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# INTRODUCTION

5-10 Days

## UNDERSTANDING THE CURRICULUM

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### OVERVIEW

Because this class is less structured than many at the high school level and because so much of the class relies upon group work, students *must* know *from the outset* what is expected of them, how they will be evaluated, and what they will be doing throughout the semester. The first two days of class should include an introduction to the grading system, the syllabus, and degree of structure that will be administered. In addition, Celebrate Possibility recommends that the students do a trial-run of the entire semester in a single five-day period. That is, in small groups, they choose an issue, do cursory research, write a position paper, write letters, meet with people, grassroots organize, and so on. They will not, of course, complete the tasks at hand—the week is designed as an introduction to give the students an understanding of what is coming; what they will be learning; and what they should look for in, among other things, a topic. Ideally, students would do the trial-run in the groups they will work in throughout the semester. If you do not know your students prior to their enrollment in the class, however, you may use this first week as an opportunity to observe and get to know your students before doing the final grouping.

The introduction is also an important time to introduce the journal system that will be used throughout the semester as a way of getting the students focused as they enter the classroom. The journals will also encourage students to tune in to current events and to evaluate their work throughout the semester. One journal topic should be presented to the students each day (many sample topics are included with the curriculum), with time allotted at the beginning of class (perhaps during roll-taking) for students to complete the brief exercises. Check journals on a regular basis, either weekly or biweekly.

**COLORADO CIVICS STANDARDS ADDRESSED:** 1.4, 1.5, 4.3, 4.4

### SAMPLE JOURNAL QUESTIONS

- Can you change the world around you? Why? Why not?
- What does it mean to be part of a community?
- How does it feel to be in a group with people you don't know well? What strategies are you or others using to help the group work together effectively?
- If you had five hours a week to devote to changing one thing in your community, what would it be?
- Identify someone who works to improve our community, state, or nation. What do you admire about this person's work?
- What do you like about the way this course is organized? What concerns do you have?

## **VOCABULARY\***

**Civic life:** Public life of the citizen concerned with the affairs of the community and nation as contrasted with private or personal life, which is devoted to the pursuit of private and personal interests.

**Civic values:** Individual rights including life, liberty, the right to own property, and the pursuit of happiness; the common or public good; self-government; justice; equality; openness and free inquiry; truth; and patriotism.

**Civic virtue:** Dedication of citizens to the common welfare, even at the cost of their individual interests.

**Democracy:** Form of government in which political control is exercised by all the people, either directly or through their elected representatives.

**Democratic republic:** A term used to describe the U.S. form of government, which combines the principles of both a democracy and a republic to limit the power of the government and to protect the inalienable rights of all citizens.

**Inalienable rights:** Inherent rights that cannot be surrendered or transferred.

**Justice:** Fair distribution of benefits and burdens, fair corrections of wrongs and injuries, or use of fair procedures in gathering information and making decisions.

**Political culture:** Fundamental beliefs and assumptions of a people about how government and politics should operate.

**Politics:** Methods by which individuals and groups try to influence operations of government.

**Power:** Ability or capability to exercise control or influence.

**Principles:** Basic rules that guide or influence thought or action.

**Public agenda:** Issues that command the attention of public officials.

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\* Definitions derived from Denver Public Schools Civic Standards.

**Step 1 – Introductions (Getting Acquainted)**

**Goals** – Students become acquainted with each other and the teacher. Students are introduced to *PARTICIPATION*. Students start the process of becoming secure enough with each other to work together in a small or large group setting.

**Means** – Students learn about the journal assignment and respond to the first journal prompt. Students then meet in assigned groups to become acquainted with each other. Teacher provides groups with several questions to respond to as part of the icebreaking/getting acquainted process. For example, students might introduce themselves by sharing a problem they see in the school or community or by explaining which of the civic values listed in the Vocabulary section on page 11 is most important to them. They might also discuss one of the journal questions (e.g., Can you change the world around you?) or a current controversial issue with a direct effect on youth.

