

US Government Foundations Unit Plan

Abstract:

The purpose of this unit is to introduce students to the foundations of US government. The course is taught over one semester, exclusively to seniors. Class periods meet every other day for ninety minutes. My goal for the unit is to use primary sources and historical references to teach about the origins of our government and to demonstrate key ideas of guiding documents such as the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

Day One (1st day of course):

Issue books

Introduce class and procedures

Analyze documents: Magna Carta available at

<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/medieval/magframe.htm> , English Bill of Rights available at

<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/medieval/magframe.htm>

Discuss: English society and Parliamentary system, colonial system

English Parliament—House of Commons, House of Lords

1600s-1763 relative autonomy from Great Britain

Colonial systems

Subservient relationship with GB

Day Two:

Lecture/Discussion: Theories behind formation of government “Principles of Government PowerPoint”

Document Discussion: excerpts from John Locke’s “2nd Treatise of Government” with questions (attachment), writing topic (attachment)

Day Three:

Discuss French and Indian War (Seven Years’ War) and implications on colonies

How are tensions building in the colonies?

Boston Tea Party

Boston Massacre

Tax chart (not available)

Continental Congress:

Major Players

Read and discuss: Olive Branch Petition available at

http://ahp.gatech.edu/olive_branch_1775.html and A Proclamation by the King for Suppressing

and Sedition, August 23, 1775 available at http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/charters_of_freedom_1.html#

Day Four:

Topics:

2nd Continental Congress

Writing of the Declaration of Independence Rebellion

Documents:

Common Sense—run Socratic Seminar. Have students come up with at least three thought-provoking, open-ended questions. Examples available

<http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/commonsense/study.html>

Summary View of the Rights of British America (Peterson, 103-123)

Declaration of Independence

Discussion Questions:

How are the ideals of the Enlightenment reflected in the Declaration?

What was the most important part of the Declaration for Americans in 1776?

Why?

What did Thomas Jefferson mean by “all men are created equal?”

Why is this sentence now seen as an “American creed?”

Forms of government chart (attachment)

Day Five:

Topics:

Forming the Articles

Why confederacy?

Reflections of British government?

Problems with the Articles begin PowerPoint “The Articles of Confederation, what they could & couldn’t do”

Day Six:

Making the Constitution: Constitutional Convention finish “Articles” PowerPoint

How shaped by the Founders

Structure

Opinions of Revolutionaries

Federalist #10

Federalist #51

Excerpts from Washington’s First Inaugural Address:

<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/presiden/inaug/wash1.htm>

Jefferson letter to Alexander Donald (Peterson, 919-920)

“We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution” Lesson 15: What Conflicting

Opinions Did the Framers Have about the Completed Constitution? Available at

http://www.civiced.org/wtp_hs15_sb.php

Brutus #1 available at

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=849>

Second Treatise of Government
John Locke, 1690

In 1690, English philosopher John Locke produced two treatises (essays) on government. In his second treatise, he discussed the responsibilities of a government and claimed that the people have the right to overthrow an unjust government. Locke's ideas greatly influenced Thomas Jefferson and other supporters of the American Revolution. In this selection, Locke explains why people form governments.

"To understand political power aright. . . we must consider what estate all men are naturally in, and that is, a state of perfect freedom to order their actions, and dispose of their possessions and persons as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature, without asking leave or depending on the will of any other man. . .

Men being. . . by nature, all free, equal and independent, no one can be put out of this estate and subjected to the political power of another without his own consent, which is done by agreeing with other men, to join and unite into a community for their comfortable, safe and peaceable living, one amongst another, in a secure enjoyment of their properties, and a greater security against any that are not of it. . . .

[When any number of men have, by the consent of every individual, made a community, they have thereby made that community one body, with a power to act as one body, which is only by the will and determination of the majority. . . . And thus every man, by consenting with others to make one body politic under one government, puts himself under an obligation to everyone in that society to submit to the determination [decision] of the majority, and to be concluded by it. . . .

