October 2018 | 4-HCIM15

EXPLORING CITIZENSHIP

Unit VI: My Government

This book belongs to:

My name: _____

My address: _____

My phone number: _____

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National Standards for Civics and Government, Grades 9–12

"My Government" Project Summary

Additional Citizenship Units

Acknowledgements

This material was originally prepared by Maurice Spencer, 4-H Youth Development Leader, University of Georgia, and the Southern Regional 4-H Citizenship Literature Committee: Norma Roberts, Louisiana (Chairman); Treva Sawatski, Arkansas; Ruth Milton, Florida; Maurice Spencer, Georgia; Robert Soileau, Louisiana; and Ben Powell, Tennessee, through a grant from the Coca-Cola Company. This document was published as one of a series of the 4-H Youth Development Program, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. June 1985 by John Rutledge, 4-H Youth Development Specialist.

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An Equal Opportunity Institution. 4-H is the nation's largest youth development organization. Over 230,000 members in the State of Florida help to make up the community of more than 6.5 million young people across America. 4-H is a non-formal, practical educational program for youth. Florida 4-H is the youth development program of Florida Cooperative Extension, a part of the University of Florida/IFAS.

Reviewed: 04/2025

Introduction

Good citizenship is understanding your government. It is getting involved to see that your government represents you and other citizens. Democratic governments are established to be operated by the people and for the people. Citizens' involvement in government is the only way to keep government responsive to the people. How much do you know about your government? Are you involved in seeing that your government operates for you and other citizens? If you have trouble answering these questions, the "My Government" project is for you. In this project, you will:

- Share the knowledge gained through this project with others, and
- Function as an involved and informed citizen to see that government operates for the people.

Your experiences in learning more about government and in participating more fully in government will be fun, exciting, and challenging!

Planning "My Government" Project

This project may be taken as an individual project or as a group project. It can be continued for more than one year, depending on how much you want to learn. Begin the project by reviewing the entire project book.

- Go back and select ☑ the activities you would like to carry out.
- Select and complete **at least one activity** *in each of the eight lists of "Things to Do."* Your involvement does not have to be limited to the activities discussed in this project book. Your imagination and interests are the only boundaries.
- Write down your project goals. Your goals should reflect what you plan to do and what you want to learn from this project.
- Make a plan of action for reaching your goals.
- Keep a record of what you do, what you learn, and how you share this knowledge with others. A 4-H record form is included in the back of this project book.

The My Government project will help you learn about government at the local, state, and national level. It will help you understand the importance of citizen involvement in the government, and it will also help you find ways to get involved in government. Specifically, this project is designed to help you:

- Understand how local, state, and national governments are organized and operated.
- Become aware of career possibilities related to government.
- Plan and carry out projects that will increase your knowledge of and involvement in government.
- Keep a written record of activities undertaken and what you learned from each activity.

Summary of Steps to Follow in Carrying Out This Project

1. Review the entire project book.
2. Select activities which you plan to carry out.
3. Set your project goals. Record these goals.
4. Make a plan of action.
5. Carry out the plan.
6. Keep a record of what you do, what you learn, and how you share your knowledge with others.

Part 1—American Democracy

Democratic government is founded on some basic beliefs about people and governments:

- People are rational beings, capable of self-government.
- Each person is unique and has worth.
- Constitutional government established a "government of laws and not of men," meaning that the law is above the power of a select few to do whatever they want.
- All human beings should be judged equally and given equal opportunity. There should be free popular elections.

- A choice should be provided through opposing political parties.
- There should be government by discussion and debate where opposing views can be presented.
- The majority should rule, with minority rights protected.
- Political power should be separated among main branches of government so that government cannot become a tyranny (government by one ruler).

In order to function as a responsible citizen in a democratic society, you must understand the basic principles of democracy. The United States has a democratic form of government. This means government by the people. In a democratic government the supreme power is vested in the people. They exercise their power directly or indirectly through a system of representation, which includes a system of free elections.

Democratic government requires citizen participation. Citizens have support to give or withhold. Each citizen has a responsibility to stay informed on public issues, to express an opinion on these issues, and to make sure that government stays sensitive to the desires of the people. In the United States, only a small group fulfill this responsibility. To most people, voting is the extent of their participating. After election time they wait until the next election to become active again. Many citizens never become active even to register to vote.

Don't be a "let-the-other-person-do-it" citizen. Get involved! Make sure your democratic government represents you and other citizens.

Things to Do

Select one of these activities to practice good citizenship.



Credit: Tyler Jones, UF/IFAS

ACTIVITY 1: Rid yourself of citizen apathy.

Read the newspaper and stay informed on public issues. Express your concerns and opinions to your elected officials. Learn about government organizations and operations so you can affect your government in a positive way.

Reflect and Apply

- What sorts of issues did you learn about?
- What stance did you take on some of the more popular issues you read about? Did you get a response from your elected official?
- What skills did you learn that will help you succeed in school? Your 4-H club?

ACTIVITY 2. Rid your community of citizen apathy.

