

CIVIC VIRTUE IN AMERICAN HISTORY

SS.8.CG.2.3 Analyze the role of civic virtue in the lives of citizens and leaders from the Colonial period through Reconstruction

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2023 BENCHMARK UPDATES

- Updated from SS.8.C.1.3
 - Changed from “~~Recognize~~ the role of civic virtue in the lives of citizens and leaders from the colonial period through Reconstruction.” to “Analyze the role of civic virtue in the lives of citizens and leaders from the Colonial period through Reconstruction”
- Depth of Knowledge Changes within Benchmark
 - Changed from “recognize” to “analyze”
- Benchmark Clarification Changes
 - Benchmark clarifications are an addition to the 2023-2024 middle school civics and government benchmarks. Benchmark clarifications are listed in the lesson summary below.
- Vocabulary Changes
 - No changes

Essential Teacher Content Background Information

[Teacher Content Notes Not Appropriate For Student Use]

This section addresses the following topics:

1. What is Virtue?
2. What is *Civic* Virtue?
3. Roots of Civic Virtue in Ancient Greece and Rome
4. Civic Virtue in the United States

1. What is Virtue?

Virtue generally refers to moral excellence or the quality of being morally ‘good’. It involves behaving in a way that aligns with ethical principles, such as honesty, compassion, courage, and justice. Virtues are often considered to be positive character traits that contribute to a person's overall moral and ethical character. In some cases, virtues may be seen as ideals to aspire to or as a standard of conduct to follow.

Different cultures and belief systems may have different views on what constitutes virtue, but common examples of virtues include honesty, kindness, respect, self-discipline, courage, and wisdom.

2. What is *Civic* Virtue?

Civic virtue refers to the set of values, attitudes, and behaviors that promote and uphold the well-being and interests of a community or society. It encompasses a range of actions and characteristics such as honesty, integrity, responsibility, respect for the law, patriotism, and commitment to the common good.

Civic virtue involves actively participating in public affairs, volunteering in community organizations, and obeying the laws and regulations that govern society. It also entails advocating for policies and practices that promote the welfare of all members of the community and challenging those that undermine it.

Civic virtue is often seen as essential for the functioning of democratic societies, as it helps to maintain the social contract, promote fairness and justice, and foster a sense of shared responsibility, community, and common purpose among citizens.

3. Roots of Civic Virtue in Ancient Greece and Rome

Civic virtue in Ancient Greece and Rome referred to the moral and ethical principles that guided the behavior of citizens towards the betterment of the community as a whole. In both societies, civic virtue was considered essential for the success and stability of the state.

In Ancient Greece, the philosophers Socrates and Plato both helped develop the concept of civic virtue. They believed that individuals had a responsibility to help improve their communities and that the virtues of justice, courage, wisdom, and temperance were essential for individuals to fulfill their roles as citizens.

Plato, one of Socrates' most famous students, developed his philosophy in the context of the political and social turmoil of Ancient Greece. In his most famous work, *The Republic*, Plato outlined his vision for an ideal society in which individuals would be guided by the principles of justice and virtue. He believed that the

state had a responsibility to educate its citizens in these virtues, and that only by doing so could it achieve stability and prosperity.

Plato's concept of the "philosopher-king" also had a significant impact on the idea of civic virtue. He believed that the most virtuous individuals should be chosen to govern the state, and that they should be guided by their commitment to the common good rather than personal interests. This idea influenced later political philosophers and had a lasting impact on the development of political theory in Western civilization.

Plato's student Aristotle in turn further developed the concept of civic virtue in his work *Politics*. Aristotle believed that the ultimate goal of political society was the advancement of the common good, and that civic virtue was necessary for individuals to contribute to this goal. He emphasized the importance of the virtues of justice, courage, temperance, and wisdom, which he believed were essential for individuals to fulfill their roles as citizens.

