative models from other countries, past and present.
- **CIV 9–12.4** Explain how the U.S. Constitution establishes a system of government that has powers, responsibilities, and limits that have changed over time and that are still contested.
- **CIV 9–12.11** Evaluate multiple procedures for making governmental decisions at the local, state, national, and international levels in terms of the civic purposes achieved.
- **CIV 9–12.12** Analyze how people use and challenge local, state, national, and international laws to address a variety of public issues.

Common Core State Standards

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.7** Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.1** Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.B** Work with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision-making, set clear goals and deadlines, and establish individual roles as needed.

Vision of A Learner Attributes: Students will be able to independently use their learning to... ("I can" statements to be demonstrated)

- **TCC2(9-12):** I can evaluate evidence from multiple perspectives, and recognize their limitations and implications, in order to justify new conclusions.
- **CCE4:** Express ideas in a variety of ways, according to context, purpose, and audience.
- **DE4:** Are inclusive and help others in need.
- **TI1(9-12):** I can implement a realistic plan and adapt when necessary to achieve my goals.
- **P2:** Believe that individuals can strengthen weaknesses through purposeful strategies, practice, and effort.
- **AA2(9-12):** I can assess my past successes and mistakes to change my approach.

<p>Understandings: Students will understand that...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laws shape, and are shaped by, ever-changing societal values • Citizens have many rights and responsibilities within their country, state, and city or town • Because of diverse opinions within society, the morality associated with rights and responsibilities are often hotly debated • The U.S. Constitution is the supreme law of the land, establishing the framework of government as well as protecting civil rights and liberties • The court system is complex, including a state system and a federal system, and the court rulings can set precedent which hold the weight of law • Citizens can get involved in government in many ways with varying degrees of time and financial commitment • Systemic and structural barriers impact voter participation • A law's effectiveness can be disrupted in many ways 	<p>Essential Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do laws both shape and reflect characteristics of a society? • What are my rights and responsibilities as a resident in the United States, in Connecticut, and in my town? • What is the purpose of law? • How are rights and responsibilities related to morality and legality? • What rights, if any, should citizens be willing to accept limitations on for the safety of society? • What does it mean to be a citizen? • How does the U.S. Constitution establish our three branches of government and our legal system? • How does a case reach the Supreme Court, and why are landmark Supreme Court cases important? • In what ways can citizens get involved with the government? • What factors influence voter participation? • What are the characteristics of an effective law?
<p>Students will know...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the purposes of law in a society • the similarities and differences between rights and responsibilities of American citizens • the historical context of the U.S. Constitution • the three branches of government: executive, legislative, judicial • the separation of powers between the branches of government as written in the U.S. Constitution articles • the composition of the U.S. Congress • the lawmaking process at the local, state, and federal levels • the importance of the Supreme Court in establishing landmark rulings • characteristics of effective laws • voter requirements, the voter registration process, and the reasons for which people vote • opportunities for citizen advocacy 	<p>Students will be able to...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • construct arguments using precise and knowledgeable claims, with evidence from multiple sources, while acknowledging counterclaims and evidentiary weaknesses • distinguish the powers and responsibilities of local, state, national, and international civic and political institutions • analyze the role of citizens in the U.S. political system • analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people's perspectives • evaluate the legislative intent of laws • collaborate with classmates to set and achieve goals while developing leadership skills • engage respectfully in discussions, acknowledging similar and different perspectives • ask questions to drive learning and challenge the viewpoints of others • discuss key concepts related to the Constitution, American government, the law, rights, and responsibilities

Key Vocabulary: law, rule of law, rights, responsibilities, human rights, Constitution, separation of powers, checks and balances, Bill of Rights, amendment, executive branch, veto, legislative branch, Senate, filibuster, House of Representatives, impeachment, judicial branch, Supreme Court, judicial review, federalism, ordinance, bill, appeals court, precedent, landmark case, advocacy, lobbying, referendum, democracy, republic, voting

Assessment Evidence

Performance Tasks:

- **Summative:** Students complete a performance task on the relationship between rights and responsibilities. This task may be in the form of an essay, debate, Socratic seminar, or similar project, considering potential connections to current topics. **TCC2, TI1, P2, CCE4**
- **Summative:** In groups, students develop a presentation advocating for a change to the Nonnewaug student handbook, supported with various types of evidence and addressing possible sources of support and opposition. After receiving feedback and revising, groups present their proposals to the Nonnewaug administration. **TCC2, TI1, AA2, DE4, CCE4**

Other Evidence:

- **Interim:** As part of the summative on rights and responsibilities, students must complete an organizer or check-in as preparation. **TCC2, TI1, P2, CCE4**
- **Interim:** Students take a quiz on checks and balances in the United States government. **P2**
- **Interim:** Students choose from a list of Supreme Court landmark cases, or propose their own, and research to complete an organizer about the case, focusing on its impact on society. Students then present their cases to each other in one-on-one “speed-dating” format. **TCC2, TI1, CCE4**
- **Interim:** As part of the summative on changing the Nonnewaug student handbook, groups must submit a written proposal outlining their proposed change prior to developing the presentation. **TCC2, TI1, AA2, DE4, CCE4**

Learning Plan

- Teach research skills of locating and evaluating sources (CRAAP test, SOAPS, etc.), searching for and skimming through resources, and citing material **TCC2, TI1**
- Develop success criteria for debates, seminars, projects, and presentations by viewing negative and positive models, considering prior experiences, etc. **AA2**
- Discuss and model positive peer feedback strategies for group activities **DE4**
- Reading assignments with SAT-style questions **P2**
- Content-based quiz on key vocabulary and concepts **P2**
- Written responses and/or discussions on videos and articles (especially those in the resources below) **CCE4**
- Participation assessments (i.e. guided notes, Pear Deck, etc.) **CCE4**
- Case studies **TCC2**

Teacher Resources: U.S. Constitution; <https://www.supremecourt.gov/>; <https://www.congress.gov/>; Fordham Modern History Sourcebook; Bill of Rights Institute; Center for Civic Education; *Upfront* magazine articles and questions; Civics Mini-Q DBQ book; Newsela; CommonLit; Glencoe Street Law textbook and workbook; [U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services](#) website's citizenship test study guide



Unit 2 - The Criminal Justice System

Desired Results - Goals, Transfer, Meaning, Acquisition

Established Goals:

Connecticut Secondary Social Studies Frameworks

- **CIV 9–12.5** Evaluate citizens' and institutions' effectiveness in addressing social and political problems at the local, state, tribal, national, and/or international level.
- **CIV 9–12.8** Evaluate social and political systems in different contexts, times, and places that promote civic virtues and enact democratic principles.
- **CIV 9–12.10** Analyze the impact and the appropriate roles of personal interests and perspectives on the application of civic virtues, democratic principles, constitutional rights, and human rights.
- **CIV 9–12.13** Evaluate public policies in terms of intended and unintended outcomes, and related consequences.

Common Core State Standards

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.1** Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.4** Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.

Vision of A Learner Attributes: Students will be able to independently use their learning to... ("I can" statements to be demonstrated)

- **TCC2(9-12):** I can evaluate evidence from multiple perspectives, and recognize their limitations and implications, in order to justify new conclusions.
- **CCE4:** Express ideas in a variety of ways, according to context, purpose, and audience.
- **DE4:** Are inclusive and help others in need.
- **TI1(9-12):** I can implement a realistic plan and adapt when necessary to achieve my goals.
- **P2:** Believe that individuals can strengthen weaknesses through purposeful strategies, practice, and effort.
- **AA2(9-12):** I can assess my past successes and mistakes to change my approach.