**Means** – The teacher discusses the class, the extent to which the students choose what they learn, and student responsibilities. Students learn about the core activities for the semester (choosing and investigating an issue with a small group of classmates, writing in journals, volunteering, etc.) and about the final product—presentation of written, oral, and artistic work at a community event resulting from students’ organizational efforts.

**Goals (Optional)** – Teacher determines the extent of the students’ previous education in government and civic engagement to help plan instruction.

**Means** – Students complete the optional Prior Knowledge Quiz, a brief quiz on levels and roles of government.

**Assignments:** Syllabus/Student Expectation Form to be read and signed.

**Step 2 – Introductions (Cont’d) and Operating Procedures and Groups**

**Goal** – Students learn how their work will be evaluated.

**Means** – Teacher details grading system. If desired, students can participate in deciding the means by which group grades will be given. Two assessment tools are provided: (1) a checklist by which a group project and individual portfolios created through the group work can be evaluated and (2) a self and group accountability log. We recommend that teachers adapt these tools to meet

Notes:

Horizontal lines for notes.



**Step 5 – Semester in a Week: Day 3**

**Goal** – Students understand the structure of the class and lay the groundwork for the semester.

**Means** – Students design and execute a quick art piece intended to share the slogan they wrote about their issue. The artwork is to be placed in the school.

Students should see the handouts from the art portion of the course. It is not necessary that students take these handouts at this point.

**Assignment** – For homework, students must register the reactions of five people to their artwork and interview those people about their stances on the issue involved.

**Step 6 – Semester in a Week: Day 4**

**Goal** – Students understand the structure of the class and lay the groundwork for the semester.

**Means** – Students document the reactions they registered for homework the previous evening. As they share the reactions they have documented, they also do a quick self-assessment of the trial-run project and suggest what they might do in the future to more ably draw people to their cause.

Students should see the handouts from the event planning and community organizing sections of the course. It is not necessary that the students take these handouts at this point.

**Step 7 – Choosing an Issue**

**Goal** – Groups select the issues they will work on throughout the class.

**Means** – Teacher gives students the Choosing Your Topic handout and reviews the completed example with the class, discussing the advantages and disadvantages of various types of issue (national, state, local, school-based). Teacher finalizes group assignments, and groups complete the Choosing Your Topic handout. Teacher distributes the Campaign Planning Worksheet and tells students that they will be developing their campaign plan as they complete their research and continue their group work.

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## PRIOR KNOWLEDGE QUIZ

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What classes have you taken that taught you about government or politics?
2. What have you done outside of school that has taught you about government or politics?
3. How frequently do you read the newspaper? (circle one)  
Never            1-2x a Month            1-2x a Week            3-5x a Week            6-7x a Week
4. What is your primary source for news?
5. How frequently do you write a letter to a newspaper, magazine, or politician?  
Never            1-2x a Year            1-2x a Month            1-2x a Week            3-5x a Week
6. Can you make a difference in the problems affecting your community?  
Not at all            A little            Some            A noticeable amount            A lot
7. Can you make a difference in the problems affecting your school?  
Not at all            A little            Some            A noticeable amount            A lot
8. What are the three major branches of the U.S. national government?
9. Name three rights protected by the Bill of Rights:
10. Who is our current president?
11. Who is our current governor?
12. Which has more power—city ordinances or federal laws?
13. Name one group that helps govern your school.
14. Define *democracy*.
15. Define *republic*.

Name:

## **PARTICIPATION COURSE DESCRIPTION AND STUDENT EXPECTATIONS**

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Course Description**

The purpose of the *PARTICIPATION* course is to introduce students to the concept of civic engagement. Students will learn how to become community activists able to have a positive effect upon the community agencies most likely to impact their lives. Students will learn how to become registered voters, how to lobby community organizations, how to organize themselves into a structure that can perform the function of influencing the formulation of public policy.

Government begins at the local level. Most laws that impact the individual are enacted, usually in the form of ordinances, by local governments such as city councils, county commissioners, school districts, recreation districts, water delivery agencies, etc. The level of government with the next greatest impact on the individual's day-to-day life is state government. Most criminal laws, for example, are made at the state level. The federal government affects the most people nationally but does not necessarily affect the individual as directly as local government.

