



An Introduction to America's Culture of Democracy

Curriculum Unit 08.04.02
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Introduction

American culture is laced with our democratic heritage. We learn about democracy, in our homes and from our earliest days in school. Soon after we learn to walk, we begin to learn that the majority does and should rule in thousands of little decisions from what the family has for dinner to whether or not a class goes out for recess on a cold day. We are taught that this is a just and fair way of making decisions. As adults, we participate in polls and surveys that take our opinion on topics as varied as our preferences on television and our agreement with an idea.

The primacy of democracy in our culture belies our history. Growing up in a culture of democracy can lead students to believe the legend of America; that it was born from a democratic heritage and has fostered democracy ever since. As is always the case in history, the reality is far more complicated than the legend. It is against this backdrop that teaching American government can get very tricky. This can make it very difficult to help students move from their understanding of the legend to the reality.

At the same time, this legend has a great deal of educational value in itself. Our students bring to our classes a wealth of understanding about the function of democracy in our society. They are in fact experts on the subject of democracy. What they lack is an understanding of the theory that underlies our government as a distinct system separate from the academic definitions of democracy. Furthermore, while they have internalized the sovereignty of the people they have done so largely without realizing the uniqueness and relative youth of this bedrock of modern government. Thus while it is useful to explore their current understanding of democracy in America, and the history of that idea, it is also necessary to study the ideas that preceded the American Constitution.

In this unit, I intend to both approach the legend of American democracy and use it to critically evaluate their understanding. I will present a concise perspective on the history and culture of democracy in the United States. In this way the students will have the tools in hand to begin to understand the roots of their perspectives on democracy. The ultimate goal of this unit is to give the students a much deeper understanding of the idea of democracy in America.

This unit will focus on two essential questions "What is democracy?" and "Is America a democracy?"

Answering these questions will require us to look at the various foundational documents in American history, as well as various depictions of American government and politics. Additionally, we will look at various moments in American history when that democracy was expanded or extended to cover a greater portion of the population. This study will allow us to fully discuss the essential question, answering further questions like: is democracy a cultural ideal as well as a governmental system? If we are a democracy, when did we become one? And if we are not, what stands in our way? Furthermore, is democracy something we should aspire to as a nation at all? Or is it merely a term we apply to our existing system, regardless of its truth? Each of these questions not only requires a strong understanding of the history and culture underlying American democracy, but also allows for the demonstration of that understanding.

In order to fully answer our essential questions, the unit will be broken into three phases, designed to answer three separate questions all leading up to the end of the unit. We will begin by asking the simple questions “what is democracy?” and “what is government?” The second phase will be based around the questions “how does our government work and why does it work that way?” The final phase of the unit will rely on depictions of American democracy and ask “what does it take to be a democracy?” and “is it something to aspire to?” In this way we will build toward a deeper understanding of democracy, government and America.

Context

This unit is specifically intended as the introduction to an AP Government and Politics course. This unit will be taught in my class at a magnet high school in New Haven, Connecticut. The class periods are 82 minutes long and meet every other day. The course is designed to serve as an overview of U.S. government and politics and it fulfills the state of Connecticut’s requirement that each student must complete a course in civics prior to graduation.

The course and the unit are designed for juniors and seniors with an advanced reading level. For that reason, the readings are relatively long and go into greater depth than those of a typical civics course. Given the limited time frame of the course, and the fact that my course takes place in a block schedule, this unit will only last seven to ten days. As a result, every topic, and all of the readings need to take place in a small number of class periods, and require a conscientious approach to reading and homework. The material that is presented however, is foundational for any course in American History or Civics and given more time, much of the readings can be excerpted and read in class if necessary.

Outline

The first phase of this unit will seek to address the questions of what democracy and government are. We will begin with a discussion of foundational ideas of government and democracy. In this vein we will look at the work of Aristotle, whose work will offer an early picture of democracy as it was first envisioned, in its purest form. In *Politics*, Aristotle outlines various forms of government, kingly rule, aristocracy, and constitutional

government. He fully defines each and outlines potential abuses of these systems. Aristotle explains that a constitutional government, when taken to extremes, can result in a democracy, which he cites as one of these abuses. Aristotle's skepticism comes from his mistrust of the masses to govern judiciously.

Aristotle goes on to discuss the possible perversions of democracy, and to define the problems of democracy as he sees them, and the many forms democracy might take. This will allow us to begin with a sound definition of democracy that goes into some depth on the ideas that underlie a democratic form of government. Furthermore, a study of Aristotle will ground the unit in a time long before the foundation of the United States.

Perhaps Aristotle's most important contribution to this unit is his skepticism regarding the value or appropriateness of democracy to all situations. He offers the students a chance to step outside of their prevailing views about the supremacy of democracy, and see that democracy and popular sovereignty have not always been taken for granted. Furthermore the chosen excerpts from *Politics* will allow for definition of democracy in the context of other forms and systems of government.

Thus we will use Aristotle as a means of introducing the concepts of comparative government, and democracy from the perspective of a man and a time not wholly given to democratic sentiment. In this way the students will have the chance to look into the wisdom of democracy through a lens that is outside of their culture and experience, and define democracy much more clearly than they might have otherwise.

