

Lesson Plan: US Government

Objectives: The students will

- I.** identify the principles of American democracy;
- II.** compare American democracy and authoritarianism.
- III.** examine human rights around the world and evaluate the status of human rights in the United States.

Topics: Defining democracy, comparing democracy and authoritarianism.

Warm Up Activity (Anticipatory Set): Placemats: What is Democracy?

The Placemat Activity

- A) Divide the class into teams of four students.
 - B) Distribute or have students create a "placemat," a single piece of paper divided into four sections and a center section.
 - C) Have students write their names on the back. On the front, each student is in charge of one of the sections. The center will be filled in later.
 - D) Have students brainstorm the following topic: **"List all the people places, ideas, concepts, symbols related to American Democracy that you can think of."**
 - E) Students who are non-verbally oriented should be permitted to draw pictures related to the topic.
 - F) If students draw a total blank, have them thumb through the textbook scanning for photos and illustrations that can be used to spark their thinking so that they can insert something into their section of the placement.
 - G) Allow three minutes for the brainstorm period. (This will seem like a long time. Extend if needed). Once students have entered their concepts into their section, have them read or explain their entries to their group members.
 - H) Instruct the students to develop a definition of American Democracy that includes some aspect or element of each person's viewpoint. This definition should be entered in the center square of the placemat.
 - I) Have students choose a group "spokesperson" to read aloud the group's definition of American democracy.
- Variation: Allow students to place their final definitions on the board or on computers. Go around the room and discuss the elements that made up their definitions.
- Variation on Procedure: Each student-section of the placemat can be topic specific.
- Examples: Student #1 might concentrate on leaders, student #2 on symbols, student #3

on historical events, student #4 on current events, etc. Then the group definition would be a new synthesis of ideas with student contributions as examples for the definition they created.

Main Activity (Instructional Input): Lecture-Discussion: Principles of American Democracy

A) Display the following concepts as part of a [traditional lecture-discussion](#) or as a [PowerPoint Presentation](#).

The Principles of American Democracy

- 1) Free elections are used to select representatives of the people.
 - 2) The powers of government are based on the consent of the governed.
 - 3) Public questions are decided by the will of the majority.
 - 4) Rule of law guarantees rights and freedoms.
 - Freedom to live or travel anywhere in the US
 - Freedom to work at any job for which one qualifies.
 - Freedom to marry and raise a family.
 - Freedom to receive free education in public schools.
 - Freedom to join a political party, union, or other legal group.
 - 5) People retain the right to alter or abolish a government that becomes destructive and form a new government.
 - 6) Equality under the law is promised for all citizens.
 - 7) Majority rule will prevail with the rights of minorities protected.
 - 8) The organization of government is based on the separation of powers, which includes the concept of checks and balances.
- B) Students should take notes for each of the above items.

Examples (Modeling): Chart on Authoritarianism vs. Democracy

A) Have students copy the following elements into their notes or distribute as a worksheet:

Available in [Word 2000](#) or [PDF format](#)

| Principle | Authoritarian | Representative Democracy |
|-------------------------------|---|---|
| 1) Extent of Government Power | Government is not limited. | |
| 2) Control of Power | | Power is exercised by elected officials who are chosen by ballot. |
| 3) | Rights are not guaranteed in practice. | |
| 4) Elections | | |
| 5) | | Government and people are under the rule of law. |
| 6) | Force or threat of force are used frequently to keep peace. | |

Check For Understanding: Reviewing the Chart

A) Review student responses to the chart above. The chart is available as a separate worksheet.

B) As you review the chart, ask students to discuss examples in history or in the news for each entry in the chart.

C) [Answers to the chart are available here.](#)

Guided Practice: Human Rights on the Web

A) Choose the following nations to study (nations are listed alphabetically) or choose others:

● North Korea

- Iraq
- China
- Serbia
- Burma (Myanmar)
- Libya
- Cuba
- Rwanda

C) Assign groups of four one of the nations listed. Print and distribute the key elements of the human rights record of the assigned nation to the group members.

Creative Writing: Have students write a letter to an imaginary child or fellow student in the country assigned to their group. The students can write a group-letter using the computer. Have the students describe what life and politics are like in the United States, and have them describe how they perceive human rights to be in the nation of their "pen pal." If your school has a web site, post student letters on the site and allow for discussion of human rights records in these nations and in the United States as well.

To view a set of letters from and to authoritarian countries such as China, Cuba, and Iraq, visit the North Hagerstown High School student project entitled "Letters From America" at <http://www.cyberlearning-world.com/letters/freedom.htm>

Homework (Independent Practice): Democracy and Authoritarianism In The News

Have students watch a news broadcast or read the newspaper overnight. Have them list three examples of democracy and three examples of authoritarianism with a sentence for each example. Compare student responses during following classes.

Wrap-Up Activity (Closure): How Democratic Is the US?

Have students write a short essay that evaluates American democracy. Have them describe the strengths and weaknesses of American democracy in comparison with other nations around the world.

Evaluation: The lesson will be evaluated by:

- I. the accuracy of student's written responses;
- II. student's scores on future tests and quizzes.