Civic virtue was also a central concept in the Roman Republic. The philosopher and statesman Cicero was a key advocate of civic virtue in Rome, and his work *On Duties* emphasized the importance of individual responsibility towards the state. Cicero believed that the virtues of honesty, justice, and patriotism were essential for the success of the state, and that citizens had a duty to participate actively in political life.

Another Ancient Roman who contributed to the concept of civic virtue was the Emperor and Stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius. Aurelius believed that individuals living a virtuous life was central to the wellbeing of society as a whole. He emphasized the virtues of wisdom, courage, justice, and self-discipline, which he believed were essential for individuals to fulfill their duties as citizens and leaders.

In both Ancient Greece and Rome, the concept of civic virtue was closely linked to the idea of citizenship and the responsibilities that came with it. The belief in civic virtue helped to foster a sense of community and collective responsibility, which were essential for the stability and success of these societies.

4. Civic Virtue in the United States

Civic virtue, the notion that citizens have a responsibility to contribute to the common good of society by participating in public life and acting in the best interests of their community and nation, played a significant role in the American founding, and was viewed by the Founders as central to upholding the democratic/republican society they were building.

In the American context, civic virtue was seen as a necessary ingredient for a successful republic. The Founders were very aware of the vulnerability of the system they were creating, with the famous story about Benjamin Franklin, at the conclusion of the 1787 Constitutional Convention, being asked by one citizen what form of government the Framers has created replying "a republic, if you can keep it" being highly illustrative. The Founders believed that a democratic society could only flourish if its citizens possessed certain moral and ethical qualities, such as a commitment to the rule of law, a sense of public duty, and a willingness to sacrifice their personal interests for the greater good of the nation.

This emphasis on civic virtue can be seen in a variety of aspects of the American founding. For example, the concept of the social contract, which formed the basis for the American Constitution, emphasized the idea that citizens had a duty to support the government and obey its laws in exchange for protection and security. Similarly, the Founders placed a great deal of emphasis on the importance of education and moral instruction as a means of cultivating civic virtue. Many of them believed that a well-educated and 'morally upright' citizenry was essential for the success of the new republic.

In short, the idea of civic virtue was central to the American founding because it represented a belief in the importance of individual responsibility and a commitment to the common good. By encouraging citizens to participate in public life and contribute to the welfare of their communities, the Founders sought to create a society that was prosperous, just, and worthy of the ideals espoused in the Declaration of Independence.

Lesson Summary

ESSENTIAL QUESTION		
What role did civic virtue play in the lives and careers of citizens and leaders from the Colonial era through Reconstruction?		
BENCHMARK		
SS.8.CG.2.3 Analyze the role of civic virtue in the lives of citizens and leaders from the Colonial period through Reconstruction.		
CIVICS EOC REPORTING CATEGORY		
N/A		
OVERVIEW		
In this lesson, students will determine how civic virtues impacted the lives of citizens and leaders throughout early American history by analyzing primary source documents.		
BENCHMARK CLARIFICATIONS		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will understand how the idea of civic virtue changes in response to the attitudes of citizens and leaders over time. 		
BENCHMARK CONTENT LIMITS		
N/A		
CIVICS CONTENT VOCABULARY		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> civic virtue, Reconstruction era 		
INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES		
Collaborative learning	Learning centers	Student-led instruction
MATERIALS		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7 document folders numbered 1-7 if using print copies, or student digital devices White copier paper or poster paper Markers, colored pencils, sharpies Timer (optional) George Washington Quote slide Civic Virtue Definition for Kids video (external link) Are We Forgetting the Role of Civic Virtues? reading (external link) Document Analysis Graphic Organizer George Washington and the Newburgh Conspiracy reading Benjamin Franklin and the Thirteen Virtues reading 		

- John Adams and the Boston Massacre reading
- *Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, March 31, 1776* reading
- Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad reading
- On the Life of Frederick Douglass reading
- Lincoln and the Blind Memorandum reading
- Civic Virtue Biographical Poster Rubric

B.E.S.T. STANDARDS

- ELA.8.R.2.1- Analyze how individual text sections and/or features convey a purpose and/or meaning in texts.
- ELA.8.R.2.4- Track the development of an argument, analyzing the types of reasoning used and their effectiveness, identifying ways in which the argument could be improved.
- ELA.8.R.3.2- Paraphrase content from grade-level texts.
- ELA.8.C.4.1- Conduct research to answer a question, drawing on multiple reliable and valid sources, and generating additional questions for further research.
- ELA.K12.EE.1.1- Cite evidence to explain and justify reasoning.