With a sound understanding of democracy as a concept, we will then progress to a study of John Locke and Thomas Hobbes, as originators of modern governmental theory.. While their work is not the only work we could study at this point, it allows us to shift to the Anglo-American tradition, and continue studying works that influenced our founding fathers. Specifically, we will read excerpts from Hobbes's *Leviathan Revised Student Edition* edited by Richard Tuck, and Locke's *Two Treatises of Government A Critical Edition with an Introduction and Apparatus Criticus* edited by Peter Laslett. As with Aristotle, Locke and Hobbes allow us to focus our study on the history of American democratic values. In this way students will be able to trace, albeit loosely, the progression of the democratic ideas that would become theirs and their cultural heritage.

Through a brief study of Locke and Hobbes, the students will begin to see the state of governmental theory in the English-speaking world prior to the Revolution. In this way, we will ensure that the students have a strong understanding of the basics of governmental theory in addition to their understanding of democracy. It will be very important at this point for the students to understand that many of the ideas that underpin our governmental structure were by no means pre-ordained, and that the form they took in our Constitution might well have been very different if taken as a whole unit, unencumbered by our specific history.

Each of these men left us with core ideas that serve as the foundation of our current system of government. From Hobbes, we take the purpose of government as a protector and bringer of order. Locke refined these ideas to include protection of life, liberty and property, but also added that the governed should have a say in their government. He even went on to note that if a government becomes tyrannical, the governed have a right to revolt.

The ideas put forth by these two men constitute the core of much of our system of government; so much so that the best parts of each are interwoven into our worldview. The ideas that the founders took from Locke especially are nearly household terms. It would therefore be negligent to leave them out of a unit of this kind. Additionally, it is important for the students to have a strong sense of a time when these ideas we take as truth were new and revolutionary.

Locke and Hobbes also offer an interesting dichotomy between authoritarianism and representative government. This is a tension, which was a constant source of debate during the Constitutional Convention that is an essential idea in any government course. Furthermore, Locke offers the students a glimpse into the future with his recurring discussions of representative government and property. These ideas, which are distinctly anti-democratic, found their way into the Constitution and allow us to introduce the notion that America was founded with a republican rather than a democratic spirit.

These basic notions of government and democracy will serve the students well as we move on to the next phase of our unit in which we study the Constitution and selected Federalist Papers. It is my hope that through a close reading of the Constitution, and Federalist 51 and 10, the students will begin to understand the United States was set up as a republic rather than a democracy and judge it accordingly. This will offer the students an opportunity to move beyond merely understanding theories of government and definitions of democracy. At this stage of the unit we will look at how our government functions, and why the framers made the decisions they did.

This will be the first time we delve into our essential question as well, asking ourselves whether or not the United States is a democracy. In this way, I intend to frame the debate in terms of our founders' republican ideals and therefore question whether or not the early republic set up by the founders can be rightly called democracy.

In order to accomplish this task, we will take a look at the founder's words through a close reading of the Constitution as well as a study of the history behind it. It will be particularly important to pay close attention to those clauses and ideas, which are most republican in nature. We will look at the initial plan for the election of senators, the requirements for voting and citizenship, and the Electoral College as examples of this republican philosophy.

Without a look into the history of the Constitution, and the men who wrote it, it would be difficult for the students to understand the decisions that they made. Furthermore, while it is possible to understand American government without reading every word of the Constitution, one could not answer our guiding question without an in depth understanding of it. Thus we will not only address whether or not the government is a democracy through this reading, but also address what the government is and how it was intended to accomplish its task.

In the interest of developing a clearer view of the founders' thoughts when writing the Constitution, we will also read Federalist 10 and Federalist 51. These two documents comprehensively lay out some of the main ideas behind the Constitution and offer an argument in favor of the choices the Founders made when drafting the document. In particular, we learn Madison's views on the necessity of federalism, the reasoning behind checks and balances, and most importantly, his concern over controlling the rise of factions.

In the same way that Locke and Hobbes offer views into complex ideas that the students may take for granted, Federalist 10 and 51 give us a window into why specific decisions were made in the writing of the Constitution. This is a valuable look into the process by which theories of government become laws of government, and how the ideas held by the founders became the bedrock of our current society. Most importantly, Federalist 10 and 51 allow the students to, once again, explore ideas they take for granted in their understanding of government.

Additionally, Federalist 10 and 51 raise specific concepts that enrich the students' understanding of government and governmental structures. Without a clear view of factions, separation of powers, pluralism,

majoritarianism, and federalism, it would be difficult to engage in a conversation about American government. As with other readings in this unit these two papers help us to peel back our conceptions of what is right in our government and delve more deeply into the wide range of possibilities that exist outside of our system. This may even offer the students the chance to, “what might have been, had other choices been made”

It is my hope that through these documents, and through our discussion of them, I will be able to help the students in building a mental picture of American government at its inception. This picture will not only be necessary to move forward with this unit but also will be necessary in their study of American history and government in general. In order for the students to fully understand and appreciate the debates, battles and conflicts to come, they must fully understand the foundations of our system.

