



Charity.
Government.
Entrepreneurship.

MyImpact Challenge Workshop

October 16-18, 2018

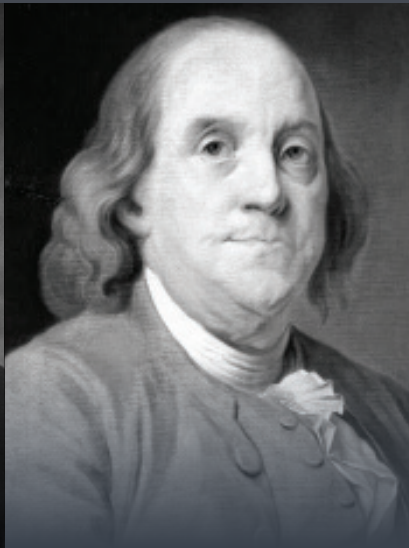
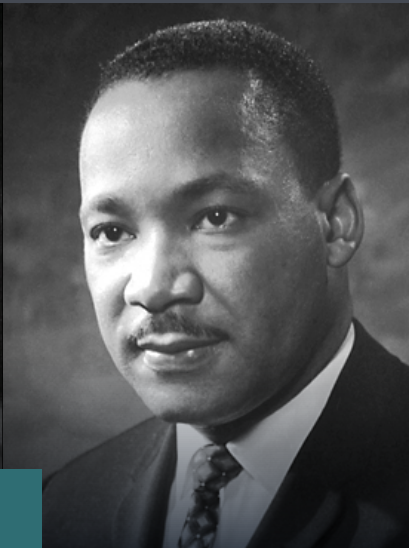
Wyoming

Teacher Guide

BILL *of* **RIGHTS**

INSTITUTE





UNIT 1

Defining Citizenship

KEY QUESTION

In order to be citizens in a free society, functioning as productive individuals in our public lives and demonstrating American civic virtues in solving problems in our own communities, what do we need to know about concepts of civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions?

OVERVIEW

The Founders understood that, in order to preserve their liberty and happiness, and that of future generations, the foundation of successful self-government was citizens who understood and applied certain virtues. They constructed the U.S. Constitution according to their study of the principles and virtues that were most necessary to sustain a free, prosperous, and orderly society. In this lesson, students will explore different definitions of citizenship and analyze the relationships between and among civic skills, virtues, and principles.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will work in small groups to identify the characteristics of a good citizen, and then apply that understanding to their roles as participants in their various communities and circles of influence.
- Students will compare the meanings of citizenship through history.
- Students will analyze the role of principles and virtues in civil society.
- Students will identify relationships between and among virtues and constitutional principles.
- Students will analyze a portion of Benjamin Franklin's autobiography and evaluate his efforts to cultivate more virtue in his own life.
- Students will engage in civil discourse, demonstrating reasoned judgment while considering varied opinions.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“Neither the wisest constitution nor the wisest laws will secure the liberty and happiness of a people whose manners are universally corrupt. He therefore is the truest friend of the liberty of his country who tries most to promote its virtue.” —**Samuel Adams**, *Essay in The Public Advertiser*, 1749.

RECOMMENDED TIME

180 minutes

MATERIALS LIST

- **Handout A: Background Essay: What Does It Mean To Be a Citizen?**
- **Handout B: Civic Virtue Quote Cards**
- **Handout C: Principles and Civic Virtues in the Constitution**
- **Handout D: Benjamin Franklin and Virtue: Primary Source Activity**

STANDARDS

- **National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS):**

Themes:

- 4. Individual Development and Identity
- 6. Power, Authority, and Governance
- 10. Civil Ideals and Practices

- **Center for Civic Education (CCE)**

V.D. Civic dispositions and character traits

- **UCLA Department of History (NCHS)**

Era 3 (1754-1820s), Standard 3

KEY TERMS

Virtues

- Civic knowledge
- Courage
- Initiative
- Honor
- Justice
- Moderation
- Perseverance
- Respect
- Responsibility
- Self-reliance

Constitutional Principles

- Checks and balances
- Consent
- Due process
- Equality
- Federalism
- Freedom of contract
- Freedom of religion
- Freedom of speech, press, assembly
- Inalienable rights
- Limited government
- Private property
- Rule of law
- Separation of powers

Lesson Plan

Activity 1: Defining Classroom Citizenship

Tip: This lesson is ideal for the first day of school.

Students work in small groups to identify characteristics of a good citizen, and translate that work into classroom rules. Students will debrief the activity to consider other communities in which they are good citizens. Prior to the lesson, arrange student desks in small groups (4 or 5 students per group).