Do a survey in your community to learn how people feel about citizen participation in government and how involved they are in their government. Use the results of this survey to plan an "active-citizen" campaign in your community.

Your campaign might include:

- Presenting programs to civic clubs, community organizations, or school groups explaining the role of a citizen and the importance of citizen participation in a democratic society. You should use local examples to show the results of citizen activity or apathy.
- Writing articles or "letters to the editor" to be printed in the local newspaper.
- Arranging to be interviewed for broadcast over radio or television.
- Conducting voter registration drives and "get out the vote" campaigns.

Reflect and Apply

- What were some of the more surprising statistics you found?
- Would you say the majority of your community is active citizens or inactive citizens?
- Does your community value their democratic government?
- What are other situations when you would use the skills you've learned from this activity?

- What would you do differently if you conducted this activity again?

Part 2—Division of Power in a Democracy

Democracy has a strong bias against concentrated political power. In the United States, government powers and functions are divided in two ways—by geography and by function. The division of power by geography is between local, state, and federal governments. The division of power by function is usually between executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. This division of power creates a system of checks and balances. It prevents any one person or group from becoming too powerful. This system of checks and balances helps ensure that our government remains a democracy.

Local Government

There are several types of local governments—county, city, town, and township. These are the governments closest to the people and the ones that affect people most directly. Local governments have certain powers that are granted to them by the state government. Local government responsibilities often include such areas as:

1. Public safety—police, courts, fire departments, correctional institutions.
2. Public health—sewage, garbage, food, water, nursing, health care.
3. Public utilities—water, gas, electricity.
4. Public education—schools, adult education, libraries, museums.
5. Public welfare—playgrounds, parks, housing, care of the needy.
6. Public service—roads, highways, bridges, airports.
7. Planning and zoning—residential, commercial.
8. Financing—assessments, taxes, budget.

Your study of local government should focus on county (borough, or parish) government.



Credit: gettyimages.com

Things to Do

Learn about Local Governance - Select one or more to complete.

Your study of local government should focus on county government. County governments vary from state to state in their organizational structure and in their range of powers. In order to understand the organization and operation of your county's government, conduct one or more of the following activities to learn about your county government. In order to carry out the activities you will need to visit with local county officials. You must remember they are busy people, so do not plan to take too much of their time.

Explain that you are trying to learn about county government and would appreciate any material or information they can provide. A copy of your state's constitution would also be helpful since this document spells out the power granted to local government.

ACTIVITY 1: Attend a meeting of your county governing body.

My Findings

- What is the exact name of your county governing body? Is it provided for in the state constitution or by legislation? How many members does it have?
- What are the qualifications for office?
- How are members of the county governing body selected? What is the term of office?

- Are members paid by salary or by fees? What is the total amount they are paid each year?
- What are the principal duties of the governing body? Does it have power to levy taxes, make appropriations, or authorize bonds? Does it have any appointing powers? If so, whom does it appoint?
- How often does the governing body meet? Are meetings open to the public? Are minutes of the meetings available to the public?
- Are hearings held? On what kinds of matters?
- How is the chair of the governing body chosen? What power or role does this person have in county government beyond presiding over meetings?

Reflect and Apply

- What were the most interesting facts you learned regarding your county's governing body?
- How can knowing more about your local governing body help you or your family, neighborhood, or community?

ACTIVITY 2: Interview several local government officials.

Find out who is elected and who is appointed in your county's governing body. Learn about your county's finances.

My Findings:

- Does your county have a single responsible county executive? If so, how is this person chosen? What are the term of office, salary, and associated duties?
- What authority does this person have? Do they have any appointing powers?
- If your county does not have a central executive, what *officials* perform executive functions?
  - To whom are they responsible for performance of these duties?
  - Who is responsible for carrying out the governing body's decisions or for presenting budget proposals to it?
- Which of your county officials are elected? What are their names and duties?
- Who are the principal appointed officers? Who appoints them? What are their duties?
- What is the term of office and salary of each county official? Who sets their salaries?
- What *services* are provided by your county government?
- How is your county government financed?

Reflect and Apply

- Which county jobs sound fun? Which division of power would you like to work for one day? Why?

ACTIVITY 3: Visit a local court during a trial by jury.

- What courts hold regular sessions in your county? What is the jurisdiction of each?
- What are the lengths of these sessions? What judicial positions are in your county?

What is the grand jury in your county? Answer some of these questions about your county's grand jury process:

- How is the list drawn up?
- How many members does it have?
- How much are they paid? Who is exempt from jury service? How are exemptions granted?
- When is the grand jury summoned?
- How long does it serve?
- Are the accused sometimes held for long periods of time awaiting grand jury sessions?

What is the petit jury in your county? Answer some of these questions about your county's petit jury process:

- How many members does it have?
- How much are they paid?
- Who is exempt from jury service?
- What type of cases are brought before the petit jury?

My Findings

- What new facts did you learn regarding your county's courts and judicial system?

Reflect and Apply

- Now that you know all about the divisions of power in a democracy, how can you devise a citizenship project that benefits the community and highlights the divisions of power?

