

POLITICAL AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION

SS.912.CG.2.2 Explain the importance of political and civic participation to the success of the United States’ constitutional republic.

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2023 BENCHMARK UPDATES

- Updated from SS.912.C.2.2
 - Changed from “~~Evaluate~~ the importance of political participation and civic participation.” to “Explain the importance of political and civic participation to the success of the United States’ constitutional republic.”
- Depth of Knowledge Changes within Benchmark
 - Changed from “Evaluate” to “Explain”
- Addition of Benchmark Clarifications
 - Benchmark clarifications are an addition to the 2023-2024 high school civics and government benchmarks. Benchmark clarifications are listed in the lesson summary below.

Essential Teacher Content Background Information

[Teacher Content Notes Not Appropriate For Student Use]

This section addresses the following topics:

1. Methods of Political and Civic Participation
2. Political and Civic Participation: An Example From History
3. Limitations on Participation

1. Methods of Political and Civic Participation

Remaining engaged politically and civically is a central responsibility of citizenship. While citizenship carries with it certain *obligations*, such as obeying laws, paying taxes, and defending the nation if called upon, no less important are the actions a citizen takes to participate in shaping our constitutional republic. The survival of a constitutional republic relies on “we the people” to engage. In addition to the obligations mentioned above, the table below outlines additional ways in which citizens can exercise political and civic participation.

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| Voting | Citizens have a responsibility for selecting public officials who will represent their interests in government. |
| Attending civic meetings | Civic meetings are ways for citizens to be engaged participants in their government. Interest groups, political parties, candidates for public office, religious organizations, the media, and public officials hold civic meetings in order to inform and learn from the public. |
| Petitioning and Assembly | <p>The right of individuals to come together with others and collectively express, promote, pursue, and defend common interests. This includes the right to assemble in public places and the right to join an association. Peaceable assembly is also understood as freedom of association. The U.S. Supreme Court has upheld laws requiring general permits, as well as prosecutions for illegal demonstrations under certain circumstances. The right of individuals to express themselves must be balanced against the need to maintain public order.</p> <p>People are protected when they bring to the government’s attention their unresolved concerns, provide information to political leaders about unpopular policies and issues, and expose government misconduct. The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that regulation of assembly may not be used to stifle dissent; unpopular groups may not be prevented from gathering based on the nature of the group’s message.</p> |
| Political campaigns | Citizens may run for or be appointed to serve in public office. Individuals not interested in service can still participate by volunteering time to a campaign, wearing a shirt or button endorsing a candidate, contributing money to a campaign, or engaging in civil discourse with potential voters. |
| Volunteering | Contributing to the common good is an essential component of citizenship in a constitutional republic. Coming together with friends, neighbors, or organizations to accomplish goals is an important foundation for a democratic society. |
| Staying informed and Communicating | Being an informed citizen allows you to engage in other civic responsibilities more effectively. Knowing about political candidates and their stances on issues for example, would allow you to be a more well-informed voter. It also allows you to communicate any concerns you have or voice support for something to elected public officials. Being |

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| with public officials | informed also comes with the responsibility of finding trusted sources, examining all sides of an issue, and practicing good media literacy. |
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2. Political and Civic Participation: An Example From History

The Civil Rights Movement is one of the most well known examples of political and civic participation in U.S. history. Taking place primarily in the 1960s, this movement sought to ensure social and legal equality for African-Americans. Despite the promises of the Reconstruction Era, American society had operated under the premise of “separate but equal” for a majority of the 1900s. Individuals and groups were divided in their stances towards racial equality. Some, like Governor George Wallace, the White Citizens Council, and members of the Ku Klux Klan worked to stop the expansion of rights and desegregation efforts. Others, like Martin Luther King Jr., the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee pushed for true equality. While both sides engaged in methods of civic and political participation in attempts to have their viewpoints prevail, it would ultimately be those advocating to abolish segregation, discrimination, and disenfranchisement that would be victorious. The individuals and groups fighting for justice and equality used three main methods:

- A. One effective method used during the Civil Rights Movement was to petition the courts. Most famously, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) brought the *Brown v. Board of Education* case to the Supreme Court in 1954. This victory by the NAACP helped achieve the end of racial segregation in public schools nationwide.
- B. One of the most popular methods of participation was engaging in boycotts, demonstrations, and acts of civil disobedience. In 1955, in Montgomery, Alabama, Rosa Parks was arrested after refusing to give up her seat on the bus and move from the “whites-only” section. For 381 days after, African Americans did not ride the bus in Montgomery. During this boycott, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. came to prominence. In 1963, in Birmingham, Alabama, Fred Shuttlesworth and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. boycotted stores in downtown Birmingham that would not hire African Americans. Dr. King was arrested during this time and wrote his famous "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." Children participated in the famous “Children’s March” in Birmingham, Alabama and student groups across the country held countless protests. And after four black students staged a sit-in at a segregated lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina in 1960 that demonstration tactic also gained steam.
- C. A final area where individuals and groups knew that their civic and political participation could make a difference towards achieving their goals was through the use of the ballot box. Massive voter registration drives began around the nation. A large voter registration march took place in 1965. Participants from numerous civil rights organizations gathered to walk from Selma, Alabama to Montgomery, Alabama to register to vote. After crossing the Edmund Pettus Bridge, they were met with violence. The event today is known as Bloody Sunday.