Our next phase in the unit, and in their understanding of American democracy, will be the writings of Alexis De Tocqueville. De Tocqueville came to America in the 1830’s and made a full, accurate, and predictive study of American democracy in his book *Democracy in America* . His work is poignant and timeless, offering a picture of America that is still relevant almost 200 years later. The class will read excerpts of *Democracy in America* and evaluate De Tocqueville’s critique.

Our study of *Democracy in America* will mark our transition from understanding what American government is in its formal structure and how it works, to a critical look at our democratic culture. Having studied the theory, and the documents that made that theory governmental practice, we will turn our attention to the effects of that governmental structure, and those theories on our society as a whole. This will lead us back to our guiding question, is America a democracy? With this question in mind we will look at De Tocqueville’s critique of democracy in America, evaluating his perspective on American democratic traditions, and evaluating whether or not democratic traditions as outlined by De Tocqueville make the United States a democracy.

The central theme of our study of De Tocqueville is his idea that America is democratic in nature, not as a governmental requirement, but as a result of culture and economics. As a class we will evaluate this idea, comparing it to our existing notions of democracy, and once again revisit the essential question. In this way, the students will broaden their understanding of democracy, or at the very least, evaluate another example, which they declare to be undemocratic.

This discussion will require that the students consider an expanded view of what democracy is. If indeed it is a cultural idea, as well as a governmental one, then our questions progress, requiring more sophisticated answers. If we are indeed a democracy, is it more than our laws that make us so? I expect this will be a difficult concept for students to approach at first, and were it not for Tocqueville I might not even attempt it. His perspective however is so compelling that it is difficult to disagree with him, even when one believes his conclusions to be incorrect. Thus I expect that when our study of his work is complete the students will agree with his conclusions regarding the democratic nature of our society. In particular I expect that when they have read his perspective on the history of American democracy they will come away with a more polished view of government in America.

From De Tocqueville, we will deviate slightly from the canon of American governmental writings to branch into more popular and artistic depictions of democracy as it functions in the United States. To do this, we will refer to the paintings of George Caleb Bingham and the writings of Walt Whitman. These men represent a new, perhaps a first generation of Americans, and they both helped to lay the cornerstone of the legend of democracy in America. Furthermore, each of these men contributed to the early culture of democracy in the U.S. and they each present an argument about democracy in America. As with De Tocqueville, the students will look into these arguments and determine whether or not they agree with the picture of democracy in

America that is presented. For each man we will look into his work ask, “is his perspective accurate?” and “if it is, is the United States a democracy?”

Through the genre paintings of George Caleb Bingham, we begin to see the culture of democracy as a part of the American landscape and the American mind. Bingham depicts a local election in his painting “The County Election” and a stump speech in the painting “Stump Speech”. Both paintings offer an iconic view of the democratic process in early America, and both lend artistic expression to commonly held ideals of their day. Bingham’s work gives us a glimpse into the early stages of democratic expression in the United States as well as providing us a visual representation of democracy in action. Given that democracy is notoriously difficult to depict in visual form, these paintings are an important grounding force in this unit. We will critically evaluate these paintings, summarizing the story they represent, and question their meaning and value.

These questions will lead us deeper into our cultural evaluation of American democracy, and help to demonstrate to the students their preconceptions about democracy. Given that the goal of genre painting is to create a sort of idealized portrait of reality, Bingham has brought to life scenes that are less descriptive of the reality of American democracy than they are representative of its spirit. His works successfully encapsulate the legend of American democracy, where people have their say in the public square through voting and debate.

Bingham’s is, however, not an uncritical view of democracy. While he depicts his candidates in white, and both paintings seem to rise to the action of voting or debate, each has its own critiques on American democracy. These negative pictures, the man accepting the bribe, the drunk being hauled out to vote, the aristocratic candidate at leisure, are honest ones. Furthermore, Bingham’s critiques of the system are not new. These views will call the students back to Aristotle, and his ideas of perversion of government. It will however, be important to stress that even though these views are not totally positive, the core of their message is. This will allow the students to remain focused on the legend of democracy inherent in the paintings and in American culture without getting caught up in the trap of believing that a legend must always be positive.

In this way the students will come away from the paintings with a great deal of fodder for discussion and evaluation. This will force the students to discuss and approach both the legend of democracy in our country and the reality of our system. By dealing with questions like “should a drunk be allowed to vote?” and “are these candidates really ‘of’ the people?” the students will have to deal with realities of mob politics, and potentially dishonest candidates. It is my hope that these conversations will lead us to move beyond our guiding question and into the realm of evaluating our system regardless of their answer to the question of whether or not our system is a democracy.

Our visual representations of democracy in America will then give way to literary and poetic representations. At this point, we will take a look at Walt Whitman, studying *Leaves of Grass* and *Democratic Vistas*. Specifically, the students will read “A song for Occupations,” “By Blue Ontario’s Shores,” “For you O Democracy,” and the first seven paragraphs of *Democratic Vistas*, which lay out his thesis. These readings will allow the students to continue their evaluation of democracy in America through the lens of a pre- and post- Civil War perspective. This will allow us to expand into a discussion of the first major expansion of suffrage in the United States in the form of the 15th Amendment.

