

## American Studies

***“The care of human life and happiness, and not their destruction, is the first and only object of good government.” - Thomas Jefferson***

### Course Description

American Studies is a class designed to introduce students to the origins, concepts, organizations, and policies of the United States government and political system. To increase understanding, students read relevant primary and secondary source documents and incorporate new knowledge and ideas into the foundational lessons of the course. Students analyze the unique roles and responsibilities of the three branches of government established by the Constitution, including an in-depth study of the Bill of Rights and other amendments. After learning these concepts, students determine how the Constitution reflects a balance between republican philosophies and the rights of the individual, and they evaluate the principles of the Constitution, including checks and balances, separation of powers, minority vs. majority rights, equality of rights, and the rule of law. American Studies is directly aligned with the traits defined in the ***Portrait of the Crusader***. Throughout the course, students are encouraged to develop an understanding of and appreciation for civil liberties, first amendment rights, and the importance of protecting freedoms; they are encouraged to value and respect the rights and dignity of all people and develop an awareness of the socially just directions that guide their country.

### Assessment Practices

Student knowledge and skills are measured in a variety of ways throughout the course, which may include the following:

- Written assessments that include terminology, short answers, and constructed responses to assess content knowledge and make connections.
- Essays that ask students to research, analyze and respond with sound reasoning and thoughtful insight.
- A project that may include a presentation or performative component.
- A Socratic Seminar or other form of debate.

### Essential Questions for the Course

- What does it mean to be a government of the people, by the people, for the people?
- How does the government balance individual liberty with the safety and security of its people?
- How does the government maintain an effective and efficient balance among the three branches of government?
- What is the role of the individual citizen in maintaining an effective, representative government?

## Course Curriculum

### Unit 1 - The Legislative Branch (Chapters 3 & 4 from primary textbook)

Pacing: 18 -20 Classes

#### Focus Questions:

- What is the purpose of the Constitution?
- What is the role of each branch of government?
- How does the Constitution create a balance between the three branches?
- What are the seven principles of the Constitution?
- What is the role of the House of Representatives? The Senate?
- What are the Congressional Powers?
- What is a Congressional Organization?
- How does a bill become a law?
- What is the role of the lobbyist?

#### Concepts/Skills:

- Discuss/explain the purpose of government in the United States and other countries.
- Explain the connections between democracy and the free enterprise system.
- Analyze the form and function of the United States Constitution.
- Explain the importance of the seven principles of the Constitution.
- Define the three branches of government and the role each plays.
- Describe the duties performed by those who serve in congress.
- Analyze the formal and informal qualifications for election to the House and the Senate.
- Explain the three types of powers delegated to Congress.
- Understand the investigatory powers of Congress.
- Compare the roles of the presiding officers in the Senate and the House.
- Explore how lobbying impacts the legislative process.

### Unit 2 - Chapters 5 & 6 - Executive Branch

Pacing: 18 -20 Classes

#### Focus Questions:

- What is the role of the President in executing laws?
- What is the President's responsibility in establishing foreign policy?
- As the Commander in Chief of the armed forces, how does the President serve the issue of national security?
- What is the role of the President in leading negotiations for foreign treaties?
- What is meant by executive overreach?

#### Concepts/Skills:

- Analyze the role of the Executive Branch.
- Understand the constitutional powers of the President, including the President's power to execute the law and issue executive orders.
- Explain why and how executive agreements are made.
- Explore the concept of executive overreach and review real examples from U.S. history.

Potential Current Event Issues for Exploration: U.S. Role on the world stage, Human Trafficking, Policing Internet Crimes from Overseas

### **Unit 3 - Chapters 7 & 8 - Judicial Branch**

**Pacing: 18 -20 Classes**

#### Focus Questions:

- Why did the Constitution create a national judiciary and what is its function?
- What are the different levels of the federal court system?
- What is judicial review? Why is this process important to maintaining balance among the three branches of government?
- Why are the first ten amendments to the constitution referred to as the “Bill of Rights?”
- What is the difference between civil liberties and civil rights?
- What is the importance of having a limited government?

#### Concepts/Skills:

- Analyze the function of the Judicial Branch as defined in the Constitution.
- Detail the levels of the federal court system and the process for appointing federal judges.
- Evaluate the practice of appointing Supreme Court judges for life.
- Explain how cases reach the Supreme Court.
- Understand the impact of judicial philosophy and analyze issues raised by judicial activism and judicial restraint.
- Contrast civil liberties and civil rights and explain how both are developed in the United States.
- Discuss/debate the importance of limited government.
- Explain the role(s) of court officers.

Potential Current Event Issues for Exploration: Vaccine Mandates, Inequality, Equal Opportunity Vs. Equal Outcome

### **Unit 4 - Chapters 10 & 11 - Participation in Government**

**Pacing: 18 -20 Classes**

#### Focus Questions:

- How are new amendments formed in the United States? How can we participate in this process?
- What was the purpose of the 15th Amendment to the United States Constitution?
- What were some of the obstacles to extending voting rights?
- How did the Civil Rights Act 1959-1960 affect the 15th Amendment to the Constitution?
- Why is it important to exercise our right to vote?
- What were the origins of the two-party system? What’s the role of the political parties?
- What is the process for electing a president? Why did the framers develop this process?
- How can we become involved in improving our local, state, or national government?

#### Concepts/Skills:

- Explain the process of establishing a new amendment.
- Explore the obstacles to extending voting rights in the United States, including the implementation of the 15th Amendment.
- Describe the voter registration process and discuss instances where voter turn-out made a significant difference in the outcome of an election.
- Analyze the responsibilities of citizenship.
- Describe the distribution of political power in the United States.
- Explain the role of political parties and the two-party system in America.
- Analyze and evaluate the electoral college.
- Research/explore ways to become involved in local government.

Potential Current Event Issues for Exploration: Media Bias, 24 hour news networks, Voting Rights, Economic Responsibilities

**Resources Textbook – *Magruder’s American Government, McLenaghan, 2011.***

An E-book is available for the text and is typically used.

### **Grading**

The grading policy is:

- 50% - Mastery - Summative assessments that test knowledge of content and topic questions.
- 20% - Formative -Assignments that help develop knowledge and understanding between summative assessments.
- 15% - Student Preparation - Assignments typically include work completed to prepare for class.
- 15% - Participation -Relates to participation in class and participation in assignments and group projects

Please refer to the Absence Make Up Policy in the student handbook

The Social Studies Department has developed a department-wide policy for accepting and grading late work which will be shared with each student during the first two days of classes.