Eventually, due to the political and civic participation of many, the Civil Rights Movement achieved great success. Two of the greatest achievements, the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, allowed the promises of the Reconstruction Era to finally be fulfilled.

3. Limitations on Participation

Though the U.S. Constitution and its amendments contain broad guarantees of citizens’ right to participate in our nation’s political and civic life, individuals can be denied and limited in their right to

participate. These limitations include things such as losing voting rights for a felony conviction, limitations on political contributions, and limits on the type of protesting that can occur.

Historically, it's been common for felons to lose their right to vote, sometimes permanently, though, in recent years, many states have moved to restore those rights upon completion of a sentence. As states set requirements for voting (within the limits set by the Constitution and its amendments), restoration is a state-by-state decision up to the legislature of the state in question. Currently (2023), in two states (Maine and Vermont), plus the District of Columbia, felons never lose their right to vote. 23 other states strip felons of the right to vote only while incarcerated, with rights restored automatically upon release. 14 other states restrict voting both during the sentence as well as during parole and probation. The remaining 11 states require some additional action following any period of parole or probation, such as the paying of all court fees or action on the part of the governor for voting rights to be restored.

Another limit on citizens' right to participate in our nation's political and civic life involves limitations set on political campaign contributions. The Federal Election Commission (FEC), under the Federal Election Campaign Act (1971), sets limits on contributions made by individuals or other entities to political campaigns. The motivation for this is to limit the potential for corrupting influences on political campaigns and candidates by just a small handful of individuals and/or entities, providing a more level playing field for everyday citizens to participate in elections. Currently (2023), the limit on contributions to political campaigns is \$3300 per individual donor to each individual candidate.

A final example of limits on citizens' right to participate politically and civically involves limitations on the type of protesting that can occur. While the First Amendment protects the right to peaceably assemble and petition government for a redress of grievances, there are some limits that indicate where our First Amendment rights end. For instance, local governments can require permits depending on the location of the protest and its potential for disruption to traffic or commerce. Protests also cannot include lawless action or incitement to violence. In general, though, the government can only restrict First Amendment rights when there is a pressing public need.

Sources:

<https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/felon-voting-rights>

[https://www.fec.gov/updates/contribution-limits-for-2023-2024/#:~:text=The%20limits%20on%20contributions%20made,per%20calendar%20year\)%20\(52%20U.S.C.](https://www.fec.gov/updates/contribution-limits-for-2023-2024/#:~:text=The%20limits%20on%20contributions%20made,per%20calendar%20year)%20(52%20U.S.C.)

<https://www.freedomforum.org/the-first-amendment-right-to-protest-has-limits/>

Lesson Summary

| BENCHMARK | | |
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| SS.912.CG.2.2 Explain the importance of political and civic participation to the success of the United States' constitutional republic. | | |
| BENCHMARK CLARIFICATIONS | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">Students will discuss various ways in which U.S. citizens can exercise political and civic participation.Students will identify historical examples of political and civic participation (e.g., Civil Rights Movement, Women's Suffrage Movement).Students will describe the ways in which individuals can be denied and limited in their right to practice political and civic participation (e.g., losing voting rights for felony conviction, limitations on political contributions, limits on the type of protesting). | | |
| FLORIDA CIVIC LITERACY EXAM COMPETENCY CONNECTION | | |
| Competency 1: Understanding of the basic principles and practices of American democracy and how they are applied in our republican form of government | | |
| OVERVIEW | | |
| In this lesson, students will be able to explain the importance of political and civic participation by identifying methods and historical examples of political and civic participation and understanding ways individuals can have their rights to participate limited or denied. | | |
| ESSENTIAL QUESTION | | |
| Why is political and civic participation important to the success of the United States' constitutional republic? | | |
| GOVERNMENT CONTENT VOCABULARY | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">assembly, campaign, constitutional republic, civic meeting, Federal Election Commission, felony, movement, petitioning the government, suffrage | | |
| INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES | | |
| Collaborative learning | Primary source analysis | Visual art |
| MATERIALS | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">Benjamin Franklin Quote slidePolitical and Civic Participation readingPolitical and Civic Participation Notes Sheet5Ws Graphic OrganizerHistorical Participation slidesPerfect Citizen Ad RubricPoster paper or blank paperArt supplies | | |

| B.E.S.T. STANDARDS |
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| <p>The grade in which this lesson is taught will determine the specific B.E.S.T. standards correlation. Thematically, this lesson aligns to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• ELA.R.2.2 Central Idea• ELA.C.4.1 Researching and Using Information |

