

KK4

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I WHAT IS GOVERNMENT AND WHAT SHOULD IT DO?

A What is government?

CONTENT SUMMARY AND RATIONALE

At the early elementary level, **government** can be described as the people and groups within a society with the authority to make, carry out, and enforce laws and to manage disputes about them. Understanding what government does may be initiated in early grades by having students look at the governance of the family and school as analogous to the governance of the larger community and the nation. In the family, for example, parents make rules governing the behavior of their children. They also are responsible for enforcing these rules and for settling disputes when conflicts arise about them. In schools, teachers and administrators make, carry out, and enforce rules and laws and manage disputes about them.

These fundamental ideas about government and its functions provide a basis on which children in their earliest school years can begin to develop an understanding of the formal and informal institutions and processes of government in their communities, states, and the nation.

Government can be described as the people and groups within a society with the authority to make, carry out, and enforce laws and to manage disputes about them.

CONTENT STANDARDS**1 Defining government**

Students should be able to provide a basic description of government.

To achieve this standard, students should be able to

- describe government in terms of the people and groups who make, apply, and enforce rules and laws for others in their family, school, community, and nation and who manage disputes about them, e.g.,
 - ▶ adult family members make, apply, and enforce rules for their children and manage disputes about them
 - ▶ teachers, principals, and school boards make, apply, and enforce rules and laws for their schools and manage disputes about them
 - ▶ city councils and mayors make, apply, and enforce rules and laws for their communities
 - ▶ governors and state legislatures make, apply, and enforce rules and laws for their states
 - ▶ tribal governments make, apply, enforce rules and laws for tribal members in Indian country
 - ▶ the national government makes, applies, and enforces rules and laws for the nation
 - ▶ courts at all levels apply laws, manage disputes, and punish lawbreakers

B Where do people in government get the authority to make, apply, and enforce rules and laws and manage disputes about them?

CONTENT SUMMARY AND RATIONALE

Since government is defined as people and groups with authority to perform certain functions in a society, it is important to understand the concept of *authority* and the related concept of *power*. **Power** may be understood, in its relationship to government, as the capacity to direct or control someone or something. As such, power is a neutral term, it may be directed to good or bad ends. **Authority** is power that people have the right to use because of custom, law, or consent of the governed. In the United States, the authority of the government comes from the consent of the people.

Authority may be understood, at the elementary level, as the right of people in certain positions, such as parent, guardian, teacher, police officer, or president, to direct or control others. In the case of parents, authority comes from law and custom. People in other positions of authority gain the right to direct or control others by being appointed or elected. Students at an early age can understand that the person employed as a teacher has the right to teach the class and control the behavior of the students in it. A crossing guard has the right to control traffic and pedestrians. That right comes from laws that establish the position and describe the duties persons taking the position must fulfill. Those laws were made by others in positions of authority, such as legislators, selected by the people to represent them.

An understanding of the difference between power and authority is essential for understanding whether people with power have the right to exercise it.

Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed.

Declaration of Independence (1776)

CONTENT STANDARDS**1 Defining power and authority**

Students should be able to explain the difference between authority and power without authority, and that authority comes from custom, law, and the consent of the governed.

To achieve this standard, students should be able to

- explain that **power** is the ability to direct or control something or someone
- explain that **authority** is power that people have the right to use because of custom, law, or the consent of the governed
 - ▶ parents have authority to direct and control their children; this authority comes from both custom and law
 - ▶ governors of states have the authority to carry out and enforce laws; this authority comes from law and the consent of the people who have elected the governors
- identify examples of authority, e.g., the authority of teachers and administrators to make rules for schools, the authority of a crossing guard to direct traffic, the authority of the president to command the armed forces
- identify examples of power without authority, e.g., a neighborhood bully forcing younger children to give up their lunch money, a robber holding up a bank

C Why is government necessary?**CONTENT SUMMARY AND RATIONALE**

Many people have argued that life without government would be dangerous and miserable. Unfortunately, evidence supporting this claim is provided daily by events in some communities in the United States and in other nations where the controlling influences of government are weak or non-existent. It also is clear that government, when directed toward worthy purposes and conducted effectively in accord with basic principles of justice, can be a powerful force for the protection of the rights of individuals and the promotion of the common good.

An understanding of the necessity of government and its usefulness in promoting agreed upon goals which benefit the individual and society is essential for the development of informed, competent and responsible citizens.

Life without government would be dangerous and miserable.

CONTENT STANDARDS**1 Necessity and purposes of government**

Students should be able to explain why government is necessary in their classroom, school, community, state, and nation, and the basic purposes of government in the United States.

To achieve this standard, students should be able to

- explain probable consequences of the absence of government and of rules and laws
 - ▶ the strong may take advantage of the weak and act in their own selfish interests
 - ▶ people may become disorderly or violent and threaten others' lives, liberty, and property
 - ▶ people would feel insecure, unable to plan for the future, or to predict how others would behave, e.g., if there were no traffic laws, people could not predict on which side of the road cars would drive or that drivers would stop at red lights
- explain that the basic purposes of government in the United States are to protect the rights of individuals and to promote the common good

D What are some of the most important things governments do?**CONTENT SUMMARY AND RATIONALE**

An understanding of the basic things governments do may be developed by an examination of how schools and local communities make, carry out, enforce, and manage conflicts over rules and laws.

Understanding at the school and community level provides a basis for understanding how similar functions of government are carried out at state and national levels. It also may help students develop a more positive attitude toward government and an interest in participating in its activities.

Governments make, carry out, enforce, and manage conflicts over rules and laws.

CONTENT STANDARDS**1 Functions of government**

Students should be able to explain some of the major things governments do in their school, community, state, and nation.