For students to be effective in influencing governmental agencies that make decisions affecting their lives, they must understand the nature and structure of those agencies. To register to vote, for instance, a citizen must know what agency regulates voting, what the statutes provide, where and how to register. On Election Day the voter must know where the polling place is and the rules that govern the voting procedure.

Controversial issues will be discussed in this class, but the teacher will not attempt to convince students of any particular political opinion. Rather, the focus will be on convincing students of the necessity of becoming civically engaged. Any problems that arise should be brought to the teacher's attention.

### **Student Expectations**

*PARTICIPATION* is a demanding course. Working individually and in a group assigned by the teacher, students will create a variety of work products, including essays, speeches, art, and more. Students will organize their work and assignments into a group project and an individual *PARTICIPATION* portfolio that will be explained by the teacher. During the first week of the course, the teacher will explain how students' work will be evaluated.

At the beginning of each class period, each student will make an entry in a journal that will be part of the portfolio. These entries will be drawn from readings, previous research completed by the student, and class discussions.

Each student will be assigned to a small group that will work together on projects assigned by the teacher and the students themselves. The group work will be further explained in class. Students will be expected to participate in all group and class activities such as issues research, project development, and discussion. Creating and analyzing art will be an integral dimension of the course. These activities will help students develop and practice the thinking skills they need to be powerful and engaged citizens.

Each student and parent, or guardian, is to sign the form below and return it to the teacher within five days of receiving this course description.

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I understand the purpose and structure of the *PARTICIPATION* course and the work I will be expected to do.

Student \_\_\_\_\_

Parent \_\_\_\_\_



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Group Members:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**PARTICIPATION ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST**

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

**Note:** Some elements of the checklist apply to group products, others to work created by individual students. If you have any questions about which items apply to individual versus group work, check with your teacher.

- 1. Content: Knowledge of Government and the Selected Issue**
  - \_\_\_ The group's issue is well-defined.
  - \_\_\_ Social, political, and economic aspects of the issue are described.
  - \_\_\_ Varying points of view on the project are reflected in the project.
  - \_\_\_ The project reflects knowledge of the appropriate level(s) and branch(es) of government to address concerning the group's issue.
  - \_\_\_ The project reflects knowledge of available methods for influencing those government agencies.
  
- 2. Research**
  - \_\_\_ Research sources are of various types (Internet, print, etc.).
  - \_\_\_ Research sources reflect different views on the issue.
  - \_\_\_ Project reflects analysis of the sources for bias, accuracy, reliability, etc.
  - \_\_\_ Sources are accurately cited.
  
- 3. Essay Writing**
  - \_\_\_ Essay has a clear thesis statement.
  - \_\_\_ Essay provides strong supporting evidence for the thesis.
  - \_\_\_ Essay provides powerful arguments and addresses counterarguments.
  - \_\_\_ Essay has a strong opening and close.
  - \_\_\_ Essay uses standard grammar, spelling, and punctuation with minimal errors.
  
- 4. Public Speaking**
  - \_\_\_ Speech based on essay is succinct, persuasive, and based upon position paper.
  - \_\_\_ Speech is presented comfortably and coherently.
  - \_\_\_ Group/student identifies questions that might be asked about their issue and outlines possible answers.
  - \_\_\_ Group/student documents presentation of speech to civic leader, citizens, or other interested parties.

**5. Art of Social Change**

- Student analyzes a piece of art considering elements of the piece, how elements are assembled, the context of the piece's creation, and its meaning
- Student compares two pieces of public art.
- Project includes a piece of art directed at creating change around the group's issue.

**6. Grassroots Organizing and Event Planning**

- Project includes a meeting schedule and agenda for the first meeting of a grassroots group.
- Project includes a simple database for tracking group resources.
- Project includes communication tools appropriate to the project (email bulletin, advocacy toolkit, press packet, etc.).
- Culminating event is well-organized, reflecting sound management and planning.
- Project is well presented at culminating event.