Procedures

- A. Depending on student skill level and background, briefly clarify dictionary definition of “citizen.”
- B. First, instruct students, seated in small groups, to individually list characteristics of a good citizen. There should be no conversation during this part of the lesson. (2 minutes)
- C. Students share and compare responses within each group. Each group will decide on a consensus list of the five most important characteristics of a good citizen. It is not necessary to prioritize within the list of five. Note that consensus involves a process of reaching an agreement in which everyone’s opinion is heard and considered, not simply a vote by majority rule. (10 minutes)
- D. Each group shares its list in turn, with teacher posting on the board or appropriate classroom display technology the list of five attributes the group has selected.
- E. Have the class identify and circle similarities among lists.
- F. Teacher highlights the most frequently named characteristics and states: “Now that you have proven you know what it takes to be a good citizen, I’m sure you can follow these same citizenship rules for our class.”
- G. Teacher leads a whole class discussion of how the highlighted characteristics apply to and are important for a civil and productive classroom, soliciting as much student participation as possible in identifying classroom application of the civic skills.

TIME REQUIRED

45 minutes in class, followed by
15 minutes homework

MATERIALS

- Paper
- Pencils
- Dictionary
- Copies of **Handout A Background Essay: What Does It Mean To Be a citizen?** to distribute and assign for homework at the end of the introductory activity

- H. Have students first individually reflect on debrief questions such as the following, and then conduct a whole-class discussion as appropriate.
1. What steps did you follow individually/as a small group?
 2. Did you need to start with a definition of citizenship, or did you develop it as you worked?
 3. Were the characteristics you listed based on reason or emotion?
 4. To what extent will the list we developed as a class be a good set of rules?
 5. What else might we need to consider?
 6. What steps are important in reaching a reasoned decision as an individual? As a group?
 7. What skills were necessary in order for you to accomplish this activity?
 8. Why is the skill of rational decision-making a useful tool?
 9. What criteria did you use to prioritize/reach consensus?
 10. In what ways did you and your group demonstrate the ability to come to a reasoned judgment in reading, writing, and speech?
- I. Distribute and assign for homework **Handout A: Background Essay: What Does It Mean to be a Citizen?**

Activity 2: Analysis of Civic Virtues

Procedures

- A. Prior to the lesson, make enough copies of the set of ten **Civic Virtue Quote Cards** to provide one card for each pair of students. (Tips: Print the cards on heavy paper and laminate for multiple uses. If multiple sets of the quote cards are needed, make each set of ten cards on a different color card stock to simplify collection and organization of materials for future use.) Post a list of the virtues prominently in the room so that all can see them throughout the activity.
- B. Discuss/clarify student responses to the Review Questions from **Handout A Background Essay: What Does It Mean to be a Citizen?** Instructions called for students to prepare to explain their reasoning on the opinion questions. Have students explain their reasoning as time permits.

TIME REQUIRED

45 minutes

MATERIALS

- **Handout B: Civic Virtue Quote Cards**

- C. Have students work in pairs to analyze the Quote Cards, giving one card to each pair. Have students read and discuss the definition and quotations on their cards. Post questions 1–6 prominently on the board or appropriate classroom display technology:

How can you exercise this virtue in each of the following situations?

1. In your family relationships?
 2. As a friend?
 3. As a team member?
 4. In your school?
 5. In your neighborhood?
 6. In a voluntary civic group?
- D. After providing some time for students to reflect individually on the following questions, then lead a whole class discussion based on them.
1. What are some examples you've witnessed of adults or students exercising the civic virtues in the lesson?
 2. What are some situations in which one or more of the virtues was needed but absent? (You may want to instruct students to refrain from using names of individuals in this step.)
 3. Why is it important for citizens to act according to these virtues?
 4. What are some consequences if people do not exercise these virtues?
 5. What is the relationship between these virtues and the practice of self-government?
 6. What are some concrete ways you can demonstrate these civic virtues in your life as an engaged citizen now?

Activity 3: Identifying Principles and Civic Virtues in the Constitution

Procedures

- A. Prior to the lesson, make one copy for each student of **Handout C: Principles and Civic Virtues in the Constitution**.
- B. Activate prior learning by asking students to use a Think-Pair-Share activity and, referring to a list of constitutional principles and civic virtues, show how a specific principle is related to a specific virtue.
- C. Students work in pairs or small groups to annotate and discuss the passages from the Constitution and decide which principles and civic virtue(s) are implied for each one. Encourage students to refer to the Constitution itself for context of each quote as needed. After students have completed the small group work, convene the class to ask the following discussion questions.
 1. Which virtues did you find were implied most often? Why do you think this might be?
 2. Based on your own experience and on this quick review of constitutional passages, which virtues do you think are most important to contribute to productive civil society, liberty, and human flourishing?
 3. What relationships, if any, did you discover between specific principles and civic virtues?
 4. Describe the relationship between three principles and three virtues you found in the Constitution in one sentence each (or even a tweet!)

TIME REQUIRED

30 minutes

MATERIALS

- **Handout C: Principles and Civic Virtues in the Constitution**
- Copies of the Constitution
- List of Constitutional Principles and Essential Virtues (See **Appendix, p. xx**)

Activity 4: Benjamin Franklin and Virtue

Procedures

- A. Distribute a copy of **Handout D: Benjamin Franklin and Virtue: Primary Source Activity** to each student, and assign the reading, either individually or in pairs, for discussion as they go.
- B. After students have had time to read and analyze the primary source, either individually or with partners, conduct a whole-class discussion of selected Discussion Questions.
- C. Have students respond to the Journal Prompts.