- How can you compile all this information into fun ways to teach your 4-H club about your local government?

State Government

Each of the fifty states within the United States has a state constitution and a state government. States have certain rights and powers, according to the United States Constitution. The United States Constitution is the law of the land, but the constitution of each state is the law within the boundaries of that state. The only powers a state is denied are those that conflict with the guarantees of the United States Constitution. The limitations placed on states by the Constitution are actually few. The separate states cannot make treaties with foreign countries, coin money, tax imports or exports, deny the due process of equal protection of the law to any individual or corporation, or impair the obligation of contracts.

State citizens elect their own officials who give leadership to their state's government. The states enact and enforce civil and criminal law subject only to the Constitutional board's guarantees of individual freedom. The states control the public education systems within their borders and provide services in health, welfare, and highway construction. They license business and industry, charter corporations, and regulate utilities, insurance companies, and other businesses. States also have the power to tax individuals and corporations within the state.

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

The EXECUTIVE BRANCH includes the governor and a number of other elected officials. These may or may not include a lieutenant governor. Generally, there is a secretary of state, a treasurer, an attorney- general and sometimes an auditor. Executive officials may be elected by the people or the state constitution may specify that the governor appoint them, much as the President of the United states appoints his/her cabinet and certain other officials. The governor is head of the state and usually the head of his/her political party in that state.

Let's Explore

- Who is the governor of your state? What is his/her political party?
- What other officials make up the executive branch of your state's government, and what are their positions?
- In your state, how are the members of the executive branch, excluding the governor, chosen?

LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

The LEGISLATIVE BRANCH usually consists of two houses (except in the state of Nebraska). These are usually referred to as the Senate and the House of Representatives. Senators are usually elected to four-year terms while representatives usually serve two-year terms.

In 1962, a Supreme Court decision (Baker vs. Carr) insisted on the concept of one person, one vote. This ruling resulted in the apportionment of state senators as well as representatives on the basis of population. Thus, the composition of state legislatures is much different from that of the national congress. In time there might be single-house state legislatures such as Nebraska has used since 1937.

Let's Explore!

- What does the legislative branch in your state consist of?
- The men and women who are elected to serve in your state legislature serve designated periods of time. What are the lengths of their terms?
- What are the names of the men and/or women who represent you in the state legislature?
- What are their political parties?

JUDICIAL BRANCH

The JUDICIAL BRANCH of the state, like that of the federal government, consists of a number of different court systems. No state has more than four kinds of courts, or fewer than two. At the top level is a court of last appeal, often but not always called the state supreme court, as in the federal judiciary. The state supreme court supervises and receives cases of appeal from lower courts. In the state supreme court, the number of justices ranges from three to nine.

Below the supreme courts are the courts of appeal. Next are the trial courts, with such names as chancery court, circuit court, district court, and superior court.

Except for those in District of Columbia, we are all residents of a state and consider ourselves Georgians, New Yorkers, Floridians, Californians, etc. To be sure, all of us are Americans, but we are also citizens of a state. We are proud of our state citizenship, and as good state citizens, we should be informed on issues that affect our state. We should actively work toward making our state a better place to live.

Let's Explore!

- What is the court of last appeal called in your state?
- How many justices sit on the court of last appeal in your state, and what are their names?
- What is the function of the court of last appeal?
- What system of courts is immediately below the court of last appeal in your state, and what is its function?
- What other courts make up your state's judiciary system, and what is the function of each one?

Things to Do

Select two or more of the following activities to learn more about state government.

ACTIVITY 1: Analyze your state constitution.

In order to learn the facts about Florida's state government, read the constitution of the state of Florida and make a notebook of comparisons between the Florida constitution and the constitution of another state of your choice (preferably somewhere you'd like to live!). Find the state constitutions on the internet, at your school library, or at the public library. Your state representative or the secretary of state are other possible resources.

Reflect and Apply

- Which state's constitution did you prefer?
- Were there any laws that you were shocked by?
- Why did you choose that particular state? Do you have family there?
- Did you like or dislike anything about that state's constitution compared to Florida's?
- What did you learn while comparing the two state constitutions?
- In what other ways can you apply the skills you gained in this activity?

ACTIVITY 2: Serve as a legislative page.

A firsthand way to learn more about state government is to serve as a legislative page. Contact the person who represents you in the state legislature and inquire about serving as a page.

Reflect and Apply

- What did you learn as a legislative page? Would you like to work in government when you get older?
- How can you apply the skills you learned as a page to better lead your 4-H club? How can you apply them at school?

ACTIVITY 3: Conduct a state government bowl.

This is an activity where teams compete against one another. The teams have the opportunity to answer questions related to state government. Points are awarded for correct answers, and the team with the most points wins. Create questions and answers for the state government bowl. Make sure the questions you use have only one correct answer, and be sure the answer you have is the correct one.

Also, create a list of references that your club members could study before participating in the bowl. You will need rules for conducting the bowl. Once you have rules and the questions, you are ready to organize the bowl. Set the time and place. Secure the teams and any prizes that are to be awarded to the winners.

