

Our Nation's Report Card



National Assessment of Principle Progress (NAPP)

Civics 2b
Grades 6-8

by
Fran O'Malley
The Democracy Project
Institute for Public Administration
College of Human Services, Education & Public Policy
University of Delaware

©The Democracy Project 2007

The Nation's Report Card

National Assessment of Principle Progress (NAPP):

by
Fran O'Malley

Lesson Description: In this lesson students will reflect on the principles upon which this nation was founded as well as the major events that have shaped this nation to address the question: to what extent have the American people lived up to the principles of the American political system? Students will assign the nation a grade based on their perceptions of the degree to which the people of the United States have lived up to their nation's fundamental principles.

Audience: Grades 6-8 cluster.

Time Required: 1-2 class periods.

Benchmark Addressed [Civics Standard Two 6-8b]: Students will understand the principles and content of major American state papers such as the Declaration of Independence; United States Constitution (including the Bill of Rights); and the Federalist Papers.

Essential Question Addressed: To what extent have the American people lived up to the principles embedded in the nation's founding documents?

Enduring Understanding: While disparities have always existed between the realities of daily life and the ideals of American democracy, the preservation and improvement of American constitutional democracy depends largely on the efforts of each succeeding generation to live up to these principles and narrow the disparities.

Prior Knowledge: This lesson is designed to be implemented toward the end of a course in United States history. It is assumed that students have had some exposure to the principles of the American political system earlier in the course (e.g., during the Founding Era). In this lesson, the students are asked to draw on their understandings of the principles and major events in American history to grade our progress toward fulfilling those principles.

Materials:

- Markers
- Blank paper (unlined)
- Attachment 1: "Web of Our Nation's Principles."
- Attachment 2 (transparency): *Principles of the American Political System.*
- Attachment 3 (transparency): *The Nation's Report Card.*
- Attachment 4: Teacher Resource – *definitions of principles.*

Procedures:

1. **Brainstorming Principles:** Tell students that today's class is going to focus on the concept of *principles*. Ask students to...
 - a. define the term "principle." (The American Heritage's Children's Dictionary defines it as "*A rule or standard of behavior.*").
 - b. take a moment to think about one principle that they hold dearly. Identify that principle and explain why that principle is so important to them? Ask volunteers to share their responses.
 - c. then, ask students to reflect and come up with one example of how they have honored that principle and one example of how they have fallen short of honoring that principle. Invite volunteers to share their examples.
2. **Think-Pair-Share Web:** Tell students that one thing that distinguishes a group of people (e.g., Americans) from another group of people is the principles to which they are committed. Ask students to work in pairs to think about some principles to which the American people might be committed. Distribute copies of **Attachment 1:** "*Web of Our Nation's Principles.*" Have pairs create webs that identify the principles associated with the American people. Ask for volunteers to share the principles they identified. Web them on the board for all to see.
3. **Defining & Illustrating Principles:** Project a transparency copy of **Attachment 2:** *Principles of the American Political System* on the overhead. Explain to the students that this transparency contains a list of principles that civics education experts (see National and Delaware standards) have associated with the people of the United States. The list is drawn from major American State Papers including the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

Distribute a blank piece of paper and one or more markers to each pair of students. Assign one principle to each pair of students and ask them to define and illustrate their principle. Have each pair share their definition while displaying their illustration. Teacher should clarify as the definitions are offered (see **Attachment 4:** *Teacher Resource*).
4. **Graffiti Exercise.** Write one principle as a header on separate pieces of poster paper (e.g., individual liberty" on paper 1). Place students in small groups (2-3) and give each group one piece of poster paper and a marker. Their task is to describe **one** development in American History that supports the idea that the American people have either lived up to their principle or failed to live up to their principles. They might use plus and minus signs to distinguish evidence of living up (+) or not (-). Groups are free to use their textbooks to locate developments but are not permitted to repeat what earlier groups recorded. Each group should be given 3-5 minutes to deliberate and record one development.

Alternative Graffiti strategies:

- a. write principles as headers on the top of a blank piece of paper and simply ask groups to write their responses using pens or pencils.
- b. have students pass papers rather than have the students rotate from principle to principle.

5. Model the Task: Choose one principle such as *equal opportunity*. Ask students think about American history from 1776 when the nation declared its independence and announced its core principles to the world to the end of the Civil War (or Reconstruction if you've managed to get that far). Then, ask them to...
 - a. define the term *equal opportunity*. Write a plausible definition on the chart paper.
 - b. describe and record evidence suggesting that the American people lived up to the principle of equal opportunity (e.g., elimination of property requirements for voting).
 - c. describe and record evidence suggesting that the American people fell short in living up to the principle of equal opportunity (e.g. women still denied the right to vote).
 - d. give the American people a grade from A-F that symbolizes the progress made by the American people toward fulfilling the principle of equal opportunity between 1776 and 1865 (or 1877).

Then, ask the students to think about more current development. Repeat questions b-d above with attention to current progress toward fulfilling principles.

6. Synthesis: After all principle papers have circulate through every group and each group has had an opportunity to record and episode, the original group that had each paper is to review all of the responses and give the American people a grade. That grade is to be based on all responses considering the progress, if any, that Americans have made toward the fulfillment of a specific national principle. Grades can range from an A (distinguished progress made) to an F (taken steps backward).