Extension

- D. For additional activities exploring civic virtues, see the Bill of Rights Institute’s *Voices of History* website www.VoicesofHistory.org for the following resources:
 - America’s Heroes Past and Present: *Being an American, Lesson 5*
 - A Personal Response to American Citizenship: *Being an American, Lesson 6*

TIME REQUIRED

45 minutes

MATERIALS

- **Handout D: Benjamin Franklin and Virtue—Primary Source Activity**

Background Essay: What Does It Mean To Be a Citizen?

Directions

Read the essay and respond to the Review Questions at the end.

What Is a Citizen?

The term, “citizen” is related to the Latin term, *civitas*, meaning “city,” and referred in early times to an inhabitant of a city. In modern times it denotes a legally recognized member of a state who is entitled to certain rights and bears certain responsibilities. In the United States, our understanding of what it means to be a citizen comes from a number of influences that predate the U.S. Constitution, which did not initially define citizenship, but left it to each of the states to determine the qualifications for participation in government. To the ancient Greeks, a citizen was a member of the community who participates in public affairs through informed, reasoned debate and discussion, respectfully considering the views of others. Aristotle taught that a citizen is capable of both ruling and being ruled through active participation in deliberation and decision-making. In the Roman Republic, *civitas* consisted of those city residents who were educated and had the right to vote and hold office. Ideally, they exercised moderation and good judgment by voting for the good of the people, sharing in the rights and responsibilities of self-government.

Why did the Founders think virtue is necessary?

Building on this underpinning, the Founders of the United States took the position that citizens

must exercise certain knowledge, skills, dispositions, and virtues in self-government. Among the many observations of Founders regarding the important role of a citizen are the following:

- John Adams wrote, “Public virtue cannot exist in a nation without private [virtue], and public virtue is the only foundation of republics.” John Adams to Mercy Otis Warren, April 16, 1776
- Benjamin Franklin wrote, “Only a virtuous people are capable of freedom. As nations become more corrupt and vicious, they have more need of masters.” Letter to Messrs, the Abbes Chalut, and Arnaud, April 17, 1787
- James Madison stated: “To suppose that any form of government will secure liberty or happiness without any virtue in the people, is a chimerical [imaginary] idea.” Speech in the Virginia Ratifying Convention, June 20, 1788
- Madison also wrote, “As there is a degree of depravity in mankind which requires a certain degree of circumspection and distrust, so there are other qualities in human nature which justify a certain portion of esteem and confidence. [America’s republican form of government] presupposes the existence of these qualities in a higher degree than any other form.” (*Federalist No. 55*, 1788).

- Thomas Jefferson wrote: “Convinced that the people are the only safe depositories of their own liberty, and that they are not safe unless enlightened to a certain degree, I have looked on our present state of liberty as a short-lived possession unless the mass of the people could be informed to a certain degree.” Letter to Littleton Waller Tazewell, 1805

Ratified in 1868, the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution provides the legal definition of U.S. citizenship, stating, “All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and the State wherein they reside.” For purposes of this study, we will use the following description:

A citizen in a free society is a person who functions privately and publicly according to principles of moral and ethical excellence essential to leading a worthwhile life and to effective self-government. A citizen seeks to be active in public life, demonstrating civic virtues in everyday life and solving community problems.

What virtues are necessary in a free society, and who is responsible for cultivating them among the citizens?

If citizens are to be free, how is it appropriate for government to be concerned about character formation? What does it mean to be free? The Founders believed that all humans are born with certain natural rights, and that legitimate government is based on the will of the people

expressed through the laws they make for themselves through their representatives. Self-government in civil society depends on certain attributes of character, but the government is not the primary institution responsible for inculcating those virtues. Rather, generating the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions is primarily the responsibility of families. The first and most powerful influences on character come from experiences and expectations learned in the family setting. In the endeavor to develop decent human beings who know how to work with one another, solve problems, and resolve disputes productively, families are supported by private institutions such as religious institutions and civic associations. Government plays a secondary role in encouraging these qualities in a variety of ways, including through its provision of tax-supported community schools.

There are many virtues that contribute to civil society, but the Founders’ public and private writings tell us that many of them understood at least the following attributes of character to be necessary: **justice, responsibility, courage, moderation, respect, initiative, honor, perseverance, self-reliance, and civic knowledge.**

To preserve freedom citizens must first understand what **justice** is and have the **courage** to assert themselves when their rights or the rights of others are violated. If individuals are to be free, they must exercise **self-reliance** and **responsibility** to provide for themselves and their families. They must also **respect** others enough to behave generously when other community members face hardship. Another outgrowth of respect for others is that individuals exercise **moderation** in their thoughts and actions in order to listen and engage in civil discourse. Communities built on

this foundation also require individuals who apply **initiative** to act energetically in solving problems, **perseverance** because problems often do not yield to easy solutions, and **honor** so that people can trust one another to do the right thing. **Civic knowledge** is necessary so that people understand their rights and can act with wisdom based on evidence and reason. In addition to applying these virtues in their own lives, citizens must hold their elected officials accountable to these standards. Seeking to serve the public in a representative office is a heavy responsibility, and voters must exercise vigilance and wisdom as they mark their ballots.