Reflect and Apply

- Did your 4-H club enjoy the state government bowl? Who won?
- What did your club learn from this bowl? Did they already have a solid background in government? What questions did the teams answer wrong?
- How can you take the interesting facts you learned (especially those the teams got wrong!) from the state government bowl and help educate your town about government?

ACTIVITY 4: Tour the state capitol.

Plan a tour of the state capitol while the legislature is in session. Invite 4-H members and other interested young people to participate. For assistance in arranging such a tour, contact your representative in the state legislature. This person can give you information that will be helpful in planning the tour. Your representative might agree to make the necessary arrangements for the group to participate in some specific learning activities while at the capitol. Some activities that might be arranged are a tour of the legislature in action and committees at work or a meeting with the governor and other government officials.

Reflect and Apply

- What did you learn from the tour of the state capitol? Were you able to see the legislature or any committees in action?
- Did you meet the governor or any other government officials?
- How can you apply the skills you learned in this activity to other areas of your life?

ACTIVITY 5: Conduct a mock state legislative session.

Plan and conduct a mock state legislative session. Involve your 4-H club or 4-H members within the county who are interested in learning about the operation of state government.

Reflect and Apply

- Did you incorporate both the Senate and the House of Representatives?
- What topics did your members discuss?
- What was your position?
- Were you part of the majority or minority? What laws did you draw up?
- How can you take what you learned from the mock state legislature and apply it to other areas of government?

ACTIVITY 6: Invite your state representative to a club meeting.

Invite your state representative to speak to your 4-H club or county 4-H group. Work with your club members in advance to prepare questions for the representative.

Reflect and Apply

- What is your state representative's name?
- Were you successful in getting your state representative to come speak to your 4-H club?
- What subjects were discussed with your group? Did any topics pertain to youth exclusively?
- What did you learn from the presentation?
- Would you like to be a state representative one day?
- What can you do to start making a difference in your community as a youth?
- How can your state representative help you in your mission?

ACTIVITY 7: Keep up with current state issues.

Read a daily newspaper to stay informed on issues within your state. Many newspapers are published online if your family does not subscribe to a local paper. As you read the newspaper, make a list of current problems your state and its residents are facing.

Reflect and Apply

- What can you do to help solve a particular problem you have studied?
- What can you do to help educate your 4-H club, community, and/or county about the issues affecting your state?
- Carry out your plan of action. How effective was your plan?
- Were you successful in making a difference in your 4-H club by educating others about this issue? Were you successful in your community? Were you successful in your county?

ACTIVITY 8: Interview state employees.

Interview three or more state employees (not elected officials) in your local area. Find out what they do and how the state agency they work for serves the citizens. Check out the state agencies in Florida at MyFlorida.com.

Reflect and Apply

- Who did you interview? What are their jobs?
- How does the agency they work for serve the citizens of your state?
- Can you benefit from any of the services of the agencies you learned about?
- How do they affect your life?

Federal Government

The United States Constitution is the supreme law of the land. The Constitution reserves certain powers for the Federal government and gives other powers to state and local governments.



Credit: gettyimages.com

The Constitution establishes three branches of Federal Government. These branches operate within a system of "checks and balances." This system keeps any one branch from becoming the dominant force of the federal government.

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

The EXECUTIVE BRANCH is headed by the president and represents all the people of the United States. To be president, you must be a natural-born citizen at least 35 years of age. The presidency is an elected office of four years and is now limited to two terms. The president is commander-in-chief of the armed forces, conducts foreign relations, recognizes foreign governments, and makes treaties, subject to Senate ratification. The president may recommend legislation and veto bills passed by Congress. A two-thirds vote of both Houses can override a presidential veto.

The president executes the laws, manages operations of the federal government, and has the power to pardon those who have been convicted of federal crimes. Under the Constitution, the president is more the leader of all the people than any other individual in government, and the president's messages, press conferences, and speeches can spearhead public opinion. Congress, however, can determine much of the success or failure of the presidential program. Congress can accept the president's recommendations, reject them, or change them.

Let's Explore!

- Who is the president of the United States?
- Who is the vice-president of the United States?
- What are the names and titles of the members of the president's cabinet?

LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

The LEGISLATIVE BRANCH is made up of two houses: the Senate and the House of Representatives. A senator represents the people of an entire state. There are 100 senators, two from each state. They are elected for a term of six years by a rotating system of elections every two years so that one-third may be chosen every second year. Senators are elected directly by the people they represent. The vice president presides over the Senate but has no vote unless a tie occurs.

The Senate is required to confirm most of the president's appointments. The Senate also ratifies or rejects treaties negotiated by the president with foreign powers. While the House has the power of impeachment, the Senate tries officials who have been impeached.

A member of the House represents the people of a district within a state. There are 435 representatives from the fifty states; a Resident Commissioner from Puerto Rico; and three delegates, one each from the District of Columbia, Guam, and the Virgin Islands. The number of representatives from each state is based on population; however, each state is entitled to one representative regardless of population. Representatives are elected every two years.