To achieve this standard, students should be able to

- describe some major things governments do
 - ▶ **make laws** that establish schools, provide health services, and require licenses for drivers
 - ▶ **carry out laws** that provide for crossing guards at schools, build and maintain highways, conduct immunization programs
 - ▶ **enforce laws** that require people to obey traffic, health, child labor, and sanitation
 - ▶ **manage conflicts** so that disputes between people can be settled peacefully
 - ▶ **provide for the defense of the nation**
- explain how government makes it possible for people working together to accomplish goals they could not achieve alone

Laws can protect rights, provide benefits, and assign responsibilities.

E What are the purposes of rules and laws?**CONTENT SUMMARY AND RATIONALE**

In families and in less complex societies, customs, traditions, and rules play an important role in guiding behavior and establishing order. In more complex societies, laws are enacted to perform similar functions.

Laws can be used to provide order, predictability, and security. Laws describe ways people should behave, and they can protect rights, provide benefits, and assign responsibilities.

A constitutional democracy such as the United States is governed by a rule of law that applies not only to the governed, but also to those who govern.

Law, its uses, and its influence are pervasive in the United States. An understanding of how it is used and its potential for promoting agreed upon ends is essential to an understanding of government.

Laws can be used to provide order, predictability, and security.

CONTENT STANDARDS

1 Purposes of rules and laws

Students should be able to explain the purposes of rules and laws and why they are important in their classroom, school, community, state, and nation.

To achieve this standard, students should be able to explain that rules and laws can be used to

- **describe ways people should behave**, e.g., attend school and do homework, raise one's hand and be recognized before speaking in class, respect other peoples' privacy and property
 - ▶ **provide order, predictability, and security**, e.g., rules that require people to take turns, traffic laws that require people to drive on the right side of the street, laws that protect people from others who want to harm them or take their property
 - ▶ **protect rights**, e.g., laws that protect people's right to practice whatever religion they wish to, laws that provide equal opportunities for all students to get a free, public education
 - ▶ **provide benefits**, e.g., laws that provide for schools, health services, public transportation, highways, and airports
 - ▶ **assign burdens or responsibilities**, e.g., laws that require people to pay taxes or to perform military service in times of national emergency
 - ▶ **limit the power of people in authority**, e.g., laws that require teachers and school administrators to treat all students fairly, laws that prevent parents from abusing their children

*Law, strictly understood,
has as its first and principal
object the ordering of the
common good.*

St. Thomas Aquinas (13th Century)

F How can you evaluate rules and laws?**CONTENT SUMMARY AND RATIONALE**

Not every rule or law is a good one. It is important, therefore, that young children become familiar with criteria that can be used to identify the strengths and weaknesses of rules or laws. It also is important that they learn to draft rules or laws that meet that criteria. An understanding of criteria useful in evaluating rules and laws also is important for adult Americans. It provides citizens with a basis for participating intelligently in the evaluation of existing and proposed laws.

*Not every rule or law
is a good one.*

CONTENT STANDARDS**1 Evaluating rules and laws**

Students should be able to explain and apply criteria useful in evaluating rules and laws.

To achieve this standard, students should be able to

- identify the strengths and weaknesses of a school rule or a state law by determining if it is
 - ▶ well designed to achieve its purposes
 - ▶ understandable, i.e., clearly written; purposes are explicit
 - ▶ possible to follow, i.e., does not demand the impossible
 - ▶ Limits on government are designed to protect fundamental values and principles and to insure that government serves the purposes for which it was established.
 - ▶ fair, i.e., not biased against or for any individual or group
 - ▶ designed to protect individual rights and promote the common good
- draft a school rule that meets these criteria

G What are the differences between limited and unlimited governments?**CONTENT SUMMARY AND RATIONALE**

A limited government is one in which everyone, including all of the people in positions of authority, must obey the laws. In the United States, effective limitations are placed upon those in authority by the Constitution and Bill of Rights and numerous other laws. These limits are designed to protect fundamental values and principles and to insure that government serves the purposes for which it was established. Unlimited governments, by contrast, are those in which there are no effective controls over those in power.

An understanding of the differences between limited and unlimited government provides a basis for making reasoned judgments about whether people in authority are acting in accord with the responsibilities they have been assigned and the limitations placed upon their powers.

Limits on government are designed to protect fundamental values and principles and to insure that government serves the purposes for which it was established.

CONTENT STANDARDS**1 Limited and unlimited governments**

Students should be able to explain the basic differences between limited and unlimited governments.

To achieve this standard, students should be able to

- explain that in a limited government everyone, including all the people in positions of authority, must obey the laws. This even includes the president of the United States
- give examples of laws that limit the power of people in government, e.g.,
 - ▶ laws that prohibit a teacher from releasing personal information about students to people other than their parents or guardians
 - ▶ laws that prohibit governments from discriminating against people because of their religious or political beliefs
- explain that an unlimited government is one in which there are no effective controls over the powers of its rulers, who cannot be easily removed from office by peaceful, legal means, e.g., governments run by dictators

[The government of the United States is] a government limited...by the authority of a paramount Constitution.

James Madison (1788)

H Why is it important to limit the power of government?**CONTENT SUMMARY AND RATIONALE**

In the United States, the powers of government are limited to insure that people in positions of authority fulfill the responsibilities they have been assigned, serve the major purposes of government, and do not misuse or abuse the power they have been given. Limited government thus is seen as essential to the protection of the rights of individuals.

An understanding of the reasons for and the necessity of limited government is essential if citizens are to control their government and make sure it fulfills its purposes.

*Wherever Law ends,
Tyranny begins.*

John Locke (1690)

CONTENT STANDARDS**1 Importance of limited government**

Students should be able to explain why limiting the power of government is important to their own lives.