We will approach Whitman in the same spirit that we approached Bingham and Tocqueville. While we will keep our eyes on our guiding question, we will also question whether or not his is a fair depiction of America, and whether or not the America he depicts is a democracy. Whitman offers us a longer view of America through

his work than our previous subjects. While De Tocqueville was only here for two years, and Bingham's paintings were basically snapshots in his career, Whitman wrote over the course of turbulent decades.

Whitman also offers a link from the early Federal period to the period of Reconstruction. This is an important link at the end of the unit. Additionally, it allows us to assess a more mature America, one that is at once closer to our experience, and less optimistic than De Tocqueville's America. Whitman will help to broaden the student's experience as well, fleshing out their repertoire of depictions of American democracy, and cementing their skills of critical evaluation of those depictions. At this point the students should be in a position to evaluate American democracy, having taken a critical look at part of the history and culture of democracy in America. This is by no means an exhaustive study, but it covers a range of critiques and depictions of democracy and should sufficiently prepare the students to answer our essential question.

Our last step in our discussion of America as a democracy will be a tour of post- Civil War amendments that have had an impact on the democratic character of the United States. We will read and evaluate the 13th , 15th , 17th and 19th amendments, determining how they expanded American democracy to groups and to areas where it had previously been denied. This study will set us up for our final essay project in which the students will seek through argument to answer the question posed at the beginning of the unit: "Is America a Democracy?"

Objectives

These objectives seek to present the content in a measurable way, while building from the more basic, to the more complex levels of Bloom's taxonomy. Each objective relates loosely to a day or so of teaching, though I expect that some will run into more than one day, while others might come up short. Furthermore, the objectives are grouped into phases, each focusing on a guiding question, which leads up to our essential question for the unit.

Phase 1- What is democracy? What is Government?

1. Discuss and define the various types of government outlined by Aristotle *Politics*
2. Evaluate the views of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke with regards to their impact on American government

Phase 2- How does our government work? Why is that the case?

1. Analyze the American governmental system as outlined in the Constitution and compare our democratic tendencies with our republican tendencies.
2. Analyze the perspectives of James Madison in Federalist 10 and 51 with regards to his perspectives on faction and separation of powers asking, "is this democracy?"

Phase 3- Is our system a Democracy? Is our system good?

1. Evaluate Alexis De Tocqueville's view of American democracy asking "does a culture of democracy make a culture a democracy?"
2. Evaluate George Caleb Bingham's view of American democracy asking "is this system good?"
3. Evaluate Walt Whitman's view of American democracy asking "is this a fair depiction of American democracy?" "Does his view add to the culture of democracy? Detract from it?"

Final Assignment- Is America a democracy?

1. Evaluate our culture and system, redefining democracy and answering the question "Is America a democracy?"

Strategies

Each of the following strategies breaks down the given objective into roughly one day of teaching. In order to make each lesson more straight-forward and teachable, the larger unit objectives are broken down into more measurable and scaffolded lesson objectives. This will make it easier to establish student proficiency, and therefore adjust instruction throughout the lesson.

Objective 1 :

In our first class period, we will discuss and define various types of government noted in Aristotle's *Politics* . Specifically, we will define oligarchy, democracy, aristocracy, monarchy, and republic. Each of these terms is foundational in this unit, and so it will be necessary to ensure that the students have a sound understanding of them. Furthermore, the students will frequently return to these terms throughout my course, asking which best explains American government at any given moment.

Additionally, we will look into his biases in favor of or against each of these types of government. This will require the teacher to play devil's advocate throughout the discussion. It would be easy to defer to their existing predispositions in favor of democracy, but it is necessary for the students to understand that beliefs they take for granted were not always commonly held.

To accomplish these tasks we will begin by reading through the excerpts as a class, taking note of his definitions, and his dispositions. When this is complete the students will translate the definitions into their own words, and compare them with the definitions in their glossary. Finally we will discuss their thoughts on Aristotle, and his opinions, with the teacher guiding the discussion to challenge their assumptions.

Objective 2 :

In our second class period, we will address the impact of the work of Locke and Hobbes on our government and political system. We will do this by reading short quotations from their works, which are generally representative of their work. The quotations are necessary given the relatively short time frame for dealing with a large amount of material and they appear in the quotes section of this unit.

The class will begin with a brief review of the history surrounding these men. It will be necessary to give a brief lecture on English revolutionary history, in order to provide context for the work of each man. This will serve as a brief primer to political history in the English speaking world, as well as offering background to the readings.

When this is complete the students will read the quotations provided in the quotations section and summarize the theories of each man. In this way the students will begin to compare the two, and should begin to see the foundations of some ideas that have been transmitted to our time.

Once the students have read and summarized the perspectives of each man, the class will reconvene, and we will assess each man's perspective. The students will be asked whether or not they agree with each perspective, and how they think each perspective has influenced American thought. It is my hope to focus on Hobbes' insistence that the purpose of government is to provide safety and security, and Locke's assertion that certain rights must be protected in order to avoid tyranny.

