

*This high school government lesson plan was developed to facilitate instruction and discussion concerning the United States' founding principles versus totalitarian systems of government. This lesson is aligned to the expectations of [HB 5](#) (2021): Civic Education Curriculum.*

**Teacher Notes:** This lesson should be done after students have been exposed to and gained a working knowledge of the Charters of Freedom: Declaration of Independence, U.S. Constitution, and Bill of Rights.

**An accompanying [PowerPoint](#) is available and can be used with the instructions below.**

1. **SLIDE 2 - Warm Up:** Why are the founding principles essential for a free society?
  - a. Pose the following question to the class: What do we mean by Founding Principles?
    - i. Students should reference the 'Charters of Freedom' in thinking about/responding to this question.
  - b. Break down with students the term: 'Founding Principles'.
    - i. Founding. What does that term mean? Make the connection to FOUNDATION. Something you build on over time. A strong foundation is necessary to build a lasting home.
    - ii. Principles. What does that term mean? Principles are values and beliefs that we hold dear.
    - iii. Our 'Founding Principles' of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are what we build on over time. They are the FOUNDATION that built the United States, and we CONTINUE to build and improve on this foundation.
2. **SLIDES 3-6 - Image Analysis Activity:** Explain to students that we are going to look today at a government that is built on a different foundation. As we explore this, think about what it means to live in a nation built on life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.
  - a. **SLIDE 3** - Post the term 'Totalitarianism' on the screen. Ask students: What do you think of when you see this word? *Answers will likely focus on 'total'.* What do you think living under a totalitarian government might look like? *Answers will likely focus on control of all aspects of life.*
  - b. **SLIDE 4** - Post image of Mussolini. Tell students that we are going to look at a specific form of totalitarian government called fascism, most represented by Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, who ruled Italy from 1925-1945.
  - c. **SLIDES 5 & 6** - Post [image of Italian Fascist eagle](#). Have students use the [Analyze Artwork](#) sheet from the National Archives to break down the image.
    - i. Review the sheet responses with the students. Discuss with students what the eagle and fasci symbolizes (*strength and unity*). How can the fasci symbolize strength? *It's harder to break a bundle of sticks than it is a single stick or just a few sticks.* What does this suggest about the importance of the individual under totalitarian fascism? *Point out that the bundle represents the strength of the state.* Optional: compare to the American eagle and what it symbolizes.
3. **SLIDE 7 – Reading & Jigsaw Activity** – Share with students that they will use excerpts from Mussolini's '[What is Fascism](#)' to explore the foundational principles of fascism and compare them to what they know about the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. Before starting this activity, students should have access to the following: [The Preamble to the US Constitution](#); [The Preamble to the Declaration of Independence](#); and [The Bill of Rights](#). Use the embedded links and/or the text on Pages 9 and 10.
  - a. Move students into jigsaw groups. Groups should have a minimum of four members. An overview of a potential model can be [viewed here](#).
  - b. **SLIDE 8** – Pass out the Reading Discussion Questions (Page 3) and preview the questions as a whole class. Explain to students that in their individual readings, there are guiding questions to assist with comprehension, but the Discussion Questions will be used for the jigsaw activity.
    - i. Review the Discussion Questions:
      1. How do the ideas and principles of fascism compare to those of our founding documents?

2. How does this excerpt compare or contrast with the principles and ideologies expressed in our founding documents?
  3. Can you identify/highlight language that presents the greatest contrast with language in our founding documents?
  4. What might be considered a principle of fascism based on what you have read?
- c. Pass out one reading to each member of the group so that all four readings are represented in the group.
  - d. Instruct students to move to work with others with the same reading – their expert groups. While in their expert groups, students will read the text and complete the following task:
    - i. Read with the essential question in mind: how do the ideals and principles of totalitarian fascism compare to those of our founding documents?
    - ii. Answer the guiding questions on their reading.
    - iii. Developed shared responses to the Discussion Questions.
  - e. Instruct students to move back to their original jigsaw groups. Each expert should share their responses to the expert group questions.
    - i. After each expert has shared their responses, each jigsaw group should answer the essential question: how do the ideals and principles of totalitarian fascism compare to those of our founding documents?
- 4. SLIDES 9-18 – Whole Group Discussion** – Have each group share out their responses. Project each excerpt reading to allow students to discuss and compare their knowledge of the principles embedded in our founding documents. *Teacher Note: see notes in PowerPoint for additional directions for class discussion.*
- a. **SLIDE 19** - Circle back to and discuss the overarching lesson question: Why are the founding principles essential for a free society?
- 5. Summative Assessment** – Pass out the One-Pager Activity (See Page 8) to each student. Instruct students to create a one-page answer to the overarching lesson question: Why are the founding principles essential for a free society?

**Extension Suggestion:** This lesson may also be done with readings centered around totalitarian communism.

Possible sources you may use and adapt are provided below, with short descriptions of each:

- Castro’s Second Declaration of Havana (1962):  
Fidel Castro discusses the adoption of Marxism/Leninism  
<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1962castro.asp>
- Nikita Khrushchev’s Secret Speech (1956):  
Khrushchev admits the crimes of the Soviet regime under Stalin  
<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/krushchev-secret.asp>
- Brezhnev Doctrine (1968):  
Brezhnev justifies the crushing of the ‘Prague Spring’  
<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1968brezhnev.asp>
- Ludu’s Clear Current and Scum (1956):  
The Polish newspaper Trybuna Ludu glorifies the relationship between Poland and the Soviet Union  
<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1956trybuna1.asp>

**Additional Readings on Communist and Fascist Totalitarianism:**

- What everyone should know about communism (1961):  
<http://www.usd116.org/ProfDev/AHTC/lessons/RuudFel08/attachments/Lesson2/Ruud%20CommunismPamphlet.pdf>
- The 25 Points of National Socialism (1920)  
<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/25points.asp>
- Adolf Hitler Speech (April 12, 1921)  
<https://history.hanover.edu/courses/excerpts/111hit1.html>

## Reading Discussion Questions

Essential Question: How do the ideas and principles of fascism compare to those of our founding documents?