What principles guided the Founders in establishing the structure of the U.S. Constitution?

Based on their long and diligent study of the kinds of governments that been established in human history, Founders like James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, James Wilson, Alexander Hamilton, Benjamin Franklin, and George Mason, urged that certain principles must be incorporated in the framework of government in order for it to do its main job, which was protecting the natural rights of the citizens. Those principles of constitutional government

included **rule of law** and **due process**, the idea that government and citizens alike abided by the same laws regardless of political power, and that those laws must reflect the virtue of justice. Because all humans are born with **equal and inalienable rights**, no one is born with a natural right to rule over others, so legitimate government is based on the principle of **consent of the governed**. In a large and complex society, the principle of consent is generally expressed through the principle of **republicanism** (or representation) as the people entrust to certain elected officials the responsibilities of day-to-day decision-making regarding law and policy. Because humans are flawed and disposed to increase their own power at the expense of others, Founders believed it is important to preserve the principle of **limited government** through a complex structure of enumerated, divided, **shared powers** and **checks and balances**.

The Founders knew that the preservation of liberty would not be easy; it is often difficult for flawed human beings to engage productively with one another to live peaceably in community. And they also knew that the American experiment in self-government had no chance to succeed without these constitutional principles, as well as personal and civic virtues.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Using the definitions of “citizen” in the **first** paragraph of the essay, write your own definition of what it means to be a citizen.
2. Which of the Founders’ quotes in the **second** paragraph do you believe is most important for citizens to understand today? Be prepared to explain your answer.
3. Why do institutions like government, religious institutions, and voluntary organizations play a secondary, or supporting, role in developing strength of character, compared to the primary role of family?
4. Of the specific virtues listed in the essay, select the three or four that you think are most important, and be prepared to explain your opinion.
5. Of the specific principles described in the essay, select one or two that you believe are most important and be prepared to explain your opinion.
6. Paraphrase and evaluate the following quote from an essay that Samuel Adams wrote at the age of 27 in 1749. Was Adams correct, partially correct, or incorrect? Defend your answer.

“Neither the wisest constitution nor the wisest laws will secure the liberty and happiness of a people whose manners are universally corrupt. He therefore is the truest friend of the liberty of his country who tries most to promote its virtue.” Samuel Adams, Essay in *The Public Advertiser*, 1749

Civic Virtue Quote Cards

**Teacher
Directions**

Make sufficient copies of the set of ten quote cards so that each pair of students is assigned one card to discuss and analyze.

1. COURAGE

strength to withstand
danger, fear, or difficulty

'Tis the business of little minds to shrink; but he whose heart is firm, and whose conscience approves his conduct, will pursue his principles unto death.

—Thomas Paine (1737-1809), patriot and author of *Common Sense*

You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face.

—Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962), First Lady of the United States

Courage is doing what you're afraid to do. There can be no courage unless you're scared.

—Eddie Rickenbacker (1890-1973), World War I veteran and hero

2. INITIATIVE

action independent of
outside influence

Organization can never be a substitute for initiative and for judgment.

—Louis D. Brandeis (1856-1941), U.S. Supreme Court Justice

Time is neutral and does not change things. With courage and initiative, leaders change things.

—Jesse Jackson (b. 1941), activist and civil rights leader

“Students must have initiative; they should not be mere imitators. They must learn to think and act for themselves—and be free.”

—César Chávez (1927-1993), civil rights activist and farm labor leader

3. JUSTICE

being fair in respecting
the rights of all

The best and only safe road
to honor, glory, and true dignity is
justice.

—George Washington (1732-1799), first
President of the United States

Justice is the end [goal] of government.
It is the end [goal] of civil society.

—James Madison (1751-1836), Father of
the Constitution and fourth President of
the United States

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice
everywhere.

—Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968),
Baptist minister and civil rights leader

4. HONOR

adherence to virtuous
principles; being true
to one's word

Ability without honor is useless.

—Cicero (c. 106 B.C.), Roman
philosopher and statesman

Honour[‘s] connection with virtue is
indissoluble.

—James Wilson (1742-1798), patriot
and Framers of the United States
Constitution

Always stand on principle, even if you
stand alone.

—John Quincy Adams (1767-1848), sixth
President of the United States

5. MODERATION

avoidance of extremes
or excesses

It is the sign of a great mind to dislike greatness, and prefer things in measure to things in excess.

—Seneca (c. 565 BC), Roman philosopher and politician

This much, then, is clear in all our conduct, it is the mean that is to be commended.

—Aristotle (384-322 BC), Greek philosopher

Moderation in temper is always a virtue; but moderation in principle is always a vice.

—Thomas Paine (1737-1809), patriot and author of Common Sense

6. PERSEVERANCE

to persist in spite of
opposition or discouragement

Perseverance is more prevailing than violence; and many things which cannot be overcome when they are together, yield themselves up when taken little by little.