The Speaker of the House presides over the House of Representatives. Although the election of the Speaker officially occurs on the floor, the Speaker is in fact elected by the members of the majority party meeting in caucus

on the eve of a new Congress. Once elected, a Speaker is customarily re-elected so long as the Speaker's party remains in control of the House. Sam Rayburn's service was the longest in history. He occupied the Speaker's chair for over seventeen years.

Congress discusses some of the nation's most complex problems, bringing them under intense, informed investigation and analytical support and opposition. These problems can be raised in the form of messages from the president or from within the House or the Senate and range from war or tax reform to reorganization of the postal service or legislation on the US fishing industry. It is in the House that all revenue money and appropriation measures originate–the latter by law and the former by custom.

Let's Explore!

- Who are the two senators from your state?
- Who are the representatives from your state?
- Which representative represents you?

JUDICIAL BRANCH

The JUDICIAL BRANCH of the federal government is represented by the Supreme Court.

The words "Equal Justice Under Law," written above the main entrance to the Supreme Court Building, express the ultimate responsibility of the highest tribunal in the nation for all cases and controversies arising under the Constitution or the laws of the United States.

The Court's power of judicial review was not confirmed until 1803, when it was invoked by Chief Justice John Marshall in Marbury v. Madison. In this decision, the chief justice asserted that the Supreme Court's responsibility to invalidate unconstitutional legislation was a necessary consequence of its sworn duty to uphold the Constitution.

The Supreme Court is made up of nine justices who serve as long as they choose unless they are removed by impeachment. When a new justice is needed, usually due to retirement, the President appoints him or her, subject to the advice and consent of the Senate. These justices hand down decisions on cases and controversies that arise under the Constitution.

Let's Explore!

- Who is the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court?
- Who are the other Supreme Court justices?

Things to Do

Select two or more of the following activities to learn more about federal government.

ACTIVITY 1: Read the United States Constitution.

Design a set of posters that explain the articles and amendments of the Constitution. Use pictures rather than a lot of words. The posters can be used to teach others about the Constitution and the federal government.



Credit: https://pixabay.com

Reflect and Apply

- What key words or symbols did you include on your posters?
- Why are pictures better than a lot of words on posters?
- What facts were you able to teach others?
- For what other situations might it be helpful to make posters?
- Why is this a good method for teaching others?

ACTIVITY 2: Chart how a bill becomes a law.

Make a wall chart showing how a bill becomes a law. Do the chart as a diagram showing each step in the process. Use pictures rather than words. The wall chart can be used to help others understand how a bill becomes a law.

- How many steps must a bill pass through before it becomes a law?
- Why is a diagram a good way to reflect this process?
- What are other governmental processes that could easily be demonstrated by a flowchart/diagram?

ACTIVITY 3: Investigate congressional committees.

Senators and representatives in Congress serve on committees. Find out on which committees your state's senators and representatives serve. Select a committee of interest to you. Write the congressman/congresswoman on that committee and ask to be kept informed about the committee's action. Many congressmen and congresswomen have a newsletter to constituents. Ask to be put on the newsletter mailing list.

Reflect and Apply

- How does this committee affect your life? What can you do in your community to help the committee's initiative?
- Why is a newsletter a good way for representatives to stay in touch with constituents? What other mailing lists could you get on to stay up to date with your government?

ACTIVITY 4: Know your presidents!

Make a list of all the United States presidents. List them in order of service and record the years they served.

Reflect and Apply

- How many presidents have we had?
- Who served the longest? Who served the shortest?
- Who is your favorite? Why?
- What are some of the biggest issues our current president will have to face during the duration of this term?

ACTIVITY 5: Conduct a mock presidential election.

Plan and conduct a mock presidential election. Follow the same procedures as used in a real election. Voters must register. Voters cast their votes on machines or ballots. Electors are selected. They cast their votes according to how the majority of the people they represent voted.

Reflect and Apply

- What did you learn about our government as you went through the motions of a presidential election?
- Is democracy always fair?
- What are some other governmental processes that could be better understood by going through the motions to learn it yourself?

ACTIVITY 6: Visit Washington, D.C.

Plan a family vacation to Washington, D.C. While there, visit Capitol Hill, sit in on a legislative session, attend a congressional committee meeting, and visit your representatives and senators.

- What did you learn about our nation's capital?
- Were you able to meet your representatives and senators?
- What was the most interesting thing about Washington, D.C.?
- Where else could you visit to learn about government?

Learn how you can qualify for trips to Washington through state 4-H-sponsored events like Citizenship Washington Focus or National 4-H Conference.

ACTIVITY 7: Identify current congressional issues and conduct club debate.

Read the newspaper to find issues under consideration in congress. Present a controversial issue to your 4-H group. Form a pro and con team. Have each team research their side of the issue. Conduct the debate at a 4-H meeting and then vote on this issue. Why did you pick this specific issue? Outside of the pro and con teams, how did your 4-H club feel about this issue?

Reflect and Apply

- What other situations would be clarified if there were a pro and con team explaining the differences?
- Why is this a good aid to better understand both sides of an issue?