Supporting Questions:

- How does this excerpt compare or contrast with the principles and ideologies expressed in our Founding documents?
- Can you identify/highlight language that presents the greatest contrast with language in our Founding documents?
- What might be considered a principle of fascism based on what you have read?

## Reading 1

“Fascism, the more it considers and observes the future and the development of humanity quite apart from political considerations of the moment, **believes neither in the possibility nor the utility of perpetual peace.** It thus repudiates the doctrine of Pacifism -- born of a renunciation of the struggle and an act of cowardice in the face of sacrifice. **War alone brings up to its highest tension all human energy and puts the stamp of nobility upon the peoples who have courage to meet it.** All other trials are substitutes, which never really put men into the position where they have to make the great decision -- the alternative of life or death....”

### Guiding Questions:

*How can we summarize this excerpt?*

*Do freedom and democracy come into play here?*

*Where do we see a direct challenge to the ideal of 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness'?*

## Reading 2

**”Fascism denies that the majority, by the simple fact that it is a majority, can direct human society; it denies that numbers alone can govern by means of a periodical consultation, and it affirms the immutable, beneficial, and fruitful inequality of mankind, which can never be permanently leveled through the mere operation of a mechanical process such as universal suffrage....”**

**“Fascism denies, in democracy, the absur[d] conventional untruth of political equality dressed out in the garb of collective irresponsibility, and the myth of "happiness" and indefinite progress....”**

### **Guiding Questions:**

*How does fascism describe representative government?*

*How does it describe the principle of equality and the idea of voting?*

*Where do we see a direct challenge to the ideal of 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness'?*

### Reading 3

“it may rather be expected that this will be a **century of authority**...a century of Fascism. For if the nineteenth century was a century of individualism it may be expected that this will be the **century of collectivism and hence the century of the State....**”

“Fascism conceives of **the State as an absolute**, in comparison with which **all individuals or groups are relative, only to be conceived of in their relation to the State.**”

“for never before has the nation stood more **in need of authority, of direction and order.**”

#### **Guiding Questions:**

*What is the priority of government under a totalitarian fascist regime?*

*Based on these passages, What prediction can you make about how fascism would respond to a desire for a bill of rights?*

*What is the purpose of government according to fascism?*

*Based on these passages, how does fascism compare to the principles found in our Founding Documents?*

## Reading 4

“The Fascist State organizes the nation, **but leaves a sufficient margin of liberty to the individual; the latter is deprived of all useless and possibly harmful freedom, but retains what is essential**; the deciding power in this question cannot be the individual, but the State alone....”

“For Fascism, the growth of empire, that is to say **the expansion of the nation, is an essential manifestation of vitality, and its opposite a sign of decadence.**”

“But empire demands **discipline, the coordination of all forces and a deeply felt sense of duty and sacrifice**: this fact explains many aspects of the practical working of the regime, the character of many forces in the State, and the necessarily **severe measures which must be taken against those who would oppose this spontaneous and inevitable movement**”

### Guiding Questions:

*How does the fascist government conceive of the ideas of freedom and liberty?*

*What freedoms MIGHT be acceptable under this system? What would not? Why?  
Would rights be permanent?*

*How does fascism respond to the idea of ‘We the People’ as found in the Preamble to the Constitution?*

## One-Pager Activity

Create a single-page visual that summarizes the principles of our Founding Documents and contrasts them with the principles of fascism, answering the question: Why are the founding principles essential for a free society? You may complete the one-pager online (Google Docs) and submit it via e-mail or you may create it by hand on a sheet of unlined 8 ½ x 11 paper.

Use the primary sources that you have been provided and any other resources you feel are necessary to create a one-pager that would be easily understood by even someone who knows nothing about our Founding Documents or fascism. Your one-pager must contain the following:

- A title
- A summary of the principles contained in our Founding Documents, as well as the purpose of government described in those documents.
- A summary of the principles of fascism, as well as the purpose of government under a fascist totalitarian system.
- At least two images relevant to our Founding Documents, principles, or purpose of government
- At least two images relevant to fascist totalitarianism
- At least one quote that is representative of Founding Documents, principles, or purpose of government.
- At least one quote that is representative of fascist totalitarianism.

## **Preamble to the United States Constitution**

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

## **Preamble to the Declaration of Independence**

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness....

# The United States Bill of Rights

## Amendment I

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

## Amendment II

A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.

## Amendment III

No Soldier shall, in time of peace be quartered in any house, without the consent of the Owner, nor in time of war, but in a manner to be prescribed by law.

## Amendment IV

The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.

## Amendment V

No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a Grand Jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the Militia, when in actual service in time of War or public danger; nor shall any person be subject for the same offence to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation.

## Amendment VI

In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the State and district wherein the crime shall have been committed, which district shall have been previously ascertained by law, and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation; to be confronted with the witnesses against him; to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor, and to have the Assistance of Counsel for his defence.

## Amendment VII

In Suits at common law, where the value in controversy shall exceed twenty dollars, the right of trial by jury shall be preserved, and no fact tried by a jury, shall be otherwise re-examined in any Court of the United States, than according to the rules of the common law.

## Amendment VIII

Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.

## Amendment IX

The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people.

## Amendment X

The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.