Objective 3 :

In our third class period we will begin to study the Constitution by analyzing its wording and its concessions to republicanism and democracy. Prior to this class, the students will have read the Constitution as a homework assignment, and thus this class period can be truly devoted to our interpretation and analysis of the document.

The lesson will begin with a brief survey of their impressions of the wording of the Constitution. The class will discuss their own particular observations, and the teacher will keep a list on the board of their general ideas. This will serve as our lesson's foundation, allowing the students to come back to their own generalizations at will.

When this is complete, the students will be directed to go back into the Constitution and read the Preamble, Article 1 Section 2 Clause 3, Article 1 Section 3 Clause 1, Article 2 Section 1 Clause 3, which deal with democratic and republican philosophy. The students will keep a running tally of their feelings about whether our government is democratic or republican in nature, and be prepared to offer arguments in favor of one or the other.

To conclude this class period, and their comparison/ evaluation, we will use an activity called Take a Stand. In this activity students stand on either side of the room, based on which of two opinions they hold. They then must, in turn, defend their perspective in a debate like format. In this case the students will take a stand on whether we are a democracy or a republic. Students will have to make a decision, and will not be allowed to sit out. In this way the students will have to make a hard choice, and defend it, given evidence on both sides of the issue.

Objective 4:

In our fourth class the students will look into the history behind the Constitution, through an analysis of Federalist 10 and 51. This will be an opportunity to lead the students in a close reading of 2 complete pieces of political persuasion, while broadening their understanding of the underpinnings of American government.

The class will begin with a discussion of Federalist 51, in that the themes and topics it outlines are more widely and explicitly understood by students. The students will already have read the paper, and I will lead them in a brief discussion of the structures of government he outlines, and the reasoning he uses to justify these decisions. In this way I hope to flesh out their understanding of the basic structures of American government, as well as refresh their memories about the system of checks and balances. This is a much more concrete starting point than Federalist 10, which is much more theoretical, even though it is more foundational.

This will lead us to our discussion of Federalist 10, in which Madison lays out his case against faction. The idea of faction, and the protections against it, are so fundamental in our system that they can be difficult to discern when one is looking at the American system of government. I expect the students to have difficulty initially realizing just how much they know about the subject. Our discussion will center around identifying his argument, and then determining whether or not we accept it. I expect that the students will not immediately see the dangers of faction as Madison sees them. Furthermore, Madison laces Federalist 10 with the strongest available rhetoric, warning against tyranny, and oppression. I do not think the students will find the matter quite as pressing as Madison does.

That said, this paper will allow for a discussion of democracy and tyranny. Are the two mutually exclusive? Is a democracy immediately immune from the dangers of tyranny? Is our system immune? Do we have factionalism now? These are the types of questions we will ask as we wrap up our section on the Founders.

Objective 5:

On our fifth day of the unit we will move from discussion of American government to a discussion of American culture as it pertains to democracy. We will utilize the excerpts of Alexis De Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, which is available in *The Lanahan Readings in the American Polity*. The first outlines quite successfully Tocqueville's position on American culture as one of equality.

We will begin this lesson by asking a central question "Does a culture of democracy make a culture a democracy?" Given that the students' will have read the pieces the night before, I will start by asking the students "what would a culture of democracy look like?" This short brainstorming activity is meant to call to mind Tocqueville's thoughts on the subject, as well as bringing up some of the students own ideas on what it means to have a democratic culture. With this completed, we will delve into the first of the readings, looking to see what cultural factors Tocqueville noticed in America that fostered her democracy. Additionally, we will note the points on which they agree or disagree with Tocqueville. Finally we will return to the first of our essential questions, asking "what is a democracy?" Surely if a democracy is strictly a system of government then this whole culture of democracy discussion is moot. It is my hope however that the students will begin to see that a functioning democracy requires more than a constitution.

To wrap up this class we will transition into a small group discussion and reflection about the idea of a culture of democracy. It will be necessary to check in with the students and this point to ensure, on an individual level, that they each understand the concept of a culture of democracy. We cannot critically evaluate

democracy, nor can we define it as a class, without each student appreciating the role culture plays in democracy.

Therefore the students will be asked to break into small groups and discuss the question “Is a culture of democracy necessary for a democratic government?” Tocqueville’s answer is yes, and that will likely be the answer most of the students give, but a well-argued dissent could equally prove that the student understands the idea of a culture of democracy, even if they choose to question its necessity. If a critical mass of students chooses to dissent, there might even be room for a good debate here.

Objective 6:

The sixth lesson in the unit will require a certain amount of scaffolding in order to accomplish the objective. While we will be utilizing the same skills of critical evaluation, they will be focused on a painting rather than a reading, and this can require some explicit skills instruction. Thus I will begin this lesson with a brief overview of the process of reading a painting. To do this, I will simply remind the students that these paintings are not a photograph, and that every thing in the picture was under the artist’s control. Thus they should note that everything they see in the picture is deliberate, and should be read as such.