ACTIVITY 8: Design your own activity.

Develop your own citizenship activity related to the Constitution or federal government. Carry out your plan.

Reflect and Apply

- What are you aiming to learn with this citizenship project?
- What will you be able to teach others?
- How can the skills you learned here help you in other aspects of your life? How can they help you in school? How can they help you in your 4-H club?

Part 3—Political Parties in a Democracy

Political parties are the instruments through which candidates are put forward, platforms written, conventions run, and campaigns conducted.

The two major political parties in the United States are the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. From time to time third parties arise when certain groups feel neither major party represents them.

Political parties provide the framework for selecting candidates for political office at all levels. Almost all states use primaries to select candidates for state office. The Democratic and Republican primaries offer voters a choice of several candidates seeking nomination of their party. A candidate must win the primary in order to run for a state office.

National Democratic and Republican conventions are held each national election year. Delegates to the national conventions are determined by each state. This is usually done at a state convention. National conventions are held to submit presidential candidates and adopt party platforms. The presidential candidate usually selects the vice-presidential candidate.

Political parties are looking for help at all levels.

The youth of America can play an important role in American politics.

"Political parties provide an outlet for concerned citizens who do not care to run for public office. They provide a social mechanism for permitting the largest part of the population to influence majority decisions by choosing the candidates for political office. They provide a continuing link between the relatively small number of men [or women] who implement government policy and the massive voting public. In short, through participation in national political parties the people of the nation govern themselves."

—Senator Howard Baker
Republican–Tennessee

"No political candidate today can ignore the reservoir of talented young people that are available to assist in his bid for public office. In a close campaign their help can frequently make the difference between winning and losing."

—Senator George McGovern
Democrat–South Dakota

Things to Do

ACTIVITY 1: Study a political party.

Select a political party to study. Using the internet, research the US political parties. You might also want to write to the parties for information. Go online or use your local library to find their addresses.

Reflect and Apply

- What did you learn from the information on the different political parties?
- Do you feel that one party represents you best? Why or why not?
- If you do feel that you support one political party over the other, what can you do to support that party in your area?

ACTIVITY 2: Join or start a political club in your area.

Research and contact the appropriate national committee to obtain information about its teenage club.

Reflect and Apply

- What political party did you research/contact? Describe the membership of your political club.

- Do your friends have the same political beliefs as you? Why might this be?
- How else can you use clubs or teenage clubs to support causes in your community?

ACTIVITY 3: Volunteer for a political campaign.

Find a political candidate who seems to believe in the same things you do. Volunteer to help with the candidate's campaign.

Reflect and Apply

- Who did you select to support?
- What platforms does this candidate have that you agree with?
- What political party are they from?
- What office are they running for?
- How can you use the skills learned from this activity in other areas of your life? Use this background to either run for class office yourself or support a friend.

ACTIVITY 4: Create your own political party.

Create your own new and different political party that deals with issues the others do not. Come up with a party that is perfectly shaped around your ideals and political outlooks.

Reflect and Apply

- Who is interested in your new political party? If you were to campaign for this party, do you think others would support it? Why or why not?
- How can you get the Republican and Democratic parties concerned with the issues your party deals with?

Part 4—The Voter in a Democracy

The belief in free popular elections is one of the basic principles of a democratic government. Democratic government depends on citizen participation. One type of citizen participation is voting.

The vote is your opportunity to have a voice in the operation of your government, whether that government is in your school, your town, or in Washington, D.C. Every vote is important. A single vote once decided the election of a president of the United States. Regardless of the difference in votes at any election, your vote is important. It enables you to express your opinion about your government, even if the majority disagrees with you.

To be eligible to vote in local, state, or national elections you must be 18 years old and registered to vote. To find out how, when, and where to register, call your courthouse or local election board and ask for the office handling voter registration. To register, you will, under oath, need to identify yourself with name, address, and place of birth. You will give your age and establish your residence. Once you have registered, find out how long your registration lasts. Is it permanent until you move? Is it only for one year? Is it good until you have missed voting in a certain number of elections? Before you vote in any type of election (school, county, state, etc.) study the issues and the candidates. Find out all you can about the candidates and their past voting records. Then vote for the one you feel will do the best job.



Credit: gettyimages.com

Things to Do

Select one or more of the following activities to complete.

ACTIVITY 1: Run for an elected office.

Run for school, class, or club office. Develop your platform and conduct your campaign.

- What sorts of issues are important to your classmates? What are your solutions for them?
- If you were to run for local office, what sorts of platforms would you support? What are some local issues you would take care of?

ACTIVITY 2: Help organize an election at your school.

Work with your school officials and student government to set up a school election that follows standard local government voting procedures. Voters must register, candidates should campaign, someone must acquire voting machines or ballot boxes and tally votes, and so on.

- What did you learn about your local government as you went through the motions of an election?
- What are some other governmental processes that could be better understood by going through the motions to learn them yourself?

ACTIVITY 3: Organize a voter registration project for seniors at your school.

Seek local voter registration cooperation in a voter registration project for high school seniors, with appropriate information provided on the registration process and on-the-spot registration of those eligible.