—Plutarch (c. 46-120 AD), Greek biographer and moralist

Great difficulties may be surmounted by patience and perseverance.

—Abigail Adams (1744-1818), patriot, wife of President John Adams and mother of U.S. President John Quincy Adams

Perseverance is a great element of success. If you only knock long enough and loud enough at the gate, you are sure to wake up somebody.

—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882), poet

7. RESPECT

high or special regard

In republics, the great danger is, that the majority may not sufficiently respect the rights of the minority.

-James Madison (1751-1836), fourth President of the United States

A way of life that is odd or even erratic but interferes with no right or interests of others is not to be condemned because it is different.

-Warren E. Burger (1907-1995), United States Supreme Court Justice

Respect your fellow human being, treat them fairly, disagree with them honestly, enjoy their friendship, explore your thoughts about one another candidly, work together for a common goal and help one another achieve it. No destructive lies. No ridiculous fears. No debilitating anger.

-Bill Bradley (b. 1943), basketball player and former U.S. Senator

8. RESPONSIBILITY

to answer for one's conduct

The consciousness of having discharged that duty which we owe to our country is superior to all other considerations.

-George Washington (1732-1799), first President of the United States

I believe that every right implies a responsibility; every opportunity, an obligation; every possession, a duty.

-John D. Rockefeller, Jr. (1874-1960), philanthropist

I think of a hero as someone who understands the degree of responsibility that comes with his freedom.

-Bob Dylan (b. 1941), musician and activist

9. SELF-RELIANCE

confidence in one's own
powers and resources

The power which resides in him is new in nature, and none but he knows what that is which he can do, nor does he know until he has tried.

-- Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882),
philosopher, journalist, poet

To find yourself, think for yourself.

–Socrates (469 B.C.E. - 399 B.C.E), Greek
philosopher, logician, and teacher

Oh the places you'll go! There is fun to be done! There are points to be scored. There are games to be won. And the magical things you can do with that ball will make you the winning-est winner of all.

–Dr. Seuss (1904-1991), author,
illustrator, cartoonist

10. CIVIC KNOWLEDGE

Understanding the diverse
influences that shape political
systems and civic life

Liberty cannot be preserved without a general knowledge among the people, who have a right...and a desire to know.

–John Adams (1735-1826), second
President of the United States

A popular government without popular information or the means of acquiring it is but a prologue to Farce or Tragedy or perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance, and a people who mean to be their own Governors must arm themselves with the power knowledge gives.

–James Madison (1751-1836), Father of the
Constitution and fourth President of the
United States

When good people in any country cease their vigilance... then evil men prevail.

–Pearl Buck (1892-1973), American
novelist

Principles and Civic Virtues in the Constitution

Directions

Read each of the following quotations and decide what civic virtues it requires of citizens. Then, identify the constitutional principle(s) implicit in each passage. (Hint: The principle of rule of law is relevant in all passages since the Constitution itself is the law of the land. But look for additional principles as applicable.) Some quotations may have more than one answer in each category. Use the glossary, page xx as needed.

Analyzing the Constitution

Virtues				
Civic knowledge	Moderation	Initiative	Honor	Responsibility
Courage	Perseverance	Respect	Justice	Self-reliance

Constitutional Principles			
Checks and balances	Inalienable rights	Private property	Freedom of contract
Consent	Limited government	Federalism	Separation of powers
Due process	Equality	Rule of law	Freedom of religion
Freedom of speech, press, assembly			

1. The House of Representatives shall be composed of members chosen every second year by the people of the several states. (Article I)

Civic Virtue(s): _____ **Constitutional Principle(s)** _____

2. Congress shall have the power to promote the progress of science and useful arts by securing for limited times to authors and inventors the exclusive right to their respective writings and discoveries. (Article I)

Civic Virtue(s): _____ **Constitutional Principle(s)** _____

3. The privilege of the writ of *habeas corpus* shall not be suspended, unless when in cases of rebellion or invasion the public safety may require it. (Article I)

Civic Virtue(s): _____ **Constitutional Principle(s)** _____

4. No bill of attainder or *ex post facto* law shall be passed. (Article I)
Civic Virtue(s): _____ **Constitutional Principle(s)** _____

5. Neither shall any person be eligible to [the office of President] who shall not have attained to the age of thirty five years. (Article II)
Civic Virtue(s): _____ **Constitutional Principle(s)** _____

6. Before [the President] enter on the execution of his office, he shall take the following oath or affirmation:—"I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States." (Article II)
Civic Virtue(s): _____ **Constitutional Principle(s)** _____

7. The trial of all crimes, except in cases of impeachment, shall be by jury. (Article III)
Civic Virtue(s): _____ **Constitutional Principle(s)** _____

8. The citizens of each state shall be entitled to all privileges and immunities of citizens in the several states. (Article IV)
Civic Virtue(s): _____ **Constitutional Principle(s)** _____

9. The United States shall guarantee to every state in this union a republican form of government. (Article IV)
Civic Virtue(s): _____ **Constitutional Principle(s)** _____