Suggested Student Activity Sequence & Pace

| DAY | ACTIVITY SEQUENCE |
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| DAY 1 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Begin the class by projecting the “Benjamin Franklin Quote” slide. 2. Ask a student to read the brief description and quote. 3. Ask students to brainstorm and respond to the two prompts on the slide in their notebooks or on separate paper: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What did Benjamin Franklin mean by this statement? ■ What things must citizens do for our constitutional republic to work? 4. Ask for students to share responses to the first question: “What did Benjamin Franklin mean by this statement?” 5. Responses will vary, but lead students to the understanding that the Framers of the Constitution knew that in order for the constitutional republic they created to work and last, it would be up to each generation of Americans to participate in the political process and remain civically engaged. 6. Ask for students to share responses to the second question: What things must citizens do for our constitutional republic to work? 7. Responses will again vary, but lead students to the understanding that in order for our constitutional republic to work, citizens must do things like vote, serve on juries, engage with their elected officials, petition their government, and run for office: obligations and responsibilities. 8. Explain to students that in this lesson, they will learn more about the importance of an involved citizenry. 9. Place students into pairs. 10. Distribute a “Political and Civic Participation” reading and a “Political and Civic Participation Notes Sheet” to each student. 11. Instruct students to read the text in their pairs. While they read, pause to take notes and answer questions in the appropriate places on the activity sheet. 12. As students work, circulate the room to monitor for engagement and provide support. 13. When all the notes and questions have been completed, end class by reviewing responses through an all-class discussion. <p>Teacher Note: Use the answer key provided to help guide discussion.</p> |

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| DAY 2 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Begin the lesson by having students take back out their “Political and Civic Participation Notes Sheet” from yesterday. 2. Review/Discuss some of the various ways in which citizens can exercise political and civic participation. 3. Ask students if anyone has engaged civically/politically using any of the methods from the reading and would feel comfortable sharing that example. 4. Explain to students that today they will examine a few historical examples of political and civic participation. Ensure students understand that smaller, individual acts of participation are essential to the success of the constitutional republic. In some cases, enough people have the same ideas/opinions/issues that it leads to much bigger movements of civic and political participation. |
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| | <ol style="list-style-type: none">5. Distribute the “5Ws Graphic Organizer” to each student.6. Project the “Historical Participation” slides.7. For each slide, walk students through the process of primary source image analysis. Together, observe the photo, examine the different components, try to make sense of it, and connect it back to the theme of the lesson. Students should record the class discussion using the 5Ws: Who? What? Where? When? Why? Teacher Note: Use the provided answer key to help guide discussion.8. Place students into pairs.9. Conclude the lesson by having pairs create a fictitious poster advertisement for the ‘perfect American citizen’. The point of the ad is to focus on the qualities and actions of an engaged citizen using the information learned over the course of this lesson.10. Distribute the “Perfect Citizen Ad Rubric” to each pair. Review as a class.11. Allow students to access poster making materials.12. For the remainder of class, allow students to work on their ad, circulating the room to monitor for understanding and engagement.13. Have students share their posters with the class or hang them for all to examine when completed. Teacher Note: Depending on the amount of class time left, this could be finished for homework or extend into an extra day. |
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Government Content Vocabulary

| Word/Term | Definition |
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| assembly | gathering together as a group for a common purpose |
| campaign | organized actions that a political candidate takes with the goal of winning an election |
| constitutional republic | a form of government in which there is democratic voting, but governmental power is limited by the existence of a constitution that protects the rights of citizens |
| civic meeting | a meeting that is held for the people to share their opinions with government officials |
| Federal Election Commission | an independent regulatory agency whose job is to enforce campaign finance law |
| felony | a crime of high seriousness |
| movement | a group of people working together to advance their shared ideas |
| petitioning the government | the right to ask the government to solve a problem or to express an opinion about how the government is being run |
| suffrage | the right to vote in political elections |

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Florida Department of Education: Florida Civic Literacy Exam Homepage](#)

Florida Department of Education's Civic Literacy Reading List

- *Civil Disobedience* by Henry David Thoreau
- *Letter from Birmingham Jail* by Martin Luther King Jr.

ANSWER KEYS

Sample Answers: Political and Civic Participation Notes Sheet

Sample Answers: 5Ws Graphic Organizer

Perfect Citizen Ad Rubric

SOURCES

Felon voting rights information: <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/felon-voting-rights>

Campaign contribution limits information:

[https://www.fec.gov/updates/contribution-limits-for-2023-2024/#:~:text=The%20limits%20on%20contributions%20made,per%20calendar%20year\)%20\(52%20U.S.C.](https://www.fec.gov/updates/contribution-limits-for-2023-2024/#:~:text=The%20limits%20on%20contributions%20made,per%20calendar%20year)%20(52%20U.S.C.)

Limits on the right to protest information:

<https://www.freedomforum.org/the-first-amendment-right-to-protest-has-limits/>

Historical images sources on slides