



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
2004 Volume I: The Supreme Court in American Political History

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## Who Put the You in Utopia?

Guide for Curriculum Unit 04.01.05  
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This unit explores the role of the individual in American society. This unit fulfills several of the requirements for the American literature survey course taught in the junior year. The unit was written for honors-level students but can be modified for varying levels.

The unit covers three time periods: the Puritan Period, the Age of Reason, and modern contemporary America. Each reading assignment addresses in some way the importance of the individual in his society. The unit provides opportunities for students to practice a variety of skills in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing. The primary objectives are for students to (1) gain an understanding of the historical contexts presented; (2) gain familiarity with the true nature of the debate around the roles of the government in relation to the people; (3) recognize the theme of the individual in society in varying contexts, (4) explore human nature and its relationship to the law; (5) identify literary elements and techniques; and (6) apply their new knowledge to their world. In order to meet these objectives students will consider the historical information in this unit as well as read supplemental information in the classroom textbook. They will begin with the concepts of *Puritanism* and *utopia* as they read John Winthrop's, *A Modell of Christian Charity*, in which he describes his ideal "city upon a hill." The major text for the unit is Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel, *The Scarlet Letter*. This text lends itself to literary analysis and portrays the ideals of Winthrop's society in action. The unit moves chronologically into the Age of Reason and includes works by Benjamin Franklin, pre- and post- revolutionary rhetoric and documents such as the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States. The role of the individual becomes a primary interest as the government is established in relation to the individuals it governs. The unit moves forward to address the impact of the Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education* on America's evolving ideology, especially with respect to the principle of equality and the changing strategies for interpretation of the Constitution. Finally, the film *Fahrenheit 9/11* brings the theme of the individual in society into the present, and questions the actions of the government in relation to the "consent of the governed."

(Recommended for English, grade 11.)

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