10. The Congress, whenever two thirds of both houses shall deem it necessary, shall propose amendments to this Constitution. (Article V)
Civic Virtue(s): _____ **Constitutional Principle(s)** _____

11. No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States. (Article VI)
Civic Virtue(s): _____ **Constitutional Principle(s)** _____

12. Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances. (Amendment I)
Civic Virtue(s): _____ **Constitutional Principle(s)** _____

13. Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted. (Amendment VIII)
Civic Virtue(s): _____ **Constitutional Principle(s)** _____

14. The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people.
Civic Virtue(s): _____ **Constitutional Principle(s)** _____

Benjamin Franklin and Virtue: Primary Source Activity

Directions

When Benjamin Franklin was in his twenties, he began a project to become a more virtuous person. Many years later, he wrote the following selection from his Autobiography about that time. Read his reflections on virtue, then answer the questions that follow.

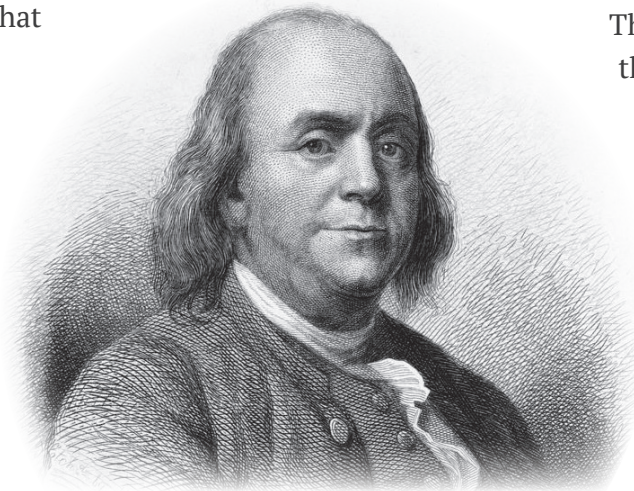
It was about this time that I conceiv'd the bold and arduous Project of arriving at moral Perfection. I wish'd to live without committing any Fault at any time; I would conquer all that either Natural Inclination, Custom, or Company might lead me into. As I knew, or thought I knew, what was right and wrong, I did not see why I might not always do the one and avoid the other. But I soon found I had undertaken a Task of more Difficulty than I had imagined. While my Attention was taken up in guarding against one Fault, I was often surpris'd by another. Habit took the Advantage of Inattention. Inclination was sometimes too strong for Reason. I concluded at length, that the mere speculative Conviction that it was our Interest to be completely virtuous, was not sufficient to prevent our Slipping, and that the contrary Habits must be broken and good ones acquired and established, before we can have any Dependence on a steady uniform Rectitude of Conduct. For this purpose I therefore contriv'd the following Method.

In the various enumerations of the moral Virtues I had with in my Reading, I found the Catalogue more or less numerous, as different Writers included more or fewer Ideas under the same Name. Temperance, for example, was by the some confin'd to eating & Drinking, while by others it was extended to mean the moderating every other Pleasure, Appetite, Inclination or Passion, bodily or mental, even to our Avarice & Ambition. I propos'd to myself, for the sake of Clearness, to use rather more Names with fewer Ideas annex'd to each, than a few Names with more Ideas; and I included under Thirteen Names of Virtues all that at that time occur'd to me as necessary or desirable, and annex'd to each a short Precept, which fully express'd the extent I gave to its Meaning.

These Names of Virtues with their Precepts were:

TEMPERANCE. Eat not to dullness; drink not to elevation.

SILENCE. Speak not but what may benefit others or yourself; avoid trifling conversation.



ORDER. Let all your things have their places; let each part of your business have its time.

RESOLUTION. Resolve to perform what you ought; perform without fail what you resolve.

FRUGALITY. Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself; i.e., waste nothing.

INDUSTRY. Lose no time; be always employ'd in something useful; cut off all unnecessary actions.

SINCERITY. Use no hurtful deceit; think innocently and justly, and, if you speak, speak accordingly.

JUSTICE. Wrong none by doing injuries, or omitting the benefits that are your duty.

MODERATION. Avoid extremes; forbear resenting injuries so much as you think they deserve.

CLEANLINESS. Tolerate no uncleanness in body, cloaths, or habitation.

TRANQUILITY. Be not disturbed at trifles, or at accidents common or unavoidable.

CHASTITY. Rarely use venery but for health or offspring, never to dulness, weakness, or the injury of your own or another's peace or reputation.

HUMILITY. Imitate Jesus and Socrates.