I will then display the painting “The County Election” on the LCD projector, and ask them what they see. This will begin as a brainstorming exercise with the students discussing what the action in the painting is, and who the characters are that are taking part. When the students have outlined the action in the painting I will pose the questions “Is this democracy?” and “what are the benefits or drawbacks to this system as Bingham sees it?”

This will lead us to our discussion of the second painting “Stump Speaking.” Our discussion of this painting will follow largely the same trajectory. It may be necessary throughout both discussions to ask the students to note particular highlights of the paintings like lighting, lines, foreground and background, all to accentuate the meaning that the artist included. The goal will be a critical look at the system Bingham presents, and the students will end class with a reflection on Bingham’s representation including its strengths and weaknesses and whether or not it is a fair depiction of our system.

Objective 7:

For the final step in the third phase of this unit, we will reach Walt Whitman, and his perspective on American democracy. Unlike previous sources, Whitman is not making an argument about democracy as much as he is making an argument about America. In each of the writings we will read, he has something more to say about America, but offers little insight into whether or not we are a democracy, or what democracy even is. This is important I think, because just as the students take for granted that we are a democracy, Whitman takes for granted that our system is democratic, for better or worse.

We will begin our discussion of Whitman with “For You O Democracy.” In this short poem the students will begin to see Whitman’s perspective on democracy. He makes no argument here about whether or not America is a democracy, he simply lays out a list of things he will do for democracy that will make America and the idea of democracy stronger. This will serve as our brief introduction to his perspectives on democracy in America. Thus we will read this poem aloud in class, focusing on what Whitman thinks is necessary for a democracy to be strong. Given that the poem centers on companionship and love of your fellow man, it should evoke images of Tocqueville’s views of the American spirit of equality.

This spirit of companionship and empowerment will continue as we move on to discuss “A Song for Occupations.” After our discussion of “For You O Democracy,” the students will break up into groups, taking with them copies of “A Song for Occupations” and “By Blue Ontario’s Shores” and answering the question “What are Whitman’s thoughts on our government here?” The groups will be given a set period of time in which to answer the question and defend their answers using pieces of the poem. After the time is up, I will lead the students in discussion of their findings.

Final Assessment:

We will begin the final lesson of the unit with Whitman. We will reconvene as a class, and read together the third paragraph of “Democratic Vistas.” The students will look for Whitman’s thesis, and some of his feelings on suffrage; that will prepare us for the final discussion of the unit, universal suffrage, in our next class. It will be necessary to explain the background and timing of this writing, but that should not take very long, and the students should be left with a sense of Whitman’s unease regarding the future of American democracy. To wrap up this introduction to the lesson, we will discuss Whitman’s feelings about “universal” suffrage, which was not universal at the time.

This will lead us into a discussion of suffrage in America. The students will be asked to create a brief summary of suffrage in America, including all of the times it has been expanded, with a brief explanation of why it was expanded. This will require the students to read and evaluate the amendments that granted suffrage to women, African Americans, and eighteen-year-olds. When this is complete the class will go over it together, cementing a whole-class understanding of what is meant by suffrage, and its history in the U.S.

The class will then discuss how the idea of suffrage, limited or universal, plays into our understanding of democracy in America. When writing their essay, students may also choose to look back into previous readings, including Whitman, Aristotle and Tocqueville. Given that this is a final assessment essay, the students will be largely responsible for assessing the amendments themselves. Their assessment will be the final step before writing their essay which answers our original questions; What is democracy? And is America a Democracy?

Classroom Activities

In this section I have included sample lesson plans for objectives 3,4 and 6. These are meant to serve as examples of how these lessons might be taught. I chose these three lessons because they represent the largest cross section of the types of lessons offered in this unit.

Lesson 3: A Close Inspection of the Constitution

Goal : To closely examine the Constitution

Objectives :

As a result of this lesson the students will be able to,

1. Review the terms Democracy and Republic
2. List their initial reactions to the wording of the constitution as well as the wording of specific sections
3. Take a stand as to whether our system is democratic or republican in nature

Materials :

Board, marker, notebooks, pens, paper

Anticipatory Set:

Students will write 5 lines in their notebooks explaining their initial reactions to the Constitution (which they read for homework the night before)

Procedure:

1. The teacher will lead the class in discussion of the anticipatory set putting all possible answers on the board.
2. When the class has sufficiently covered all of their reactions, the teacher will review the terms Democracy and Republic
3. When this is complete the teacher will lead the students in reading together the following sections from the Constitution
 - a. the Preamble
 - b. Article 1 Section 2 Clause 3
 - c. Article 1 Section 3 Clause 1
 - d. Article 2 Section 1 Clause 3
4. After each clause or section the students will be asked to translate its meaning into their own words and discuss whether or not this suggests a democracy or a republic.
5. When this is complete the students will be asked to take a stand, at which point they will all stand up, move to one side of the room or the other, and be prepared to explain their choice. In this case, their choice of location will correspond to whether our government is a republic or a democracy.
6. Each student will then be asked, in turn, to explain their decision.
 - a. If the students all choose one or the other, the teacher may need to assign students to a side, or play devil's advocate.