To achieve this standard, students should be able to

- explain why limited government is important for the protection of individual rights such as
 - ▶ **personal rights** to
 - choose their own friends
 - believe what they wish
 - enjoy the privacy of their homes
 - practice the religion of their choice
 - ▶ **political rights** to
 - express their opinions
 - vote
 - meet or associate with others
 - ask government to change laws they think are unfair
 - ▶ **economic rights** to
 - choose the kind of work they please
 - own property

*Limited government is...
essential to the protection
of individual rights.*

II WHAT ARE THE BASIC VALUES AND PRINCIPLES OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY?

A What are the most important values and principles of American democracy?

CONTENT SUMMARY AND RATIONALE

The fundamental values and principles of American democracy provide common ground for Americans to work together to promote the attainment of individual, community, and national goals.

These values and principles are expressed in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Gettysburg Address, and other significant documents, speeches, and writings.

Students' understanding of these fundamental values and principles and their importance for themselves, their community, and their nation is an essential first step in fostering a reasoned commitment to them. This commitment is essential to the preservation and improvement of American democracy

*The Spirit that prevails
among Men of all degrees,
all ages and sexes is the
Spirit of Liberty.*

Abigail Adams (1775)

CONTENT STANDARDS

1 Fundamental values and principles

Students should be able to explain the importance of the fundamental values and principles of American democracy.

To achieve this standard, students should be able to

- explain the importance for themselves, their school, their community, and their nation of each of the following **fundamental values** of American democracy:
 - ▶ individual rights to life, liberty, property, and the pursuit of happiness
 - ▶ the public or common good
 - ▶ justice
 - ▶ equality of opportunity
 - ▶ diversity
 - ▶ truth
 - ▶ patriotism
- explain the importance for themselves, their school, their community, and their nation of each of the following **fundamental principles** of American democracy:
 - ▶ the people are sovereign; they are the ultimate source of the authority of the government—“We the People” have created the government, given it limited power to protect their rights and promote the common good, and can remove people from office and change the government

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.

Declaration of Independence (1776)

- ▶ the power of government is limited by law
 - ▶ people exercise their authority directly by voting for or against certain rules, laws, or candidates as well as by voting in community or town meetings
 - ▶ people exercise their authority indirectly through representatives they elect to make, apply, and enforce laws and to manage disputes about them
 - ▶ decisions are based on majority rule, but minority rights are protected
- identify fundamental values and principles as they are expressed in the Declaration of Independence, Preamble to the United States Constitution, the Bill of Rights, Pledge of Allegiance, speeches, songs, and stories

*That this nation,
under God, shall have
a new birth of freedom;
and that government of
the people, by the people,
for the people, shall not
perish from the earth.*

Abraham Lincoln (1863)

B What are some important beliefs Americans have about themselves and their government?

CONTENT SUMMARY AND RATIONALE

Although the United States is one of the most diverse nations in the world, amidst this diversity there are a number of important values, principles, and beliefs that Americans hold in common. First among them is a commitment to the fundamental values and principles of American democracy, such as the right to freedom of religion, speech, the press, and to the rule of law. Americans also hold other beliefs and values in common such as the importance placed on the individual and individual rights, equality of opportunity, education, the law, work, and voluntarism.

An understanding of this unifying framework of commonly held values, principles, and beliefs provides a basis and common ground for understanding and working with others.

First among the ideas Americans hold in common is a commitment to the values and principles of American democracy, such as the right to freedom of religion, speech, and the press.

CONTENT STANDARDS**1 Distinctive characteristics of American society**

Students should be able to identify some important beliefs commonly held by Americans about themselves and their government.

To achieve this standard, students should be able to describe the following beliefs commonly held by Americans

- **Importance of the individual**

Students should be able to explain that Americans believe

- ▶ a primary purpose of government is to protect the rights of the individual to life, liberty, property, and the pursuit of happiness
- ▶ another important purpose of government is to promote the common good
- ▶ individuals have the right to differ about politics, religion, or any other matter
- ▶ individuals have the right to express their views without fear of being punished by their peers or their government
- ▶ the vote of one individual should count as much as another's

An understanding of this unifying framework of commonly held values, principles, and beliefs provides a basis and common ground for understanding and working with others.

- **Importance of their school, community, state, and nation**

Students should be able to explain that Americans believe that

- ▶ everyone should be concerned about the well-being of his/her school, community, state, and nation
- ▶ people should try to improve the quality of life in their schools, communities, states, and nation
- ▶ people should help others who are less fortunate than they and assist them in times of need, emergency, or natural disaster

- **Importance of equality of opportunity and equal protection of the law**

Students should be able to explain that Americans believe that

- ▶ all people have a right to equal opportunity in education, employment, housing, and to equal access to public facilities such as parks and playgrounds
- ▶ all people have a right to participate in political life by expressing their opinions and trying to persuade others; all citizens over 18 years of age have the right to vote; and citizens who meet age and other qualifications have the right to seek public office
- ▶ everyone has the right to be treated equally in the eyes of the law

*Equal rights for all,
special privileges for none.*

Thomas Jefferson (c.1780)

*No one can make you feel
inferior without your consent.*

Eleanor Roosevelt (1937)

- **Importance of respect for the law**
Students should be able to explain that Americans believe that
 - ▶ everyone, including government officials, must obey the law
 - ▶ people have the right to work together to see that laws they consider unfair or unwise are changed by peaceful means

- **Importance of education**
Students should be able to explain that Americans believe that
 - ▶ education is essential for informed and effective citizenship
 - ▶ education is important for earning a living
 - ▶ everyone should take advantage of the opportunity to be educated
 - ▶ everyone has a right to public education
 - ▶ people with special needs should be provided with appropriate educational opportunities, e.g., students with disabilities, children of migrant workers, adults who need training for employment

Education is essential for informed and effective citizenship.

