

Tips for Using *We the People: The Citizen & the Constitution*, Level 3 as an Advanced Placement Government Curriculum

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My teaching profile

- I have been teaching AP United States Government since the fall of 2002. In these past seven years, I have always used *We the People: The Citizen & the Constitution*¹ as the predominant text and program to prepare my students for the AP United States Government and Politics exam.
- My class is a one-semester class in the fall. I provide three or four review sessions in the spring to help students refresh their knowledge from the fall semester.
- More than 90% of my students pass the AP United States Government and Politics exam.
- My high school started a “regular” AP U.S. Government class two years ago (an AP U.S. Government class that is not connected to the *We the People* curriculum). My *We the People* students have outperformed the regular AP U.S. Government students on the AP exam.

AP United States Government teaching philosophy

- I believe that in an AP course, the role of the teacher is the facilitator of knowledge and information.
 - I help students find information that covers the curriculum. They might use information from textbooks, primary sources, websites, and community leaders (including judges, lawyers, and other local community members). All these parts add up to a successful knowledge base for the AP United States Government and Politics exam.
 - In the end, it is up to the student to take the information presented and work with it to prepare for the exam.
 - I cannot force a student to study, nor do I believe that in any AP course a teacher can cover all the AP curriculum in the given class time. It is therefore up to the student to prepare for the AP exam. (I also have taught or currently teach AP Comparative Government and AP Microeconomics.)
 - I believe that all textbooks are resources for the teacher and student. I do not believe that one textbook should be the only resource for teaching an AP course.
 - The new, 2009 version of the *We the People* text fills many voids that were apparent in the old, 1995 version in regard to the AP United States Government and Politics exam. There are still a few areas (media and political-party specifics) that are still weak. This

¹ Susan M. Leeson, Margaret S. Branson, Scott E. Casper, and Charles N. Quigley, *We the People: The Citizen & the Constitution*, Level 3 (high school) (Calabasas, CA: Center for Civic Education, 2009).

is where I use *American Government: AP Edition*² by James Wilson and John DiIulio to fill those voids. I also supplement the texts with daily primary-source readings (e.g., Magna Carta; English Bill of Rights; Mayflower Compact; Massachusetts Body of Liberties; various early state constitutions; Declaration of Independence; U.S. Constitution; U.S. Bill of Rights; various Federalist and Anti-Federalist papers; constitutions of other countries; historical and current examples of executive orders, signing statements, and passed legislation; to name just a few). This, again, follows the philosophy that the teacher is a facilitator of knowledge and information.

- I strongly believe that the use of *American Government: AP Edition* is a great addition to the *We the People* text in preparing a class for the simulated congressional hearings.
- In summary, I truly believe that the two curriculums work hand-in-hand to prepare the student for the final outcome of both the simulated congressional hearing and the AP exam.

How are my students doing so well on the AP exam if not all the required information is covered in depth in the *We the People* text?

- Units of *We the People* build off one another, meaning a teacher cannot teach a unit and be done with the content after that unit is finished. This creates scaffolding for students to build from, which becomes important for the AP United States Government and Politics exam.
- In any AP class, students have to be willing to devote time outside of class to studying and preparing for the test. *We the People* students do this.
- *We the People* students know how to research and find required information. More importantly, *We the People* students know how to analyze and use critical-thinking skills, as this is the basis of the inquiry-based learning strategies of the *We the People* text.
- *We the People* students know how to answer the AP United States Government and Politics exam's free-response questions, because throughout the semester of *We the People* they have learned to synthesize information learned, a key to success on the AP exam. Again, they know how to analyze the questions and to answer all its parts while giving specific examples to support their responses.
- *We the People* students do well on the multiple-choice section because students have worked with all units of the *We the People* text. They are therefore well-versed in all aspects of political science. They have had to research to find supporting evidence for follow-up questions and detailed responses for their written statements. They will use all this information in analyzing the multiple-choice section.

² James Q. Wilson and John J. DiIulio, Jr., *American Government: AP Edition*, 11th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007).