Closure :

The teacher will review the lesson, and the discussion from class today.

Assessment :

The students will be assessed based on their contributions.

Homework :

Read Federalist 10 and Federalist 51.

Lesson 4: The Federalist Papers (10 and 51)

Goal : To closely examine Federalist 10 and 51

Objectives :

As a result of this lesson the students will be able to,

1. Review the structures of American government
2. Explain the concept of faction
3. Analyze the perspectives of James Madison in Federalist 10 and 51 with regards to his perspectives on faction and separation of powers asking “is this democracy?”

Materials :

Board, marker, notebooks, pens, paper

Anticipatory Set:

Students will list the three branches and the two levels of government

Procedure:

1. The teacher will lead the class in discussion of the anticipatory set putting the answers on the board.
2. When this is complete the teacher will lead the students in going over Federalist 51 noting the division of government it supports and explaining the reasoning behind each division.
3. When this is complete the teacher will lead the students in going over Federalist 10, summarizing Madison’s arguments regarding faction
4. The students will then evaluate, through small group discussion, whether or not they agree with Madison’s description of Faction.
5. The teacher will then lead the students in a discussion of tyranny and democracy asking the

following questions

- a. Are the two mutually exclusive?
- b. Is a democracy immediately immune from the dangers of tyranny?
- c. Is our system immune?

Closure :

The teacher will review the lesson, and the discussion from class today.

Assessment :

The students will be assessed based on their contributions.

Homework :

Read *Democracy in America Excerpt*

Lesson 6: “Stump Speaking” and “The County Election”

Goal : To closely examine the election paintings of George Caleb Bingham

Objectives :

As a result of this lesson the students will be able to,

1. Explain the process of critically viewing paintings
2. Critically view “Stump Speaking” and “The County Election”
3. Evaluate George Caleb Bingham’s view of American democracy asking “is this system good?”

Materials :

Board, marker, notebooks, pens, paper, LCD Projector, Internet Accessibility

Anticipatory Set:

Students will define the concept of a culture of democracy in their own words in their notebooks

Procedure:

1. The teacher will lead the class in discussion of the anticipatory set.
2. When this is complete the teacher will go over the process of critical viewing with the students
3. When this is complete the teacher will put painting "The County Election" up on the projector, and lead the students in critically viewing it
4. When discussion is exhausted, the teacher will lead the students in discussing the following questions
 - a. "Is this democracy?"
 - b. "what are the benefits or drawbacks to this system as Bingham sees it?"
5. When this is complete the teacher will put "Stump Speaking" up on the projector and lead the students in critically viewing it.
6. When discussion is exhausted, the teacher will lead the students in discussing the following questions
 - a. "Is this democracy?"
 - b. "what are the benefits or drawbacks to this system as Bingham sees it?"
7. The teacher will wrap up class by asking whether or not Bingham's are fair depictions of our system and whether or not this is a system we should aspire to.

Closure :

The teacher will review the lesson, and the discussion from class today.

Assessment :

The students will be assessed based on their contributions.

Homework :

Read "A Song for Occupations" and "By Blue Ontario's Shores"

Quotes:

Thomas Hobbes

On the equality of Men: "Nature hath made men so equal, in the faculties of body, and mind; as that though there be found one man sometimes manifestly stronger in body, or of quicker mind than another; yet when all is reckoned together, the difference between man, and man, is not so considerable, as that one man can thereupon claim to himself any benefit, to which another may not pretend, as well as he." ¹

On the creation of Commonwealths: "The final Cause, End, or Design of men (who naturally love Liberty, and Dominion over others,) in the introduction of that restraint upon themselves, (in which we see them live in Commonwealths,) is the foresight of their own preservation, and of a more contented live thereby; that s to say, of getting themselves out from the miserable condition of war, which is necessarily consequent (as hath been shown) to the natural passions of all men, when there is no visible power to keep them in awe, and tie them by fear of punishment to the performance of their Covenants..." ²

On the office of the Sovereign: "The office of the Sovereign, (be it a monarch or an assembly,) consisteth in the end, for which he was trusted with the Sovereign Power, namely the procuration of *the safety of the people*; to which he is obliged by the Law of Nature, and to render an account there of to God, the Author of that Law, and to none but him." ³

In summary of his position on government: "That the condition of meer Nature, that is to say, of absolute Liberty, such as is theirs, that neither are Sovereigns, nor Subjects, is Anarchy, and the condition of War: That the Precepts, by which men are guided to avoid that condition are the Laws of Nature: That a Commonwealth, without Sovereign Power, is but a word, without substance, and cannot stand: That Subjects owe to Sovereigns, simple Obedience, in all things, wherein their obedience is not repugnant to the Laws of God, I have sufficiently proved, in that which I have already written." ⁴

John Locke

On the creation of a commonwealth: "Wherever therefore any number of Men are so united into one Society, as to quit every one of his Executive Power of the Law of Nature, and to resign it to the public, there and there only is there a *Political, or Civil Society*." ⁵