- **Importance of work**

Students should be able to explain that Americans believe that

- ▶ work is important to a person's independence and self-esteem
- ▶ work is important to the well-being of the family, community, state, and nation
- ▶ adults should work to support themselves and their dependents, unless they are ill
- ▶ all honest work is worthy of respect

- **Importance of voluntarism**

Students should be able to explain that Americans believe that

- ▶ people should volunteer to help others in their family, schools, communities, state, nation, and the world
- ▶ volunteering is a source of individual satisfaction and fulfillment

I am not ashamed to confess that twenty-five years ago I was a hired laborer, hauling rails, at work on a flatboat—just what might happen to any poor man's son. I want every man to have a chance.

Abraham Lincoln (1860)

C Why is it important for Americans to share certain values, principles, and beliefs?

CONTENT SUMMARY AND RATIONALE

In contrast to most other nations, the identity of an American is defined by shared political values, principles, and beliefs rather than by ethnicity, race, religion, class, language, gender, or national origin. These shared values and principles have helped to promote cohesion in the daily life of Americans and in times of crisis they have enabled Americans to find common ground with those who differ from them.

To understand their nation, citizens should appreciate the nature and importance of shared values, principles, and beliefs which provide a foundation for the stability of their government.

CONTENT STANDARDS

1 American identity

Students should be able to explain the importance of Americans sharing and supporting certain values, principles, and beliefs.

To achieve this standard, students should be able to

- explain that Americans are united by the values, principles, and beliefs they share rather than by ethnicity, race, religion, class, language, gender, or national origin
- explain the importance of shared values, principles, and beliefs to the continuation and improvement of American democracy
- identify basic documents that set forth shared values, principles, and beliefs, e.g., Declaration of Independence, United States Constitution and Bill of Rights, Pledge of Allegiance
- identify symbols used to depict Americans' shared values, principles, and beliefs and explain their meaning, e.g., the flag, Statue of Liberty, Statue of Justice, Uncle Sam, Great Seal, national anthem, oaths of office, and mottoes such as *E Pluribus Unum*
- describe holidays Americans celebrate and explain how they reflect their shared values, principles, and beliefs, e.g., the Fourth of July, Labor Day, Memorial Day, Presidents' Day, Columbus Day, Thanksgiving, Veterans Day, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Birthday

The principle on which this country was founded and by which it has always been governed is that Americanism is a matter of the mind and heart; Americanism is not, and never was, a matter of race and ancestry. A good American is one who is loyal to this country and to our creed of liberty and democracy.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1943)

D What are the benefits of diversity in the United States?**CONTENT SUMMARY AND RATIONALE**

Diversity has contributed to the vitality and creativity of the United States by increasing the range of viewpoints, ideas, customs, and choices available to each individual in almost every aspect of life.

An understanding of the benefits of diversity to the individual and society as well as some of its costs may reduce irrational conflicts and unfair discrimination and provide a basis for the equitable handling of conflicts that do arise.

America is woven of many strands; I would recognize them and let it so remain.... Our fate is to become one and yet many.

Ralph Ellison (1952)

CONTENT STANDARDS**1 Diversity in American society**

Students should be able to describe diversity in the United States and identify its benefits.

To achieve this standard, students should be able to

- explain the meaning of the word diversity
- identify common forms of diversity in the United States, e.g., ethnic, racial, religious, class, linguistic, gender, national origin
- explain why there is so much diversity in the United States
- describe some benefits of diversity, e.g., it
 - ▶ fosters a variety of viewpoints, new ideas, and fresh ways of looking at and solving problems
 - ▶ provides people with choices in the arts, music, literature, and sports
 - ▶ helps people appreciate cultural traditions and practices other than their own
- describe some of the costs of diversity
 - ▶ people sometimes discriminate unfairly against others on the basis of their age, religious beliefs, race, or disability
 - ▶ members of different groups misunderstand each other and conflicts may arise

Let us at all times remember that all American citizens are brothers of a common country, and should dwell together in the bonds of fraternal feeling.

Abraham Lincoln (1860)

E How should conflicts about diversity be prevented or managed?**CONTENT SUMMARY AND RATIONALE**

Conflicts arising from diversity are inevitable. Some conflicts however, can be prevented by enhancing communication, by learning how and why people differ and by sharing common beliefs and goals.

The fair management of conflicts that do arise can be achieved by adhering to fundamental principles of procedural justice such as providing an opportunity for all sides to present their points of view and by arranging for arbitration by an impartial third party.

CONTENT STANDARDS**1 Prevention and management of conflicts**

Students should be able to identify and evaluate ways conflicts about diversity can be prevented and managed.

To achieve this standard, students should be able to

- identify examples of conflicts caused by diversity, e.g., unfair discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, language, and gender; alienation of one group from another; efforts to impose beliefs and customs on others
- evaluate ways conflicts about diversity can be prevented, such as by
 - ▶ encouraging communication among different groups

The one absolutely certain way of bringing this nation to ruin, of preventing all possibility of its continuing to be a nation at all would be to permit it to become a tangle of squabbling nationalities... each preserving its separate nationality.

Theodore Roosevelt (1915)

- ▶ identifying common beliefs, interests, and goals
 - working together on school and community problems and projects
 - learning about others' customs, beliefs, history, problems, hopes and dreams
 - listening to different points of view
 - focusing on the beliefs Americans share
 - adhering to the values and principles of American democracy
- evaluate ways conflicts about diversity can be managed fairly, such as those which
 - ▶ provide opportunities for people to present their points of view, e.g., to the student council, school board, city council, court of law
 - ▶ arrange for an impartial individual or group to listen to all sides of a conflict and suggest solutions to problems

F How can people work together to promote the values and principles of American democracy?

