

CITIZENSHIP SCHOOLS AND CIVIC EDUCATION DURING THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT AND IN THE PRESENT

Teachers Guide

Lesson Overview

This lesson is intended to help guide students through a historical and contemporary examination of citizenship schools and civic education. During the civil rights era, citizenship schools were an integral part of the effort to educate African Americans about the rights that they had as United States citizens so that they could vigorously assert these rights in the fight against segregation. Presently, citizenship education tends to be associated with efforts to prepare noncitizens to meet the requirements for becoming naturalized U.S. citizens. Underpinning both forms of citizenship education is the concept of civics or civic education, defined by John J. Patrick as the “development of intellectual skills and participatory skills, which enable citizens to think and act in behalf of their individual rights and their common good” in a constitutional democracy.¹

For teachers not currently using the School Violence Prevention Demonstration Program (SVPDP), this lesson can be used as is. For those who are using the SVPDP curriculum, this lesson allows students to apply the Foundations of Democracy concepts of authority and responsibility. It also demonstrates concepts taught in *We the People: The Citizen & the Constitution*. Specific references to individual lessons in the curriculum are found at the end of this guide.

Suggested Grade Level

Middle school and high school

Estimated Time to Complete

45 minutes

Objectives

After completing this lesson, students will be able to

¹ Patrick, John J. "Civic Education for Constitutional Democracy: An International Perspective. ERIC Digest." *ERIC Digests.Org - Providing Full-text Access to ERIC Digests*. ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education Bloomington IN., 00 Dec. 1995. Web. 15 Feb. 2011. <<http://www.ericdigests.org/1996-3/civic.htm>>.

- explain the role that citizenship schools played during the civil rights movement, particularly in regard to preparing for state voting and literacy tests;
- identify at least two of the main objectives and instructional means of a citizenship school based on a study of the Highlander Folk School;
- compare the purpose of citizenship schools in the past with the objectives of citizenship schools in the present; and
- develop a list of three to five basic elements comprising a civic education, regardless of past or present.

Materials Needed

- Historical Information on Citizenship Schools
- 60-Second Civics: Septima Clark (<http://www.civiced.org/index.php?page=audio&&mid=336>)
- Excerpts of Interview with Septima Clark (http://docsouth.unc.edu/sohp/G-0017/excerpts/excerpt_2165.html; http://docsouth.unc.edu/sohp/G-0017/excerpts/excerpt_2167.html)
- 1965 Alabama Literacy Test (www.ccle.fourh.umn.edu/literacy.pdf)
- U.S. Naturalization Test (www.history.com/images/media/pdf/100qENG.pdf)

Before the Lesson

Review this guide and all of the materials provided.

Lesson Procedure

1. *Beginning the lesson.* Ask each of your students to write a one-sentence definition of “citizenship.” As a class, discuss what the students came up with and list some of the important elements of the definition: which should include most or all of the following: rights, duties, citizen, member, society, disposition, conduct, and community. Follow up by posing an open question: What is a “citizenship school”?
2. *Introducing Septima Clark and Citizenship Schools.* Arrange for students to listen to the 60-Second Civics episode on Septima Clark, or use the transcript provided. Why was Septima Clark later called the “queen mother of the civil rights movement”?

Analyze how citizenship classes were conducted at Highlander Folk School and elsewhere during the civil rights era by listening to or reading the excerpts from an interview with Septima Clark and the historical background provided. Have students discuss what made this method of instruction both necessary and effective.

3. *Analyzing documents.* Read some of the questions in the 1965 Alabama literacy test, which was intended to discourage or prevent African Americans from voting. Ask the students to assess the difficulty of the questions. Are any of the questions tricky or unfair? How relevant were any of these questions to the act of voting? How might such questions have presented obstacles to qualifying for voter registration? How might the obstacles have been surmounted?

Gauge student familiarity with the requirements to become a “naturalized” citizen of the United States. Specifically, ask students to consider the naturalization test requirement and the preparations needed to pass this test. What are the similarities and distinctions between citizenship education as it pertains to passing something like the 1965 Alabama Literacy Test and the U.S. Naturalization Test?

Working in groups or as individuals, ask students to compare the 1965 Alabama Literacy Test with the current U.S. Naturalization Test. They should note that the first test had to be taken by a select group of people who were *already* citizens, while the second test must be taken by persons *applying to become* citizens. Are there any similarities or differences in the questions?

4. *Where are we today?* Ask students to consider the role of citizenship schools and civic education today. The following questions can help guide the discussion:
 - How might citizenship schools be conducted today?
 - What purpose would they serve?
 - Are courses in “civics” beneficial only to persons who are applying for citizenship?
 - Are you—as students—currently engaged in civic education?
 - If so, is it anything like the forms of citizenship education that you have been examining?

Students should understand that, in the broad sense, citizenship schools and civic education both consist of educational programs that are designed to instruct students as to the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, while also imparting the knowledge and skills necessary to exercise those rights and responsibilities.

Additional Resources

- <http://www.crmvet.org/info/lithome.htm>
- <http://www.crmvet.org/tim/timhis54.htm#1954ccs>
- <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/aahtml/exhibit/aopart9b.html>
- “Lighting The Way: Nine Women Who Changed Modern America” by Karenni Gore Schiff, Miramax Books
- http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/us/july-dec08/constitution_day.html

Correlations to SVPDP Curriculum

Foundations of Democracy, Elementary School Level

- Authority
 - Unit 1, Lessons 1 and 3
 - Unit 2, Lessons 7 and 9
 - Unit 4, Lesson 11

- Justice
 - Unit 1, Lesson 1
 - Unit 2, Lessons 2 and 3
 - Unit 3, Lessons 5 and 6
 - Unit 4, Lessons 9 and 10

- Responsibility
 - Unit 1, Lesson 1
 - Unit 2, Lessons 3 and 4
 - Unit 3, Lessons 6 and 7

Foundations of Democracy, Middle School Level

- Authority
 - Unit 1, Lessons 1 and 3
 - Unit 3, Lesson 6
 - Unit 4, Lessons 8 and 9
 - Unit 5, Lessons 12 and 14

- Responsibility
 - Unit 1 Lessons 1 and 2
 - Unit 2, Lesson 4
 - Unit 3, Lesson 5

- Justice
 - Unit 1, Lesson 1
 - Unit 2, Lesson 3
 - Unit 3, Lessons 7 and 8
 - Unit 4, Lessons 10, 11, and 12

- *We the People: The Citizen & the Constitution*
 - Level 2 (Middle school), Lessons 26 and 29

- Level 3 (High school), Lessons 17 and 19

This lesson was developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. However, the contents of this lesson do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government.

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