On life, liberty and property: "For all being Kings as much as he, every Man his Equal, and the greater part no strict Observers of Equity and Justice, the enjoyment of the property he has in the state is very unsafe, very unsecure. This makes him willing to quit a Condition, which however free, is full of fears and continual dangers: And 'tis not without reason, that he seeks out, and is willing to join in Society with others who are already united, or have a mind to unite for the mutual *Preservation* of their Lives, Liberties and Estates, which I call by the general name, *Property* ." ⁶

On tyranny: "As Usurpation is the exercise of Power, which another hat a Right to; so *Tyranny* is *the exercise of Power beyond Right* , which no Body can have a Right to. And this is making use of the Power, any one has in his hands; not for the good of those who are under it, but for his own private and separate Advantage. When the Governour, however intituled, makes not the Law, but his Will, the Rule; and his Commands and

Actions are not directed to the Preservation of the Properties of his People, but to the satisfaction of his own Ambitions, Revenge, Covetousness, or any other irregular Passion.” 7

On rebellion: “For since it can never be supposed to be the Will of the Society, that the Legislative should have a Power to destroy that, which every one designs to secure, by entering into Society, and for which the People submitted themselves to the Legislators of their own making; whenever the *Legislators endeavor to take away, and destroy the Property of the People*, or to reduce them to Slavery under Arbitrary Power, they put themselves into a stat of War with the People, who are thereupon absolved from any farther Obedience, and are left to the common Refuge, which God hath provided for all Men against Force and Violence. Whensoever therefore the *Legislative* shall transgress this fundamental Rule of Society; and either by Ambition, Fear, Folly, or Corruption, *endeavor to grasp themselves , or put into the hands of any other an Absolute Power* over the Lives, Liberties and Estates of the People; by this breach of Trust they *forfeit the Power* , the People had put into their hands...” 8

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This is an easily accessible, and well-translated web version of Aristotle’s *Politics*. It is approachable and easily navigated. Most importantly, the web-site offers Aristotle’s whole catalog of writing, providing students with an opportunity to explore fully his wide range of writings.

Hobbes,Thomas. *Leviathan*. Richard Tuck *Revised Student Edition* ed. New York NY: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

With this edition of *Leviathan* , Richard Tuck has succeeded in providing the original text in fashion and form very close to original. He includes a very good introduction and a full list of citations and annotations which allow the reader to approach the text more fully. Tuck also includes an index which is organized along multiple levels and includes a concordance with earlier editions.

Locke,John. *Two Treatises of Government A Critical Edition with an Introduction and Aparatus Criticus*. 2, Peter Laslett. New York NY: Cambridge University Press, 1967.

This critical edition of Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government* is both comprehensive and well researched. Laslett has put a great deal of research into this book, and that research shows. It is evidenced in an extremely comprehensive introduction, which includes notes on Locke and Hobbes (eminently useful for a teacher of this unit), insight into the role of the 1688 revolution on Locke, and a good deal of historical information on Locke and his *Treatises* .

Schmidt, Steffen W, and Mack C Shelley. *American Government and Politics Today* . 2007-2008 ed. Belmont, CA: Thompson, Wadsworth, 2007.

This is a comprehensive text book on American government and politics. The book offers in depth coverage of a wide range of topics. In addition, it includes a full index of ancillary readings as well as both Federalist 10 and 51. I use this book as my text for my AP U.S. Government and Politics course.

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This book is a compilation of excerpts and essays designed to support a course in American government. Serrow and Ladd have compiled a large number of readings on a wide array of topics. Each reading addresses some concept or idea in American government in a greater degree of depth than a typical text. These readings range from classics, including excerpts from Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* to modern scholarly essays on various political topics.

Tocqueville, Alexis De. *Democracy in America*. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop trans. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000.

Alexis De Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* is a pivotal work in American history, government, and culture. Tocqueville represents a unique, timely and timeless account of America in its infancy. It would be hard to picture a course in American history or government failing to include his work. Furthermore, Mansfield and Winthrop provide a complete and approachable translation that allows even a novice to appreciate the genius of this work.

Whitman, Walt. "Democratic Vistas." <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~Hyper/Whitman/vistas/vistas.html> (accessed 6/30/08).

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Whitman, Walt. *Walt Whitman: The Complete Poems*. Francis Murphy. London: Penguin, 2004.

This version of Walt Whitman's poetry provides a complete catalog of his work. It includes all the revisions of "Leaves of Grass" as well as including the rest of his works. This compilation is excellent as both an introduction to Whitman and a tool for study of his work.

Notes:

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5. Laslett, Peter. Ed. *John Locke Two Treatises of Government A Critical Edition with an Introduction and Aparatus Criticus*. Second Edition. New York, NY. Cambridge University Press. 1960-1967. Pg. 343.
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7. Laslett, Peter. Ed. *John Locke Two Treatises of Government A Critical Edition with an Introduction and Aparatus Criticus*. Second Edition. New York, NY. Cambridge University Press. 1960-1967. Pgs. 416-417.
8. Laslett, Peter. Ed. *John Locke Two Treatises of Government A Critical Edition with an Introduction and Aparatus Criticus*. Second Edition. New York, NY. Cambridge University Press. 1960-1967. Pg. 430.

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