My Intention being to acquire the Habitude of all these Virtues, I judg'd it would be well not to distract my Attention by attempting the whole at once, but to fix it on one of them at a time, and when I should be Master of that, then to proceed to another, and so on till I should have gone thro'

the thirteen. And as the previous Acquisition of some might facilitate the Acquisition of certain others, I arrang'd them with that View as they stand above. Temperance first, as it tends to procure that Coolness & Clearness of Head, which is so necessary where constant Vigilance was to be kept up, and Guard maintained, against the unremitting Attraction of ancient Habits, and the Force of perpetual Temptations. This being acquir'd & establish'd, Silence would be more easy, and my Desire being to gain Knowledge at the same time that I improv'd in Virtue and considering that in Conversation it was obtain'd rather by the use of the ears than of the Tongue, & therefore wishing to break a Habit I was getting into of Prattling, Punning & Joking, which only made me acceptable to trifling Company, I gave Silence the second Place. This, and the next, order, I expected would allow me more Time for attending to my Project and my Studies; RESOLUTION, once become habitual, would keep me firm in my endeavors to obtain all the subsequent Virtues; Frugality & Industry, by freeing me from my remaining Debt, & producing Affluence & Independence, would make more easy the Practice of Sincerity and Justice, &c &c. Conceiving then that agreeable to the Advice of Pythagoras in his Golden Verses daily examination would be necessary, I contriv'd the following Method for conducting that examination.

I made a little Book in which I allotted a Page for each of the Virtues. I rul'd each Page with red Ink, so as to have seven Columns, one for each Day of the Week, marking each Column with a letter for the Day. I cross'd these Columns with thirteen red lines, marking the Beginning of each line with the first letter of one of the Virtues, on which line & in its proper Column I might mark by a little black Spot every Fault I found upon

examination to have been committed respecting that Virtue upon that Day.

I determined to give a Week's strict Attention to each of the Virtues successively. Thus in the first Week my great Guard was to avoid every the least offense against Temperance, leaving the other Virtues to their ordinary Chance, only marking every evening the Faults of the Day. Thus if in the first Week I could keep my first line marked clear of Spots, I suppos'd the Habit of that Virtue so much strengthen'd and its opposite weaken'd, that I might venture extending my Attention to include the next, and for the following Week keep both lines clear of Spots. Proceeding thus to the last, I could go thro' a Course complete in Thirteen Weeks, and four Courses in a Year. And like him who having a Garden to weed, does not attempt to eradicate all the bad Herbs at once, which would exceed his Reach and his Strength, but works on one of the Beds at a time, & having accomplish'd the first proceeds to a Second; so I should have, (I hoped) the encouraging Pleasure of seeing on my Pages the Progress I made in Virtue, by clearing successively my lines of their Spots, till in the end by a Number of Courses, I should be happy in viewing a clean Book after a thirteen Weeks, daily examination.

I enter'd upon the execution of this Plan for Self examination, and continu'd it with

occasional Intermissions for some time. I was surpris'd to find myself so much fuller of Faults than I had imagined, but I had the Satisfaction of seeing them diminish. To avoid the Trouble of renewing now & then my little Book, which by scraping out the Marks on the Paper of old Faults, to make room for new ones in a new Course, became full of Holes: I transferr'd my Tables & Precepts to the Ivory leaves of a Memorandum Book, on which the lines were drawn with red Ink that made a durable Stain, and on those lines I mark'd my Faults with a black lead Pencil, which Marks I could easily wipe out with a wet Sponge. After a while I went thro' one course only in a year, and afterward only one in several years, till at length I omitted them entirely, being employ'd in voyages and business abroad, with a multiplicity of affairs that interfered; but I always carried my little book with me.

...on the whole, tho' I never arrived at the perfection I had been so ambitious of obtaining, but fell far short of it, yet I was, by the endeavour, a better and a happier man than I otherwise should have been if I had not attempted it; as those who aim at perfect writing by imitating the engraved copies, tho' they never reach the wish'd-for excellence of those copies, their hand is mended by the endeavor, and is tolerable while it continues fair and legible.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the ideas in the essay that you found most surprising or most important.
2. How does Franklin understand virtue? How does he define, use, and refine the term?
3. What was Franklin's rationale for ordering and working on the virtues in the order he did?
4. Franklin wrote that there was something more powerful than his intention to live virtuously. What was that more powerful thing?
5. Aristotle believed that virtue was a habit. Would Franklin have agreed with him?
6. What was Franklin's process for imposing accountability on himself for his project?
7. How does Franklin describe his struggle to live virtuously? Do you believe moral perfection is possible? If so, how? If not, what motivates an individual to act virtuously? Is it better to aim for perfection and fail than not to try at all?
8. What does Franklin reveal about his beliefs regarding the universality of right and wrong?
9. Did Franklin believe he succeeded in his ultimate goal? Why or why not?
10. What value did Franklin find in the project?
11. What most impresses you about Franklin's project? What questions would you like to ask Benjamin Franklin about this project?
12. Compare Franklin's list of virtues to the one found in **Handout C: Principles and Civic Virtues in the Constitution**, noting differences and similarities.

Journal Assignment

1. How could you borrow some of Franklin's ideas and strategies to help you work on just one or two character traits you would like to improve?
2. For what virtues or character traits would you like to be remembered? What steps can you take today to move toward those strengths?

MyImpact Challenge Lesson 1 Answer Key

Handout A: Background Essay: What does it mean to be a citizen?