<p>Understandings: Students will understand that...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A government's decisions can have unintended consequences which may result in helping some while hurting others • Laws have economic consequences • Crime happens due to a variety of economic and social conditions • Sociologists and lawmakers study and try to implement many crime prevention strategies • The criminal justice system provides citizens with order and behavioral expectations • The U.S. Constitution and court precedent determine search and seizure procedures • Plea bargains allow a suspect to plead guilty and forgo a trial in exchange for a lesser punishment • Bail allows some suspects to be released from pretrial detention. If a person cannot post bail, or is denied bail by a judge, they will wait for their trial in jail • A lawyer will advise their client which defense to use at trial depending on the circumstances • Juveniles have unique needs within the criminal justice system. • The criminal justice system in the United States has strengths and weaknesses 	<p>Essential Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can a government's decisions both help and hurt different groups of people? • How do laws both shape and reflect economic decision-making? • Why does crime happen? • How can crime be prevented? • In what ways does the criminal justice system provide for rule of law? • What laws govern search and seizure? • To what extent are the bail system and plea bargaining fair? • What defenses are most effectively used at trial? • To what extent should juveniles be handled differently than adults within the criminal justice system? • To what extent is the criminal justice system effective?
<p>Students will know...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • common crimes against persons • common crimes against property • commonly utilized defenses • key steps in the adult criminal justice process • rights of due process • common sentencing options • current rates of and theories on crime and recidivism • types of lawyers • differences between the adult and juvenile criminal justice systems 	<p>Students will be able to...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explain how a question reflects an enduring issue in the field • explain points of agreement and disagreement experts have about interpretations and applications of disciplinary concepts and ideas associated with a compelling question • evaluate citizens' and institutions' effectiveness in addressing social and political problems at the local, state, tribal, national and/or international level • critique the success of our criminal justice system in its aim to rehabilitate criminals • formulate and defend an opinion about whether the juvenile justice system should be more or less punitive

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluate social and political systems in different contexts, times, and places that promote civic virtues and enact democratic principles
<p>Key Vocabulary: criminal law, crime, incarceration, felony, misdemeanor, principal of the crime, accomplice, accessory before the fact, accessory after the fact, prosecutor, defendant, judge, jury, burden of proof, beyond a reasonable doubt, trial, plea bargain, immunity, aggravating and mitigating circumstances, common crimes against persons, common crimes against property, principal, accomplice, accessory, element of a crime, guilty state of mind, motive, strict liability, crime of omission, preliminary crime, solicitation, conspiracy, attempt, search and seizure, search warrant, racial profiling, interrogation, self-incrimination, Miranda rights, bail, grand jury indictments, common defenses against criminal charges, alibi, juvenile justice system, <i>parens patriae</i>, recidivism, due process, relevant amendment (especially the Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and Eighth), retribution, deterrence, rehabilitation, incapacitation, parole, probation</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Assessment Evidence</p>	
<p>Performance Tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summative: Students participate in a mock criminal trial. Students are divided into two teams, and each student has a defined role as part of the prosecution or the defense. After examining all materials and completing a script, students role-play in the mock trial. TCC2, TI1, CCE4, DE4, AA2, P2 	<p>Other Evidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interim: Students work individually or in pairs to complete a “Wheel of Crime” story presentation. Students will be randomly assigned story criteria, including specific crimes, that they must integrate into a fictional story demonstrating their understanding of the definitions of those crimes. Students present to the class. AA2, DE4, P2, TCC2, CCE4 • Interim: As part of the summative mock criminal trial, students must create a script that they will use to guide their role-play participation in the mock trial. TCC2, TI1, CCE4, DE4, AA2, P2
<p style="text-align: center;">Learning Plan</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach research skills of locating and evaluating sources - Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy and Purpose (CRAAP test); Speaker, Occasion, Audience, Purpose, Significance (SOAPS test) and others; searching for and skimming through resources, and citing material TCC2, TI1 • Develop success criteria for debates, seminars, projects, and presentations by viewing negative and positive models, considering prior experiences, etc. AA2 • Review positive peer feedback strategies for group activities DE4 • Reading assignments with SAT-style questions P2 • Content-based quiz on key vocabulary and concepts P2 • Written responses and/or discussions on videos and articles (especially those in the resources below) CCE4 • Participation assessments (i.e. guided notes, Pear Deck, etc.) CCE4 • Case studies TCC2 	

Teacher Resources: U.S. Constitution; Fordham Modern History Sourcebook; Bill of Rights Institute; Center for Civic Education; Upfront magazine articles and questions; Civics Mini-Q DBQ book; Newsela; CommonLit; Glencoe Street Law textbook and workbook; FBI Crime Clock statistics; Ted Talk, clips from “The People v. O.J. Simpson: American Crime Story”; clips from “The First 48”, “Live PD” and “COPS”; [mock trial materials from the New Hampshire Bar Association Mock Trial Competition](#)



Unit 3 - Civil Law

Desired Results - Goals, Transfer, Meaning, Acquisition

Established Goals:

Connecticut Secondary Social Studies Frameworks

- **CIV 9–12.7** Apply civic virtues and democratic principles when working with others.
- **CIV 9–12.14** Analyze historical, contemporary, and emerging means of changing societies, promoting the common good, and protecting rights.
- **ECO 9–12.1** Analyze how incentives influence choices that may result in policies with a range of costs and benefits for different groups.