CONTENT SUMMARY AND RATIONALE

A general agreement on the values and principles of American democracy provides a basis for people to come together to manage their differences and to promote the ideals upon which the nation is founded—the protection of the rights of the individual and the promotion of the common good. Students must learn that in order to protect their own rights, they must be responsible for supporting the rights of others, even those with whom they may disagree or dislike. To provide a safe and healthy community, all must agree to work together. This may mean merely refraining from littering or writing graffiti or it may mean volunteering for school or community service. It may also mean working with others to get new laws passed that will benefit themselves and their community.

*I have a dream
that my four little children
will one day live in a nation
where they will not be judged
by the color of their skin
but by the content of
their character.*

Martin Luther King Jr. (1963)

CONTENT STANDARDS**1 Promoting ideals**

Students should be able to identify ways people can work together to promote the values and principles of American democracy.

To achieve this standard, students should be able to

- explain how they can promote the values and principles of American democracy by
 - ▶ respecting the rights of others, e.g., allowing those with whom they disagree to express their views; not invading the privacy of others; not discriminating unfairly against others because of their race, ethnicity, language, gender, or religious beliefs
 - ▶ helping to promote the common good, e.g., volunteering for school and community service, cleaning up the environment
 - ▶ participating in government, e.g., voting, becoming informed about public issues, attempting to change laws by writing to legislators, serving on juries

III HOW DOES THE GOVERNMENT ESTABLISHED BY THE CONSTITUTION EMBODY THE PURPOSES, VALUES, AND PRINCIPLES OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY?

A What is the United States Constitution and why is it important?

CONTENT SUMMARY AND RATIONALE

The United States Constitution is a written set of laws that

- states that the basic purposes of government are protecting the rights of individuals and promoting the common good
- organizes the government and grants and divides its powers among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches
- limits the powers of government to prevent their misuse or abuse
- makes it clear that the government is the servant of the people—the people created the government, they control it, and they have the right to change it and to remove anyone working in government who is failing to fulfill his or her responsibilities

Americans should learn at an early age that government is their servant, not their master. It exists to protect their rights and to promote the common good. The Constitution of the United States sets forth these purposes and it provides a basis for understanding the fundamental ideas underlying government and evaluating its actions.

It should be made clear to all Americans at an early age that government is their servant, not their master.

CONTENT STANDARDS**1 The meaning and importance of the United States Constitution**

Students should be able to describe what the United States Constitution is and why it is important.

To achieve this standard, students should be able to explain that the United States Constitution

- is a written document that
 - ▶ states that the basic purposes of their government are to protect individual rights and promote the common good
 - ▶ describes how the government is organized
- limits the powers of government by saying what government can and cannot do
- is the highest law in the land; no government can make laws that take away rights it guarantees
- was created by people who believed that the
 - ▶ government is established by and for the people
 - ▶ government is the servant of the people
 - ▶ the people have the right to choose their representatives
 - ▶ the people have the right to change their government and the United States Constitution

*We the People
of the United States...
do ordain and establish
this Constitution for the
United States of America.*

Preamble to the
U.S. Constitution (1787)

B What does the national government do and how does it protect individual rights and promote the common good?

CONTENT SUMMARY AND RATIONALE

The national government established by the Constitution is responsible for making, carrying out, and enforcing laws, and managing conflicts over their interpretation and application. The national government is responsible for making laws that serve the purposes for which it was established—the protection of individual rights and promotion of the common good. The national government also is responsible for carrying out and enforcing laws and for seeing that disputes about laws are settled in a fair manner.

Children need to be introduced to the national government and the roles and responsibilities of its three branches. This introduction provides an initial basis for understanding the national government and how it goes about fulfilling its responsibilities. That understanding, when it is extended and deepened, enables citizens to evaluate the actions of the government and therefore to participate in it more effectively.

CONTENT STANDARDS**1 Organization and major responsibilities of the national government**

Students should be able to give examples of ways the national government protects individual rights and promotes the common good.

To achieve this standard, students should be able to explain that

- Congress passes laws to
 - ▶ protect individual rights, e.g., laws protecting freedom of religion and expression and preventing unfair discrimination
 - ▶ promote the common good, e.g., laws providing for clean air, national parks, and the defense of the nation
- the executive branch carries out and enforces laws to
 - ▶ protect individual rights, e.g., voting rights, equal opportunities to an education
 - ▶ promote the common good, e.g., enforcement of pure food and drug laws, enforcement of clean air laws
- the judicial branch, headed by the Supreme Court, makes decisions concerning the law that are intended to
 - ▶ protect individual rights, e.g., the right to a fair trial, to vote, to practice one's religious beliefs
 - ▶ promote the common good, e.g., upholding laws that protect the rights of all people to equal opportunity

Government is responsible for making laws that serve the purposes for which it was established—the protection of individual rights and promotion of the common good.

C What are the major responsibilities of state governments?**CONTENT SUMMARY AND RATIONALE**

State governments are established by state constitutions, which have purposes and functions similar to the United States Constitution. Each state has its own legislative, executive, and judicial branch. State governments, along with their local and intermediate (county, parish, special districts) governments, affect every aspect of a citizen's life. The services of state and local governments are more familiar to younger students than are those of the national government. State governments create and carry out laws providing for public education, health care, parks, roads, and highways.

Understanding the major responsibilities and organization of state government provides the citizen with the knowledge required to request government services, judge how well government is fulfilling its responsibilities, and hold officials accountable for fulfilling their responsibilities.

CONTENT STANDARDS**1 Organization and major responsibilities of state governments**

Students should be able to explain the most important responsibilities of their state government.