1. Student responses will vary, but should employ elements of and reflect understanding of the first paragraph's description of the following:
 - Modern times: “legally recognized member of a state who is entitled to certain rights and bears certain responsibilities.”
 - Ancient Greek: “participates in public affairs through informed, reasoned debate and discussion, respectfully considering the views of others”
 - Aristotle: “capable of both ruling and being ruled through active participation in deliberation and decision”
 - Roman Republic: “educated... right to vote and hold office... moderation and good judgment... good of the people...rights and responsibilities of self-government”
2. Student responses will vary, but should indicate an analysis and evaluation of the Founders' quotes and their significance for today.
3. Institutions like government, church, and voluntary organizations play a secondary role because the first and most powerful influences on character come from experiences and expectations learned in the family setting.
4. Student responses will vary regarding the most important virtues, but should reflect students' careful comparison and reasoned judgment based on the text.
5. Student responses will vary regarding the most important principles, but should reflect students' careful comparison and reasoned judgment based on the text.
6. Student responses should include their paraphrase of the quote and should convey their evaluation of the Samuel Adams quote, showing why they think he was correct, partially correct, incorrect, etc. They may also comment on the fact that Adams was in his twenties when he wrote the passage.

Handout C: Principles and Civic Virtues in the Constitution

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Virtue: initiative, responsibility
Principle: republicanism | 3. Virtue: justice
Principle: limited government, rule of law, due process |
| 2. Virtue: justice, initiative
Principle: private property | 4. Virtue: justice, moderation
Principle: limited government |

5. **Virtue:** moderation
Principle: rule of law
6. **Virtue:** honor, perseverance, responsibility
Principle: limited government, rule of law
7. **Virtue:** justice, responsibility
Principle: checks and balances
8. **Virtue:** honor, justice, respect
Principle: federalism, equality
9. **Virtue:** honor, justice, respect, responsibility
Principle: republicanism, federalism
10. **Virtue:** initiative, honor, responsibility
Principle: republicanism, federalism
11. **Virtue:** justice, respect
Principle: inalienable rights
12. **Virtue:** courage, initiative, perseverance, respect
Principle: inalienable rights
13. **Virtue:** justice, moderation
Principle: limited government, due process
14. **Virtue:** moderation, responsibility, civic knowledge
Principle: federalism

Handout D: Benjamin Franklin and Virtue: Primary Source Activity

1. Student responses will vary; encourage reasoned civil discourse.
2. Franklin understood virtue to be habits or traits that would reflect good conduct (“rectitude of conduct”) and bring a person closer to moral perfection. He refined his understanding as he concluded that moral perfection was not possible, but that the ambition and attempt toward it made him a better and a happier person.
3. Franklin ordered the virtues because he thought that working on all of them at the same time would be distracting and that focusing on one at a time would be a more effective way to work on them. He put them in an order so that virtues he acquired earlier might help him to develop others that were later on his list.
4. “Contrary Habits” or “Inclination” led him to keep slipping into habits that were not virtuous.
5. Given how frequently Franklin refers to “habit” as a part of his attempt to become more “morally perfect,” and the system he devised in order to increase his practice of virtues, he appears to have agreed with Aristotle that virtue was, indeed, a habit, and could be strengthened with practice.
6. Franklin intended to master one virtue at a time, focusing on each one for a week and marking in his book the number of times he failed at that virtue. His goal was to keep each week clear of the marks that indicated when he had failed.

7. Franklin had difficulty living as virtuously as was his goal. He had difficulty keeping his weekly lines “marked clear of spots.” He did, however, see his faults diminish. Moral perfection: Student responses will vary, but should be reasonable and related to the student’s overall beliefs and understandings. Challenge students to identify the bases of their motivations to act virtuously.
8. Franklin’s words are based on assumptions that right and wrong are universal and absolute, even while moral perfection may not be humanly impossible.
9. Franklin did not accomplish his initial goal of moral perfection because he never did rid himself of the faults he sought to eliminate. He found himself “so much fuller of Faults” than he had imagined.
10. He did eventually begin to see his faults diminish, and he did become a happier person than he would have been if he had not made the attempt, and he believes he was made better for having tried.
11. Student responses will vary, but should be based on the text.
12. Students may find several differences, including that some of Franklin’s virtues may not seem to correlate to those in the **Handout C** Virtue list. Students may also identify differences in the definition of virtues that may otherwise seem similar. Civic knowledge, courage, and self-reliance do not seem to be directly related to Franklin’s list. Accept reasoned student responses.

Franklin’s virtue of _____ is similar to or related to the Handout C virtue of _____

Franklin’s virtues	Handout C Virtue List
Temperance is similar to _____	Moderation
Silence is related to _____	Moderation
Order is related to _____	Responsibility
Resolution is related to _____	Honor
Frugality is related to _____	Moderation
Industry is related to _____	Perseverance

Franklin's virtues	Handout C Virtue List
Sincerity is related to	Honor
Justice	Justice
Moderation	Moderation
Cleanliness is related to	Responsibility
Tranquility is related to	Moderation
Chastity is related to	Respect
Humility is related to	Respect