Suggested Student Activity Sequence & Pace

DAY	ACTIVITY SEQUENCE
DAY 1	<p>Planning Note: Prior to teaching this lesson, be sure to organize your document folders (see materials section above) if you are using printed documents. This lesson calls for seven groups that will take turns with each document and then pass to the next group. Each document folder (#1-7) should have around 6-8 copies of the document in them.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Put students into pairs or small groups. Display the “George Washington Quote” slide (<i>A good moral character is the first essential in a man. It is therefore highly important that you should endeavor not only to be learned but virtuous</i>). Allow students time to read the quote and then in their pairs/small groups complete the questions/tasks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> List any words from this quote that you don’t know the meaning of. Based on your understanding of the rest of the sentence, what do you think the word <i>virtuous</i> means? Break the quote down into language they understand and rewrite it in your own words As students answer the questions with their partners/group, circulate the class to monitor engagement. Have one person from each group share their group’s paraphrased version with the class. Now ask students the question: What is virtue? Have groups share out responses. Lead students to the understanding that ‘virtue’ generally refers to moral excellence or the quality of being morally ‘good’. It involves behaving in a way that aligns with ethical principles, such as honesty, compassion, courage, and justice. Virtues are often considered to be positive character traits that contribute to a person's overall moral and ethical character. In some cases, virtues may be seen as ideals to aspire to or as a standard of conduct to follow. Different cultures and belief systems may have different views on what constitutes virtue, but common examples of virtues include honesty, kindness, respect, self-discipline, courage, and wisdom. Given that understanding, ask students the following question: In what ways can a person demonstrate virtue in their capacity as a <i>citizen</i>? Have them discuss first in their pairs/small groups. As students discuss with their partners/group, again circulate the class to monitor engagement. Have students share out responses. Lead students to the understanding that <i>civic virtue</i> is the responsibility of citizens to contribute to the common good of society by participating in public life and acting in the best interests of their community and nation. Explain that this idea played a significant role in the American founding, and was viewed by the Founders as central to upholding the democratic/republican society they were building. Explain that the focus of the next few days will be on the idea of civic virtue. We will examine the role that civic virtue played in the lives and careers of citizens and leaders throughout U.S. history, from the Colonial era through Reconstruction. Have students take out a blank piece of paper. Explain that as we firm up our understanding of civic virtue through a video clip and an article, they are going to create a bulleted list of qualities/characteristics of civic virtue.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 16. Watch the video clip "Civic Virtue Definition for Kids"(2:10) from History Illustrated. 17. Review a few of the bullets students wrote down together as a class. 18. Next, hand out the article, "Are We Forgetting the Role of Civic Virtues?" from the Iowa Capital Dispatch. 19. Work through the text together as a whole class, pausing to provide time for students to add to their notes. 20. Review a few of the bullets students wrote down together as a class. 21. Explain to students that now they will look at specific examples of civic virtue from early American history. 22. Split students into 7 groups by numbering them off or any other method appropriate to your classroom management style, and have students assemble in their groups (all #1s together and so forth). 23. Pass out a "Document Analysis Graphic Organizer" to each student. 24. Pass out numbered folders to each numbered group; folder #1 (containing copies of document 1) to group 1 and so forth: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "Document 1: George Washington and the Newburgh Conspiracy" 2. "Document 2: Benjamin Franklin and the Thirteen Virtues" 3. "Document 3: John Adams and the Boston Massacre" 4. "Document 4: <i>Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, March 31, 1776</i>" 5. "Document 5: Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad" 6. "Document 6: On the Life of Frederick Douglass" 7. "Document 7: Lincoln and the Blind Memorandum" 25. Provide time for each group to read through their first document. After reading, they should work together to fill in the corresponding row in their document analysis organizer. Teacher Note: It is recommended you set a timer for each document rotation. Getting through the first two document rotations today would be ideal pacing. 26. As students read the documents with their group, circulate the class to monitor for engagement and understanding, stopping to help guide groups in filling out their organizers as appropriate. 27. Monitor the time, giving the class a 2-minute warning as their time with this document nears its end so that students can finish writing responses. 28. When the time you have set has elapsed, have students return documents to their folder, and then have one student from each group deliver their folder to the next group in sequence i.e. folder 1 goes to group 2 and so forth, with folder 7 now rotating to group 1. 29. Repeat steps 24 - 26 with this next document/folder. 30. Conclude class by having 2-3 groups explain why they think civic virtue is important based on the historical examples they have examined so far. 31. Make note of what rotation each group has completed, have students return documents to the folders, and collect.