To achieve this standard, students should be able to

- distinguish between the national and state governments
- describe the major responsibilities of each branch of their state government
 - ▶ legislative branch—makes state laws, decides how the state will spend tax money, approves appointments made by the governor
 - ▶ executive branch—carries out and enforces laws made by the state legislature, e.g., laws providing for education, health care for needy children, protection of fish and game
 - ▶ judicial branch—interprets law and manages conflicts about the law
- describe important services their state government provides, e.g., education, law enforcement, health services and hospitals, roads and highways, public welfare
- describe how state government officials are chosen, e.g., elections, appointment
- explain how people can participate in their state government, e.g., being informed and taking part in discussions of state

State governments, along with local governments affect many aspects of citizens' lives.

issues, voting, volunteering their services, holding public office, serving on governing committees and commissions

- explain why it is important that people participate in their state government, e.g., to protect their rights and promote the common welfare, improve the quality of life in their community, to gain personal satisfaction, to prevent officials from abusing their power
- explain how state government services are paid for, e.g., taxes on sales and on individual and business income, fees for using parks and toll roads, license fees

D What are the major responsibilities of local governments?**CONTENT SUMMARY AND RATIONALE**

Local governments provide most of the services citizens receive, and local courts handle most civil disputes and violations of the law. State and local governments license businesses, professions, automobiles, and drivers; provide essential services such as police and fire protection, education, and street maintenance; regulate zoning and the construction of buildings; provide public housing, transportation, and public health services; and maintain streets, highways, airports, and harbors.

Local governments generally are more accessible to the people than their state and national governments. Members of city councils, boards of education, mayors, and other officials often are available to meet with individuals and groups and to speak to students and civic organizations. Meetings of local agencies are usually open to the public.

Citizens need to know the purposes, organization, and responsibilities of their local governments so they can take part in their governance.

CONTENT STANDARDS**1 Organization and major responsibilities of local governments**

Students should be able to explain the most important responsibilities of their local government.

To achieve this standard, students should be able to

- distinguish among national, state, and local governments
- describe services commonly and primarily provided by local governments

Local governments provide most of the services citizens receive, and local courts handle most civil disputes and violations of the law.

- ▶ public safety, e.g., police, fire, street lighting services
 - ▶ public utilities, e.g., water, gas, electricity
 - ▶ transportation, e.g., streets, highways, bus or subway systems, airports, harbors
 - ▶ education and recreation, e.g., schools, libraries, museums, parks, sports facilities
- explain how local government services are paid for e.g., property, sales, and other taxes; money from state and national governments
 - describe how local government officials are chosen, e.g., election, appointment
 - explain how people can participate in their local government, e.g., being informed and taking part in discussions of local issues, voting, volunteering their services, holding public office, serving on governing committees and commissions
 - explain why it is important that people participate in their local government, e.g., to protect their rights and promote the common good, improve the quality of life in their community, to gain personal satisfaction, to prevent officials from abusing their power

E Who represents you in the legislative and executive branches of your local, state, and national governments?

CONTENT SUMMARY AND RATIONALE

Few Americans can identify most of the key people elected to serve them. It is important to know not only who these people are but also what their positions are on important issues. It also is important to know what their responsibilities are, how well they are fulfilling them, and how they can be contacted on matters of interest. Such knowledge is essential for effective participation.

CONTENT STANDARDS**1 Identifying members of government**

Students should be able to identify the members of the legislative branches and the heads of the executive branches of their local, state, and national governments.

To achieve this standard, students should be able to

- name the persons representing them at state and national levels in the legislative branches of government, e.g., representatives and senators in their state legislature and in Congress
- name the persons representing them at the executive branches of government, e.g., mayor, governor, president
- explain how they can contact their representatives
- explain which level of government they should contact to express their opinions or to get help on specific problems, e.g.,
 - ▶ crime
 - ▶ the environment
 - ▶ recreational opportunities in schools and parks
 - ▶ street lights
 - ▶ trash in the streets or vacant lots
 - ▶ stray or wild animals
 - ▶ abandoned cars
 - ▶ missing persons

Americans should know how to contact public officials.

IV WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE UNITED STATES TO OTHER NATIONS AND TO WORLD AFFAIRS?

A How is the world divided into nations?

CONTENT SUMMARY AND RATIONALE

As a basis for understanding the place of the United States in the world, students must know that the world is divided into many different nations, each having its own government. Each nation is made up of its territory, people, laws, and government. The United States is one nation and it interacts with other nations.

CONTENT STANDARDS

1 Nations

Students should be able to explain that the world is divided into different nations which interact with one another.

To achieve this standard, students should be able to explain that

- the world is divided into many different nations and that each has its own government
- a nation consists of its territory, people, laws, and government
- the United States is one nation and that it interacts with all other nations in the world

B How do nations interact with one another?**CONTENT SUMMARY AND RATIONALE**

Nations interact by sending representatives to meet together to discuss common interests and problems. They often make treaties or agreements about such problems as the environment, drug trade, or mutual defense. Nations also interact by trading—buying and selling manufactured and agricultural goods such as farm equipment, food, television sets, and airplanes.

There is no international organization with power comparable to that of a sovereign nation. When conflicts arise, governmental representatives attempt to help nations manage their affairs and conflicts peacefully, but sometimes these conflicts result in the use of military force.

Resolving conflicts among nations peacefully through discussions and agreements promotes the rights of all people to life, liberty, and property and helps to promote the common good.

The United Nations (UN) is an international organization that provides a way for representatives of different nations to meet together to discuss their common interests and to attempt to solve problems peacefully. Sometimes the UN does this by sending peacekeeping forces to areas where there are conflicts.

Resolving conflicts among nations peacefully through discussions and agreements promotes the rights of all people to life, liberty, and property and helps to promote the common good.

CONTENT STANDARDS**1 Interaction among nations**

Students should be able to explain the major ways nations interact with one another.

