

The State Education Department

The University of the State of New York

New York State Grades 9-12 Social Studies Framework

Revised January 2015

Grade 12: Participation in Government and Civics

This course aims to provide students with opportunities to become engaged in the political process by acquiring the knowledge and practicing the skills necessary for active citizenship. Content specifications are not included, so that the course can adapt to present local, national, and global circumstances, allowing teachers to select flexibly from current events to illuminate key ideas and conceptual understandings. Participation in government and in our communities is fundamental to the success of American democracy.

12.G1 FOUNDATIONS of AMERICAN DEMOCRACY: The principles of American democracy are reflected in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights and in the organization and actions of federal, state, and local government entities. The interpretation and application of American democratic principles continue to evolve and be debated.

12.G1a Enlightenment ideas such as natural rights, the social contract, popular sovereignty, and representative government greatly influenced the framers of the Constitution and Bill of Rights.

12.G1b The Constitution created a unique political system that distributes powers and responsibilities among three different branches of government at the federal level and between state and federal governments. State constitutions address similar structures and responsibilities for their localities.

12.G1c Limited government is achieved through the separation of powers between three different branches. The system of checks and balances is part of this limited government structure at all levels of government.

12.G1d The rule of law is a system in which no one, including government, is above the law. The United States legal system has evolved over time as the result of implementation and interpretation of common law, constitutional law, statutory law, and administrative regulations.

12.G1e The powers not delegated specifically in the Constitution are reserved to the states. Though the powers and responsibilities of the federal government have expanded over time, there is an ongoing debate over this shift in power and responsibility.

12.G1f The Constitution includes a clearly defined and intentionally rigorous process for amendment. This process requires state and federal participation, and allows the Constitution to evolve and change.

12.G2 CIVIL RIGHTS and CIVIL LIBERTIES: The United States Constitution aims to protect individual freedoms and rights that have been extended to more groups of people over time. These rights and freedoms continue to be debated, extended to additional people, and defined through judicial interpretation. In engaging in issues of civic debate, citizens act with an appreciation of differences and are able to participate in constructive dialogue with those who hold different perspectives.

12.G2a Equality before the law and due process are two fundamental values that apply to all under the jurisdiction of the United States. While the United States legal system aims to uphold the values of equality before the law, due process, human dignity, freedom of conscience, inalienable rights, and civility, the extent to which the legal system upholds these values in practice is an issue of ongoing civic debate.

12.G2b The Constitution aims to protect, among other freedoms, individual and group rights

to freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, freedom of petition, and freedom of religion. The extent to which these ideals exist in practice and how these protections should be applied in a changing world continues to be an issue of ongoing civic debate.

12.G2c An independent judicial system is an integral part of the process that interprets and defends citizens' freedoms and rights. Issues pertaining to the flexibility of judicial interpretation and the impartiality of justices in practice are continued sources of public debate.

12.G2d The definition of civil rights has broadened over the course of United States history, and the number of people and groups legally ensured of these rights has also expanded. However, the degree to which rights extend equally and fairly to all (e.g., race, class, gender, sexual orientation) is a continued source of civic contention.

12.G2e Rights are not absolute; they vary with legal status, with location (as in schools and workplaces), and with circumstance. The different statuses of United States residency bring with them specific protections, rights, and responsibilities. Minors have specific rights in school, in the workplace, in the community, and in the family. The extension of rights across location, circumstance, age, and legal status is a subject of civic discourse.

12.G2f Freedom of the press is an essential element of a democratic system, and allows for a citizen to receive and interpret information representing different points of view. Freedom of the press has limits, which are intended to protect the rights of individuals and other entities. The degree to which the press is free and impartial in practice is a source of ongoing debate.

12.G3 RIGHTS, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND DUTIES OF CITIZENSHIP: Active, engaged, and informed citizens are critical to the success of the United States representative democracy. United States citizens have certain rights, responsibilities, and duties, the fulfillment of which help to maintain the healthy functioning of the national, state, and local communities.

12.G3a Citizens should be informed about rights and freedoms, and committed to balancing personal liberties with a social responsibility to others.

12.G3b The right to vote, a cornerstone of democracy, is the most direct way for citizens to participate in the government. A citizen must register to vote, and may register as a party member or select the status of independent.

12.G3c Citizens have opportunities to both participate in and influence their communities and country. Citizens contribute to government processes through legal obligations such as obeying laws, paying taxes, serving on juries, and registering for selective service.

12.G3d Citizens have the right to represent their locality, state, or country as elected officials. Candidates develop a campaign, when they decide to seek public office.

12.G4 POLITICAL AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION: There are numerous avenues for engagement in the political process, from exercising the power of the vote, to affiliating with political parties, to engaging in other forms of civic participation. Citizens leverage both electoral and non-electoral means to participate in the political process.

12.G4a Depending on the level of government and type of election, there are different processes and mechanisms within the United States electoral and representational systems,

including the electoral college and winner-take all systems. Advantages and drawbacks of election processes and mechanisms continue to be an issue of ongoing debate in the United States.

12.G4b Allowing citizens to vote does not ensure that a system is a democracy. Open, safe, and honest elections are essential to a democratic system. Engaged and informed citizens should know the mechanics associated with voting, including when major local, state, and national elections are held, how to register to vote, who currently holds each office, who is running for office, and what the central issues are pertaining to that election.

12.G4c In addition to voting, there are many ways in which citizens can participate in the electoral process. These include joining a political organization, donating money, and doing volunteer work on a political campaign.

12.G4d The United States and New York have political party systems, and the political parties represent specific political, economic, and social philosophies. Debate over the role and influence of political parties continues, although they play a significant role in United States elections and politics. The role of political parties and the platforms they represent varies between states in the United States.

12.G4e Citizens participate in civic life through volunteerism and advocacy, including efforts such as contacting elected officials, signing/organizing petitions, protesting, canvassing, and participating in/organizing boycotts.

12.G5 PUBLIC POLICY: All levels of government—local, state, and federal—are involved in shaping public policy and responding to public policy issues, all of which influence our lives beyond what appears in the Constitution. Engaged citizens understand how to find, monitor, evaluate, and respond to information on public policy issues.

12.G5a Each level of government has its own process of shaping, implementing, amending, and enforcing public policy. Customarily the executive branch will outline its plan and agenda in an executive address to the legislative body.

12.G5b On various issues, certain governmental branches and agencies are responsible for determining policy. Those who create public policies attempt to balance regional and national needs, existing political positions and loyalties, and sources of political power.

12.G5c Successful implementation of government policy often requires cooperation between many levels of government, as well as the cooperation of other public and private institutions. Conflicts between different levels of government sometimes emerge due to different goals, ideas, and resources regarding the creation and implementation of policy.

12.G5d Active and engaged citizens must be effective media consumers in order to be able to find, monitor, and evaluate information on political issues. The media have different venues, which have particular strengths and serve distinct and shared purposes. Knowing how to critically evaluate a media source is fundamental to being an informed citizen.