**7. Participation in Class and Group Work**

- Student participates fully in class discussions and interacts productively with community resource people in and outside the classroom.
- Student completes in-class and homework assignments.
- Student writes thoughtful responses to journal questions.
- Student works collaboratively with other group members.
- Student shows leadership in at least one aspect of group project.

**Comments:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Group Members:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**PARTICIPATION SELF AND GROUP  
ACCOUNTABILITY LOG**

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Work you expect to accomplish this week:

  
  
  
  

At end of the week, record what you actually completed.

Self	Group

What help do you need to accomplish tomorrow's tasks?

  
  
  

Who will help you?

  
  
  

Self grade for this week's effort: \_\_\_\_\_      Group grade for this week's effort: \_\_\_\_\_

Names:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**CHOOSING YOUR TOPIC**

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

The topic your group decides to take on will influence the type of work you do and the nature or your goals for the rest of the semester. So choose wisely! Here are some tips:

- Think about your own *personal history*. Even though you are still in high school, you have already had experience with social issues. Look for something that has affected your life and that you could get passionate about.
- Make sure that you still have an **open mind** about the issue you choose. Once you research the issue, your views are likely to change.
- Even if your group decides to go with something that you are not thrilled with, *don't sweat it*. Every issue has enough complexity to interest anybody—that's why they're controversial issues!

1. What is the issue?
2. What do you already know about the issue?
3. What are some aspects of the issue that you need to know more about?
4. List from one to four specific goals pertaining to your topic that your group would like to pursue. Be sure the goals can be achieved in a semester and that you will be able to document that you achieved the goal.

Names:  
Example  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**CHOOSING YOUR TOPIC  
(COMPLETED EXAMPLE)**

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic: Health care

The topic your group decides to take on will influence the type of work you do and the nature or your goals for the rest of the semester. So choose wisely! Here are some tips:

- Think about your own *personal history*. Even though you are still in high school, you have already had experience with social issues. Look for something that has affected your life and that you could get passionate about.
- Make sure that you still have an **open mind** about the issue you choose. Once you research the issue, your views are likely to change.
- Even if your group decides to go with something that you are not thrilled with, *don't sweat it*. Every issue has enough complexity to interest anybody—that's why they're controversial issues!

1. What is the issue?  
*Inadequate health insurance coverage for America's middle and lower classes*
  
2. What do you already know about the issue?  
*Too many Americans have no health insurance. They do not get good medical care because they cannot afford to pay. They may be financially ruined by a major illness, and if they are unable to pay, the costs are passed along to other consumers. Even people who do have insurance frequently have to pay huge amounts of money when they get injured or sick. Meanwhile, private health insurance companies make huge profits.*
  
3. What are some aspects of the issue that you need to know more about?  
*We need more statistics, and information on how other states and countries are handling the issues surrounding health care. We need information on the views of political leader and breakdowns of the costs and benefits associated with different proposed solutions. We need to know how many students in our community are not insured.*
  
4. List from one to four specific goals pertaining to your topic that your group would like to pursue. Be sure the goals can be achieved in a semester and that you will be able to document that you achieved the goal.
  - *Start a student letter-writing campaign to encourage Colorado to pass legislation.*
  - *Get an op-ed published in a local paper about health insurance coverage.*
  - *Bring students from four local schools together with nonprofits to highlight the issue.*
  - *Get students an audience with state representatives and senators to discuss healthcare.*

Names:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## CAMPAIGN PROPOSAL WORKSHEET

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

1. **Position:** What is your group’s unified position on your issue? Be sure to address the specific aspects or major contentions associated with the issue.
  
2. **Audience:** What segments of society are affected most by the issue?
  
3. **Problems and Solutions**

Identify <i>three</i> major <b>PROBLEMS</b> in society involving your issue.	What would have to change in our society or government in order to <b>SOLVE</b> these problems? What level of government has jurisdiction over these problems?	What <b>ACTIONS</b> could your group take to create these changes? (“None” is not an option. <i>Si se puede!</i> )

4. **Group Goals:** From the actions you suggested in the third column above, choose several as goals and describe how you plan to achieve them in the space on the back.