If man in the state of nature. . . be absolute lord of his own person and possessions, equal to the greatest and subject to nobody, why will he part with his freedom, this empire, and subject himself to the dominion [authority] and control of any other power? . . . It is obvious to answer that though in the state of nature he hath such a right, yet the enjoyment of it is very uncertain and constantly exposed to the invasion of others; for all being kings as much as he, every man his equal, . . . the enjoyment of the property he has in this state is very unsafe, very insecure.

This makes him willing to quit this condition which, however free, is full of fears and continual dangers; and it is not without reason that he seeks out and is willing to join in society with others. . . for the mutual preservation of their lives, liberties and estates, which I call by the general name—property.

The great and chief end, therefore, of men uniting into commonwealths, and putting themselves under government, is the preservation of their property, to which the state of Nature there are many things wanting (lacking).

Firstly, there wants an established, settled, known law, received and allowed by common consent to be the standard of right and wrong, and the common measure to decide all controversies between them. . . .

Secondly, in the state of Nature there wants a known and indifferent [unbiased] judge, with authority to determine all differences according to the established law. . . .

Thirdly, in the state of Nature there often "wants power to back and support the sentence when right, and to give it due execution. . . .

But though men, when they enter into society give up the equality, liberty, and executive power they had in the state of Nature into the hands of society . . . the power of the society or legislative constituted by them can never be supposed to extend farther than the common good. . . . Whoever has the legislative or supreme power of any commonwealth, is bound to govern by established standing laws, promulgated and known to the people, and not by extemporary decrees, by indifferent and upright judges, who are to decide controversies by those laws; and to employ the force of the community at home only in the execution of such laws, or abroad to prevent or redress foreign injuries and secure the community, from inroads and invasion. And all this to be directed to no other end but the peace, safety, and public good of the people. . . .

The reason why men enter into society is the preservation of their property; and the end while they choose and authorise a legislative is that there may be laws made, and rules set, as

guards and fences to the properties of all the society . . . Whensoever, therefore, the legislative shall transgress this fundamental rule of society and either by ambition, fear, folly, or corruption, endeavor to grasp themselves, or put into the hands of any other, an absolute power over the lives, liberties, and estates of the people, by this breach of trust they forfeit the power the people had put into their hands for quite contrary ends, and it devolves [passes] to the people; who have a right to resume their original liberty, and by the establishment of a new legislative (such as they shall think fit), provide for their own safety and security, which is the end which they are in society. . . .

Who shall be judge whether the prince or legislative act contrary to their trust? . . . The people shall be judge. . . .

. . . The power that every individual gave the society when he entered into it can never revert to the individuals again, as long as the society lasts, but will always remain in the community; because without this there can be no community—no common wealth, which is contrary to the original agreement....

Questions:

1. According to Locke, what freedoms did people have before the founding of governments?
2. What are the potential dangers of a person living in what Locke calls “perfect freedom”?
3. According to Locke, how are governments formed?
4. What trade-off does Locke say occur when people live under governments?
5. Who is the final authority of government in Locke’s opinion?

Using John Locke's *Second Treatise on Government*, respond to the following sentence. This should be ½-1 page typed, single spaced.

With out government, there is chaos; without chaos, there is no independence.

Name _____

Government Basics

What is government?

Give examples of public policy.

List 3 Ways to classify governments	Type	Definition & Subcategories	Examples

Foundations Resources

“The Avalon Project.” Yale University Law School.

<<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/presiden/inaug/wash1.htm>> and

<<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/medieval/magframe.htm>>

“Brutus No. 1.” Teaching American History.org.

<<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=849>>

Peterson, Merrill. Thomas Jefferson Writings. Library of America, New York: 1984.

“We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution” The Center for Civic Education.

<http://www.civiced.org/wtp_hs15_sb.php>