Encourage students to proceed inductively, i.e., gather evidence before deciding on a grade (rather than giving a grade then looking for evidence to support it).

7. Present Conclusions: Have each group report out on their grades and evidence. Allow students from other groups an opportunity to challenge grades given by others. Also, allow those who gave grades to change them in response to reasonable challenges.

Project **Attachment 3**: *Our Nation's Report Card* on the overhead. Record and project grades as they are given.

Debrief:

- Is the story of the American people's commitment to national principles one of progress or regression?
- Overall, what grade would you assign to the American people for the progress they have made toward living up to their national principles? What most influenced your decision?
- In which areas have we demonstrated the least amount of progress?
- How might a citizen like yourself help to narrow the gap between our ideals and reality? (*being aware of the principles, committing one's self to their fulfillment, acting consistent with those principles, encouraging others to honor them*)
- Why is it important to live up to the principles to which this nation has committed itself? (*doing so allow us to preserve our rights, liberty, and democratic way of life*)

Assessment:

Tips from the Teacher: Consider announcing this activity after you have offered instruction on the principles embedded within the major American State papers. If you teach American history chronologically, take time at the conclusion of each subsequent unit for reflection. Ask students to keep a running journal in which they identify and explain events in American history where the American people have taken steps forward or backward in terms of fulfilling the principles to which their country has committed itself. Use this lesson to pull all of the pieces together toward the end of the course.

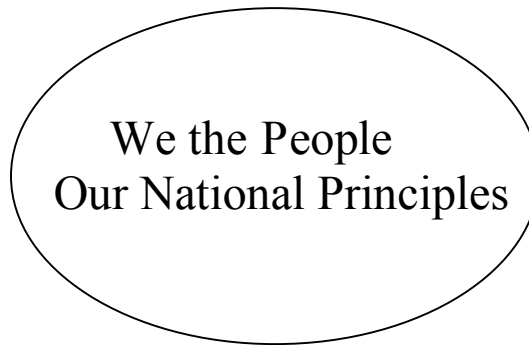
This activity may be broken up to in consideration of the scope and sequence of your course. Those who teach early American history might limit students to identifying developments in the first half of American history and vice-versa. All teachers should consider giving students a chance to reflect on developments occurring in their own lifetimes while addressing the question *how are the American people faring today?*

Works Cited

- American Heritage Children's Dictionary. (2003) Houghton-Mifflin Company. Boston, MA.
- National Standards for Civics and Government (1994). Center for Civic Education. Calabassas, CA.
- State of Delaware Social Studies Curriculum Framework (1995). Delaware Department of Education. Viewed at www.doe.k12.de.us/programs/pcs/standard.shtml on 8/27/07.

Attachment 1
Web of Our Nation's Principles

Name(s): _____



Attachment 2
Principles of the American Political System

1. individual liberty
2. freedom of religion
3. representative democracy
4. equal opportunity
5. equal protection under the law
6. popular sovereignty
7. limited government
8. majority rule
9. minority rights
10. rule of law
11. federalism
12. shared power
13. individual rights
14. separation of church and state
15. separation of powers
16. checks and balances
17. civilian control of the military

Attachment 4

The Nation's Report Card

Principle	Grade	Comments
individual liberty		
freedom of religion		
representative democracy		
equal opportunity		
equal protection		
popular sovereignty		
limited government		
majority rule		
minority rights		
rule of law		
federalism		
shared power		
individual rights		
separation of church & state		
separation of powers		
checks & balances		
civilian control of the military		

A = distinguished progress made B = significant progress made
 C = limited progress made D = no progress made E = taken steps backward

Attachment 5
Teacher Resource

Principles of the American Political System

1. checks and balances - the powers given to the different branches of the government should be roughly equal so that no branch can completely dominate the others. Branches of government are also given powers to restrain or limit the power of other branches.
2. civilian control of the military – elected officials who are not on active duty in the military should control the military to prevent those with extraordinary power from substituting their will for the will of the majority.
3. freedom of religion – people should have the right to practice any religion, or none.
4. individual liberty – a person should have the right and power to act, believe, and express as he or she chooses.
5. equal opportunity – each person should have the same political, legal, social, and economic chances as any other person.
6. equal protection under the law - all people should be treated as equals before the law, without favoritism toward any person or group.
7. federalism – power and authority should be diffused and shared between a central and local governments.
8. individual rights – each person should be protected from abuses of power by rights that cannot be taken away except in extreme circumstances.
9. limited government - the government has only as much authority as the people give it.
10. majority rule – within constitutional limits, policies should be decided on the basis of what the greatest number of people want.

11. minority rights - decisions made by majorities should not unreasonably and unfairly infringe upon the liberties of those who disagree or are different.
12. popular sovereignty - the people are the source of the government and all its power, and therefore hold ultimate authority over public officials and their policies.
13. representative democracy - government policies should be decided by officials selected by the voters and held accountable in periodic elections.
14. rule of law - government and its officials are always subject to the law. Government decisions and actions should be made according to established laws rather than by arbitrary actions and decrees.
15. separation of church and state - religion and government should be separated in order to preserve liberty of conscience and belief.
16. separation of powers – the powers to make (legislate), carry out (execute), and interpret (adjudicate) laws should be exercised by different institutions in order to maintain the limitations placed upon them.
17. shared power – power should be divided up so as to reduce the chance of it being abused and to allow for broad and effective participation.