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DAY 2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Begin class by having students return to the same groups as the previous day. Adjust as needed for any students who were absent and have returned, etc. 2. Review from the previous day by asking students to define civic virtue. 3. Have students share out responses, guiding them back to the definition from the previous day: <i>civic virtue is the good characteristics, attitudes, practices, and activities of participants in a political system. Examples of civic virtues include: civility, cooperation,</i>
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	<p><i>volunteerism, courage, fairness, compassion, self-discipline, tolerance, wisdom, contributions, humility, integrity, justice, perseverance, respect, responsibility, etc.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Explain to students that now they will continue looking at examples of civic virtue in American History by continuing to look at documents as they did the previous day. 5. Have students take back out their “Document Analysis Graphic Organizer”. 6. Distribute the document folders by number to the next group in order (e.g., if group #1 completed folders #1 and #2 the previous day, they would now start with folder #3; if group #7 completed folders #7 and #1, they would now receive folder #2). 7. Engage in the same activity sequence as steps 24 - 27 in day 1 with the additional documents. Teacher Note: It is again recommended you set a timer to pace each rotation. The goal is to finish the remaining documents if possible today. 8. Once again, conclude class by having 2-3 groups explain why they think civic virtue is important based on the historical examples they have examined so far. Is there one particular civic virtue they have seen exhibited throughout the examples? 9. If rotations are not finished, take note of what rotation each group has completed. 10. Have students return documents to the folders, and collect.
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DAY 3	<p>Planning Note: If needed, complete the document rotations following the previous day’s activity sequence and instructions. Once done, collect the documents and have students return to their normal seating (e.g. not in groups).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Begin class by guiding a review of the “Document Analysis Graphic Organizer” through shoulder partner conversations and whole group share out. Teacher Note: Use the sample answer key below to help guide the discussion. 2. Display Document 1 on your smartboard. Have the students turn and talk to their shoulder partner about what they recorded for this document and how that person displayed civic virtue. Teacher Note: Remind students that there may be multiple correct responses. Explain to them that history is complicated. There aren’t always right or wrong answers, and there are many perspectives. As long as they can support their answer with text evidence, their response is valid. 3. Before moving on to the next document, have a few students share their responses with the whole group to check for understanding. 4. Repeat steps 2 & 3 with Documents 2-7. Spend about 2 minutes on each document before moving on. 5. Explain to students that to conclude this lesson, they will be creating a biographical poster on one of the subjects of the documents (George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Abigail Adams, Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, or Abraham Lincoln). The poster will tell about their life and how they displayed civic virtue through their actions. Teacher Note: Decide ahead of time if you are allowing the students to pick their person or you are assigning. You can have them complete this task individually or in pairs. 6. Distribute the “Civic Virtue Biographical Poster Rubric”. 7. Review the requirements of the rubric with the class, taking any clarifying questions to ensure student understanding. In particular, explain to students that their poster needs to include an explanation of how their subject displayed civic virtue as well as how those actions changed the understanding of civic virtue.
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	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Make paper, markers, colored pencils, and sharpies available to students. 9. Allow students to access their document analysis organizers as well as documents 1-7 as appropriate to revisit information on the subject of their poster. Teacher Note: You may also, at your discretion, allow them to access student digital devices, to find more information/images on their subject. 10. While students create their posters, circulate the room to monitor for engagement. 11. Students should continue working on their posters for the remaining class time. 12. Before the end of class, have students return all documents, creative supplies (markers, colored pencils, etc), electronic devices (if they were used and supplied). 13. Have students hold onto posters or collect as appropriate for your classroom management.
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DAY 4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Begin class by having students get organized with their posters and materials from the day before. 2. If needed, give students a little more time to finish their posters, as you feel is appropriate. 3. Once finished, have students clean up materials and stand next to their desk with their poster. 4. Go around the room and have each student/pair of students present on their poster, sitting once they finish their presentation. 5. Each person should share: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1). The subject they chose 2). How that subject displayed civic virtue 3). How they thought the subject's actions and attitudes changed the overall understanding of civic virtue. 6. Once everyone has shared, have students hang their posters around the room. 7. Checking for Understanding (Formative Assessment): Instruct students to write a well-crafted informative response to the following prompt: <u>Prompt</u> Based on the examples analyzed in this lesson, what do you think was the most important act of civic virtue? Why? What civic virtue do you think is most important for citizens to practice today in order to preserve our constitutional republic? Explain.
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Civics Content Vocabulary