- How many high school seniors did you help register to vote? Why are high school seniors a good crowd to market voting registration to?
- What are some other ways you could volunteer your time to help unregistered voters register?

ACTIVITY 4: Volunteer at a polling place.

Volunteer to assist at a polling place during an election, or if you have a driver's license, provide transportation to the polls for senior citizens.

- How many people were able to vote because of the extra effort you put forth?
- What are some other ways you could volunteer your time to help voters in the next election?

ACTIVITY 5: Visit a voting headquarters on an election night.

Visit the voting headquarters or the courthouse on election night to see the political process in action as the votes are tabulated.

- What did you learn about voting procedures?
- How do they make sure each vote is only counted once?
- How can you use the methods for counting votes in your 4-H club? In school?

ACTIVITY 6: Invite a local election official to speak to your 4-H club.

Secure a local election official to discuss the specifics of local elections as well as voting procedures with your 4-H club or school group.

- Who did you invite?
- What new facts did you and your club members learn about voting procedures?
- How can you take the knowledge gained here and teach others about local election specifics?



Credit: https://www.flickr.com

Test Yourself!

As you complete your citizenship project, these activities are for you to test yourself on your knowledge as a US citizen.

ACTIVITY 1: The US Citizenship Quiz

Below are some questions typical of those asked on a citizenship exam given to immigrants. Can you answer them?

1. What is our national motto?
   a) In God We Trust
   b) E Pluribus Unum
   c) Liberty & Justice for All

2. When was the Constitution adopted?
   a) July 4, 1776
   b) March 4, 1789
   c) June 14, 1777

3. What is the Bill of Rights?
   a) The first 10 amendments to the Constitution
   b) A treaty with our allies
   c) The Preamble to the Constitution

4. US Senators have always been elected by the people.
   a) True b) False

5. How many Justices in the Supreme Court?
   a) nine b) seven c) twelve

6. How many Senators are there in Congress?
   a) 80 b) 100 c) 196

7. How many Senators are there from each state?
   a) one b) two c) three

8. A bill passed by both houses of Congress may become a law without the signature of the President.
   a) True b) False

9. All revenue raising bills must originate with the:
   a) President
   b) US Senate
   c) House of Representatives

10. Name the war in which we won our independence from Great Britain.
    a) War of 1812
    b) Civil War
    c) Revolutionary War

11. How are amendments to the Constitution ratified?
    a) By popular vote of the people
    b) By State Convention or Legislatures
    c) By US House and Senate

12. On what date do we celebrate our Nation's Birthday?
    a) June 14 b) July 4 c) November 11

13. The quote, "Four Score and Seven Years Ago" begins the:
    a) Declaration of Independence
    b) Preamble to the Constitution
    c) Lincoln s Gettysburg Address

14. By what margin must Congress vote to pass a bill over the President's veto?
    a) ⅔ b) ⅗ c) ¾

15. Our American President has the power to make treaties with foreign powers without consulting Congress.
    a) True b) False

16. Article I of the Constitution prohibits a levy of tax on income. How then, is income tax legal?
    a) It isn't
    b) Constitution was amended
    c) Congress passed a law making it legal

Answers to Citizenship Quiz

1. a, In God We Trust

2. b, March 4, 1789

3. a, The first 10 amendments to the Constitution

4. b, False (elected by people only since 1913 due to Amendment 17, Sec 1)

5. a, nine

6. b, 100

7. b, two

8. a, True

9. c, House of Representatives

10. c, Revolutionary War

11. b, By State Convention or Legislatures

12. b, July 4

13. c, Lincoln s Gettysburg Address

14. a, ⅔

15. b, False

16. b, Amendment XVI of the Constitution, adopted 1913

Score as Follows

14–16 correct—Congratulations! Your education and patriotism are showing.

12–13 correct—A good solid citizen.

0–11 correct—May need some more work. The 4-H Citizenship project is a great start!

Reflect and Apply

- How did you do?
- If you did not do as well as you think you should have, what is something new you learned as a result of these activities?
- How can this project help you in school or in the future?

ACTIVITY 2: The US Capitals

Match the state capitals with the 50 states outlined on the map below by placing the numbers beside each city on the map within the correct state.

1–Atlanta	11–Annapolis	21–Augusta	31–Baton Rouge	41–Concord
2–Sacramento	12–Tallahassee	22–St. Paul	32–Santa Fe	42–Helena
3–Hartford	13–Oklahoma City	23–Jackson	33–Albany	43–Springfield
4–Little Rock	14–Harrisburg	24–Providence	34–Bismarck	44–Topeka
5–Lincoln	15–Madison	25–Salem	35–Charleston	45–Cheyenne
6–Austin	16–Olympia	26–Indianapolis	36–Phoenix	46–Trenton
7–Nashville	17–Carson City	27–Columbia	37–Richmond	47–Salt Lake City
8–Montpelier	18–Montgomery	28–Des Moines	38–Lansing	48–Frankfort
9–Raleigh	19–Denver	29–Boise	39–Pierre	49–Boston
10–Honolulu	20–Juneau	30–Dover	40–Columbus	50–Jefferson City



Additional Sources of Information

Major Political Party Headquarters

Democratic National Committee
430 South Capitol Street, SE
Washington, DC 20003
www.democrats.org

Republican National Committee
310 First Street, SE
Washington, DC 20003
www.rnc.org

Major Political Party Student Groups

Young Democrats of America
430 South Capitol Street, SE
Washington, DC 20003
www.yda.org

Young Republicans/College Republicans
310 First Street, SE
Washington, DC 20003
www.youngrepublicans.com
www.crnc.org

Check the addresses of other political parties at your local library or on the internet.