Common Core State Standards

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.7** Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.1** Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.4** Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.

Vision of A Learner Attributes: Students will be able to independently use their learning to... ("I can" statements to be demonstrated)

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- **P2:** Believe that individuals can strengthen weaknesses through purposeful strategies, practice, and effort.
- **AA2(9-12):** I can assess my past successes and mistakes to change my approach.

Understandings: Students will understand that...

- Plaintiffs need to prove liability through a preponderance of the

Essential Questions:

- How can plaintiffs prove liability in a civil case, and how can

<p>evidence. There are many actions people can take to defend themselves against a lawsuit.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insurance, while costly, can reduce financial uncertainty and make accidental loss manageable. Certain types of insurance are required by law. • There are many benefits and detriments to the tort law system motivating groups to advocate for reform. • The government regulates marriage and divorce. • The civil law system has varying degrees of effectiveness. 	<p>defendants defend against a civil case?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what circumstances should a person purchase insurance? • What are the benefits and detriments of tort reform? • In what ways does the government regulate personal relationships to bring about certain outcomes for society? • To what extent is the civil law system effective?
<p>Students will know...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the precedents set by landmark tort law cases • the difference between the standard of guilt required in criminal cases and the standard of liability required in civil cases • the characteristics of intentional torts, negligence torts, and strict liability torts • the purpose of insurance • types of damages that can be awarded in civil cases • commonly utilized defenses in civil cases • methods to protect yourself from getting sued • arguments in support of and against tort reform • the legal proceedings for marriage and divorce • responsibilities such as child support and alimony 	<p>Students will be able to...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify evidence that draws information directly and substantively from multiple sources to detect inconsistencies in evidence in order to revise or strengthen claims • describe the roles of institutions such as clearly defined property rights and the rule of law in a market economy • identify when to best bring a lawsuit and how to best protect themselves from being sued • identify when and how to purchase and use insurance. • evaluate the arguments in support of tort reform • select, research, and develop an engaging presentation on a famous tort law case, drawing from multiple sources • critique relationships among individuals and groups within society • assess the rates of marriage and divorce in American society and theorize the impact on society
<p>Key Vocabulary: civil law, tort, liability, remedy, lawsuit, plaintiff, defendant, judge, jury, burden of proof, preponderance of the evidence, damages, punitive damages, compensatory damages, intentional tort, negligent tort, strict liability tort, settlement, negotiation, mediation, arbitration, litigation, lawyer, insurance, premium, deductible, copay, alimony, common law, injunction, defamation, common defenses to torts</p>	
<p>Assessment Evidence</p>	
<p>Performance Tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summative: Students choose from a list of famous tort law cases, or propose their own, and research to complete a presentation about the case, focusing on its impact on 	<p>Other Evidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interim: Students examine several tort law case studies and defend their answers to questions based on those scenarios,

<p>society. Students then present their cases to the class. TCC2, TI1, AA2, P2, CCE4</p>	<p>demonstrating an understanding of tort law definitions, principles, and defenses. P2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interim: Students fill in a Venn diagram to compare and contrast key concepts and terms of criminal and civil law. P2
<p>Learning Plan</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach research skills of locating and evaluating sources (CRAAP test, SOAPS, etc.), searching for and skimming through resources, and citing material TCC2, TI2 • Develop success criteria for debates, seminars, projects, and presentations by viewing negative and positive models, considering prior experiences, etc. AA2 • Review positive peer feedback strategies for group activities DE4 • Reading assignments with SAT-style questions P2 • Content-based quiz on key vocabulary and concepts P2 • Written responses and/or discussions on videos and articles (especially those in the resources below) CCE4 • Participation assessments (i.e. guided notes, Pear Deck, etc.) CCE4 • Case studies TCC2 	
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