To achieve this standard, students should be able to

- explain how nations interact through
 - ▶ trade, e.g., buying and selling manufactured and agricultural goods such as airplanes, farm equipment, clothing, food
 - ▶ diplomacy, e.g., representatives of nations meeting, trying to find ways to solve problems peacefully
 - ▶ cultural contacts, e.g., international meetings of doctors, lawyers, oceanographers; tours of musical groups; exchanges of students and teachers; art exhibits
 - ▶ treaties or agreements, e.g., promises to defend one another, agreements to cooperate to protect the environment or to stop the drug trade
 - ▶ use of military force, e.g., World War II, Persian Gulf War
- explain why it is important that nations try to resolve problems peacefully, e.g., promoting trade to improve peoples' standard of living, promoting peace to save human lives, protecting the environment, exchanging medical and scientific knowledge, exchanging students and teachers
- explain the most important purposes of the U.N.

*We have a problem;
lets talk about it.*

John Maverick (1633)

V WHAT ARE THE ROLES OF THE CITIZEN IN AMERICAN DEMOCRACY?

A What does it mean to be a citizen of the United States?

CONTENT SUMMARY AND RATIONALE

Citizenship in the United States means that a person is a legally recognized member of the nation. Each citizen has equal rights under the law. All citizens have certain rights, privileges, and responsibilities.

Americans who are not citizens have many of the same rights, privileges, and responsibilities of citizens. However, they do not have such important rights as the right to vote in elections, serve on juries, or hold elected office.

CONTENT STANDARDS**1 The meaning of citizenship**

Students should be able to explain the meaning of citizenship in the United States.

To achieve this standard, students should be able to

- explain the important characteristics of citizenship in the United States. Specifically, citizenship
 - ▶ means that a person is recognized as a legal member of the nation
 - ▶ gives each person certain rights and privileges, e.g., the right to vote and to hold public office
 - ▶ means each person has certain responsibilities, e.g., respecting the law, voting, paying taxes, serving on juries
- explain that citizens owe allegiance or loyalty to the United States; in turn they receive protection and other services from the government

The only title in our democracy superior to that of President [is] the title of citizen.

Louis Brandeis (1937)

B How does a person become a citizen?**CONTENT SUMMARY AND RATIONALE**

Under current law, people who are born in the United States automatically become citizens, with few exceptions such as children of foreign diplomats. Adults who have come to the United States can apply to become citizens after residing in the country for five years, passing a test of their understanding of the United States Constitution and the history and government of the United States, and taking an oath of allegiance to the United States. Minors become citizens when their parents are naturalized.

CONTENT STANDARDS**1 Becoming a citizen**

Students should be able to explain how one becomes a citizen of the United States.

To achieve this standard, students should be able to

- explain the difference between a citizen and a non-citizen (alien)
- explain that people become citizens by birth or naturalization

Nothing is more important to America than citizenship; there is more assurance of our future in the individual character of our citizens than in any proposal I, and all the wise advisers I can gather, can ever put into effect in Washington.

Warren G. Harding (1920)

C What are important rights in the United States?**CONTENT SUMMARY AND RATIONALE**

One of the primary purposes of American government is the protection of personal, political, and economic rights of individuals. It is essential, therefore, for citizens to understand what these rights are and why they are important to themselves and their society.

Few, if any, rights can be considered absolute. Most rights may be limited when they conflict with other important rights, values, and interests. An understanding of both the importance of rights and the need for reasonable limitations upon them provides a basis for reasoned discussion of issues regarding them.

CONTENT STANDARDS

1 Rights of individuals

Students should be able to explain why certain rights are important to the individual and to a democratic society.

To achieve this standard, students should be able to

- identify the following types of rights and explain their importance
 - A **personal rights**, e.g., to associate with whomever one pleases, live where one chooses, practice the religion of one's choice, travel freely and return to the United States, emigrate
 - ▶ **political rights**, e.g., to vote, speak freely and criticize the government, join organizations that try to influence government policies, join a political party, seek and hold public office
 - ▶ **economic rights**, e.g., to own property, choose one's work, change employment, join a labor union, establish a business
- identify contemporary issues regarding rights, e.g., school prayer, employment, welfare, equal pay for equal work

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.

Bill of Rights (1791)

D What are important responsibilities of Americans?

CONTENT SUMMARY AND RATIONALE

An understanding of the importance of individual rights must be accompanied by an examination of personal and civic responsibilities. For American democracy to flourish, citizens not only must be aware of their rights, they must also exercise them responsibly and they must fulfill those responsibilities necessary to a self-governing, free, and just society.

CONTENT STANDARDS

1 Responsibilities of individuals

Students should be able to explain why certain responsibilities are important to themselves and their family, community, state, and nation.

To achieve this standard, students should be able to identify such responsibilities as the following and explain their importance

- **personal responsibilities**, e.g., taking care of themselves, accepting responsibility for the consequences of their actions, taking advantage of the opportunity to be educated, supporting their families
- **civic responsibilities**, e.g., obeying the law, respecting the rights of others, being informed and attentive to the needs of their community, paying attention to how well their elected leaders are doing their jobs, communicating with their representatives in their school, local, state, and national governments, voting, paying taxes, serving on juries, serving in the armed forces

No governmental action, no economic doctrine, no economic plan or project can replace that God-imposed responsibility of the individual man and woman to their neighbors.

Herbert Hoover (1931)

E What dispositions or traits of character are important to the preservation and improvement of American democracy?

CONTENT SUMMARY AND RATIONALE

Certain dispositions or traits of character not only help the individual become an effective and responsible participant in the political system, they contribute to the health of American democracy. These dispositions include traits of private character such as moral responsibility, self-discipline, respect for individual worth and human dignity, and compassion. They also include traits of public character such as civility, respect for law, civic mindedness, critical mindedness, persistence, and willingness to negotiate and compromise.

If students examine these dispositions, they may come to a deeper understanding of their importance.

Certain dispositions or traits of character not only help the individual become an effective and responsible participant in the political system, they contribute to the health of American democracy.

CONTENT STANDARDS

1 Dispositions that enhance citizen effectiveness and promote the healthy functioning of American democracy

Students should be able to explain the importance of certain dispositions to themselves and American democracy.