Word/Term	Definition
civic virtue	the good characteristics, attitudes, practices, and activities of participants in a political system. Examples of civic virtues include: civility, cooperation, volunteerism, courage, fairness, compassion, self-discipline, tolerance, wisdom, contributions, humility, integrity, justice, perseverance, respect, responsibility, etc.
Reconstruction era	a period in American history following the Civil War (1861–1865) and was the effort to reintegrate southern states, as well as newly freed people

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Civics 360 Resources](#)

Florida Department of Education's Civic Literacy Reading List

- *Narrative on the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* by Frederick Douglass
- *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* by Benjamin Franklin
- *Lincoln: A Photobiography* by Russell Freedman

ANSWER KEYS

Sample Answers: Document Analysis Graphic Organizer

Civic Virtue Biographical Poster Rubric

Written Response: Sample Scoring Rubric

SOURCES

George Washington Quote from Mount Vernon:

<https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/past-projects/quotes/topic/family/>

Civic Virtue Definition for Kids video from History Illustrated:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FLLhmMXy2Ds>

Are We Forgetting the Role of Civic Virtues? From the Iowa Capital Dispatch:

<https://iowacapitaldispatch.com/2020/05/01/are-we-forgetting-the-role-of-civic-virtues/>

Document 1: George Washington and the Newburgh Conspiracy Source: adapted from

<https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/newburgh-conspiracy/>

Document 2: Benjamin Franklin and the Thirteen Virtues Sources: adapted from

<https://www.gcu.edu/blog/criminal-justice-government-and-public-administration/benjamin-franklin-and-civic-virtues> and *the Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*

Document 3: John Adams and the Boston Massacre Source: adapted from

<https://billofrightsinstitute.org/activities/john-adams-and-the-boston-massacre-trial-handout-a-narrative>

Document 4: *Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, March 31, 1776* Source: adapted from

<https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/remember-the-ladies/> and

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/educational-magazines/abigail-adamss-letters-john-adams>

Document 5: Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad Source: adapted from

<https://billofrightsinstitute.org/activities/harriet-tubman-follow-the-north-star-to-freedom-handout-a-narrative>

Document 6: On the Life of Frederick Douglass Source: adapted from

<https://www.nps.gov/frdo/learn/historyculture/frerickdouglass.htm> and *Narrative on the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*

Document 7: Lincoln and the Blind Memorandum Source: adapted from

https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/the-election-of-1864-and-the-last-temptation-of-abraham-lincoln/2014/09/11/e33f99aa-345b-11e4-9e92-0899b306bbea_story.html