Additional 4-H Citizenship Project Resources

Michigan 4-H website:

Citizenship: Government is US! Curriculum

Civic Engagement: After School Activities for Citizenship and Leadership

National 4-H:

Public Adventures

Agents of Change: Service Learning

4-H Citizenship Events

The **Florida 4-H Legislature** is a five-day learning laboratory in state government designed to give participants educational experiences such as learning about the functions of state level government, becoming informed about the state system of government, serving as mock legislators, reporters or lobbyists, meeting in the committee rooms of the House of Representatives as well as the House Chambers, and touring the State Capitol, Supreme Court, Archives and/or other State Buildings.

The **Citizenship Washington Focus** (CWF) Program is an exciting educational week for senior 4-H'ers in our nation's capital, exploring how their individual actions can make a difference in our world. Conducted in Washington, D.C., CWF uses our nation's Capitol building as a classroom in which to foster youth appreciation, understanding, and involvement in civic responsibility, government operations, and current issues.

National Standards for Civics and Government, Grades 9–12

1. What are Civic Life, Politics, and Government?

A. What is civic life? What is politics? What is government? Why are government and politics necessary? What purposes should government serve?

B. What are the essential characteristics of limited and unlimited government?

C. What are the nature and purposes of constitutions?

D. What are alternative ways of organizing constitutional governments?

2. What are the Foundations of the American Political System?

A. What is the American idea of constitutional government?

B. What are the distinctive characteristics of American society?

C. What is American political culture?

D. What values and principles are basic to American constitutional democracy?

3. How Does the Government Established by the Constitution Embody the Purposes, Values, and Principles of American Democracy?

A. How are power and responsibility distributed, shared, and limited in the government established by the United States Constitution?

B. How is the national government organized and what does it do?

C. How are state and local governments organized and what do they do?

D. What is the place of law in the American constitutional system?

E. How does the American political system provide for choice and opportunities for participation?

4. What is the Relationship of the United States to Other Nations and to World Affairs?

A. How is the world organized politically?

B. How do the domestic politics and constitutional principles of the United States affect its relations with the world?

C. How has the United States influenced other nations, and how have other nations influenced American politics and society?

5. What are the Roles of the Citizen in American Democracy?

A. What is citizenship?

B. What are the rights of citizens?

C. What are the responsibilities of citizens?

D. What civic dispositions or traits of private and public character are important to the preservation and improvement of American constitutional democracy?

E. How can citizens take part in civic life?

Source: Center for Civic Education

"My Government" Project Summary

Name _____ Address_____

Age _____Grade in School _____ Years in 4-H _____ Years in Citizenship Project _____

Name of 4-H Club or Group: _____

"My Government" Project Goals:_____

_____

_____

American Democracy

What I did: _____

_____

_____

What I learned: _____

_____

_____

How I shared my knowledge with others: _____

_____

_____

Divisions of Power in a Democracy
Local Government

What I did: _____

_____

_____

What I learned: _____

_____

_____

How I shared my knowledge with others: _____

_____

_____

State Government

What I did: _____

_____

_____

What I learned: _____

_____

_____

How I shared my knowledge with others: _____

_____

_____

Federal Government

What I did: _____

_____

_____

What I learned: _____

_____

_____

How I shared my knowledge with others: _____

_____

_____

Political Parties in a Democracy

What I did: _____

_____

_____

What I learned: _____

_____

_____

How I shared my knowledge with others: _____

_____

_____

The Voter in a Democracy

What I did: _____

_____

_____

What I learned: _____

_____

_____

How I shared my knowledge with others: _____

_____

_____

Additional "My Government" activities in which l have been involved: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Additional Citizenship Units

Good citizenship involves more than understanding and participating in government. Good citizenship is important in relationships with your family, friends, and neighbors. Good citizenship is important to your 4-H club and other organizations you belong to. It means understanding and appreciating yourself and your heritage, and having the same respect for other people and their heritages.

The citizenship project is made up of a series of seven units. The citizenship project consists of the following units:

- Unit 1: Me, My Family, and My Friends
- Unit 2: My Neighborhood
- Unit 3: My Clubs and Groups
- Unit 4: My Heritage
- Unit 5: My Community
- Unit 6: My Government
- Unit 7: My World

I pledge: My Head to clearer thinking,
My Heart to greater loyalty,
My Hands to larger service, and
My Health to better living, for my club, my community, my country, and my world