To achieve this standard, students should be able to

- explain the importance of the following dispositions
 - ▶ **individual responsibility**—fulfilling one’s responsibilities to family, friends, and others in one’s community and nation
 - ▶ **self-discipline/self-governance**—obeying reasonable rules and laws voluntarily and not requiring others to force one to do so
 - ▶ **civility**—treating other people with respect regardless of whether or not one likes them or agrees with their viewpoints, being willing to listen to other points of view, not being insulting when arguing with others
 - ▶ **respect for the rights of other individuals**—respect for the right of other people to hold and express their own opinions, respect for their right to a voice in their government
 - ▶ **honesty**—telling the truth
 - ▶ **respect for the law**—willingness to abide by laws, even though one may not be in complete agreement with every law

*Civility costs nothing
and buys everything.*

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1756)

*I say “try”;
if we never try,
we shall never succeed.*

Abraham Lincoln (1862)

- ▶ **open mindedness**—willingness to consider other points of view
- ▶ **critical mindedness**—the inclination to question the truth of various positions, including one’s own
- ▶ **negotiation and compromise**—willingness to try to come to agreement with those with whom one may differ, when it is reasonable and morally justifiable
- ▶ **persistence**—willingness to attempt again and again to accomplish a worthwhile goal
- ▶ **civic mindedness**—concern for the well-being of one’s community and nation
- ▶ **compassion**—concern for the well-being of others, especially for the less fortunate
- ▶ **patriotism**—loyalty to the values and principles underlying American constitutional democracy

If liberty and equality, as is thought by some, are chiefly to be found in democracy, they will be attained when all persons alike share in the government to the utmost.

Aristotle (c. 340 B.C.)

F How can Americans participate in their government?**CONTENT SUMMARY AND RATIONALE**

The well-being of American democracy depends upon the informed and effective participation of citizens concerned with the preservation of individual rights and the promotion of the common good. Americans have always engaged in cooperative action for common purposes. Participation in government, contrasted with the wider realm of organized social participation, has ebbed in recent decades, however. Indifference to or alienation from politics may characterize a significant segment of the population.

If citizens want their views to be considered, they must become active participants in the political process. Although elections, campaigns, and voting are at the center of democratic institutions, citizens should be aware of the many other participatory opportunities available to them. These possibilities include becoming informed about political issues, discussing public issues, contacting public officials, and joining interest groups and political parties.

CONTENT STANDARDS**1 Forms of participation**

Students should be able to describe the means by which citizens can influence the decisions and actions of their government.

To achieve this standard, students should be able to

- identify ways people can monitor and influence the decisions and actions of their government

If citizens want their views to be considered, they must become active participants in the political process.

- ▶ reading about public issues, watching television news programs
 - ▶ discussing public issues
 - ▶ communicating with public officials
 - ▶ voting
 - ▶ taking an active role in interest groups, political parties, and other organizations that attempt to influence public policy and elections
 - ▶ attending meetings of governing agencies e.g., city council, school board
 - ▶ working in campaigns
 - ▶ circulating and signing petitions
 - ▶ taking part in peaceful demonstrations
 - ▶ contributing money to political parties, candidates or causes
- identify individuals or groups who monitor and influence the decisions and actions of their local, state, tribal, and national governments, e.g., the media, labor unions, P.T.A., Chamber of Commerce, taxpayer associations, civilian review boards
 - explain why it is important for citizens to monitor their local, state and national governments

*Where everyman is...
participator in the government
of affairs, not merely at an
election one day in the year
but every day...he will let the
heart be torn out of his body
sooner than his power be
wrested from him by a
Caesar or a Bonaparte.*

Thomas Jefferson (1816)

G What is the importance of political leadership and public service?**CONTENT SUMMARY AND RATIONALE**

Political leadership and careers in public service are vitally important in the American democracy. Citizens need to understand what political leaders do and why leadership is necessary. They also must understand the wide range of positions and opportunities in public service and their importance to themselves and their society.

CONTENT STANDARDS**1 Political leadership and public service**

Students should be able to explain the importance of political leadership and public service in their school, community, state, and nation.

To achieve this standard, students should be able to

- describe what political leaders do and why leadership is necessary in a democracy
- identify opportunities for leadership and public service in their own classroom, school, community, state, and nation
- explain the importance of individuals working cooperatively with their elected leaders
- explain why leadership and public service are important to the continuance and improvement of American democracy

*I am only one;
but still I am one.
I cannot do everything,
but still I can do something;
And because I cannot do
everything, I will not refuse
to do the something
I can do.*

Edward Everett Hale (c. 1790)

H How should Americans select leaders?

CONTENT SUMMARY AND RATIONALE

Citizens need to learn how to examine the responsibilities of differing positions of authority and how to evaluate the qualifications of candidates for those positions. The development among citizens of the capacity to select competent and responsible persons to fill positions of leadership in American government is essential to the well-being of the nation.

CONTENT STANDARDS

1 Selecting leaders

Students should be able to explain and apply criteria useful in selecting leaders in their school, community, state, and nation

To achieve this standard, students should be able to

- identify the major duties, powers, privileges, and limitations of a position of leadership, e.g., class president, mayor, state senator, tribal chairperson, president of the United States
- identify qualities leaders should have such as
 - ▶ commitment to the values and principles of constitutional democracy
 - ▶ respect for the rights of others
 - ▶ ability to work with others
 - ▶ reliability or dependability
 - ▶ courage
 - ▶ honesty

Stand with anybody that stands right. Stand with him while he is right, and part with him when he goes wrong.

Abraham Lincoln (1854)

- ▶ ability to be fair
- ▶ intelligence
- ▶ willingness to work hard
- ▶ special knowledge or skills
- evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of candidates in terms of the qualifications required for a particular leadership role