

Background: Civic Virtue

The [American](#) historian [Gordon S. Wood](#) called it a universal 18th-century assumption that, while no form of government was more beautiful than a republic, monarchies had various advantages: the pomp and circumstances surrounding them cultivated a sense that the rulers were in fact superior to the ruled and entitled to their obedience, and maintained order by their presence. By contrast, in a republic, the rulers were the servants of the public, and there could therefore be no sustained coercion from them. [Laws](#) had to be obeyed for the sake of conscience, rather than fear of the ruler's wrath. In a monarchy, people might be restrained by force to submit their own interest to their government's. In a republic, by contrast, people must be *persuaded* to submit their own interests to the government, and this voluntary submission constituted the 18th century's notion of civic virtue. In the absence of such persuasion, the authority of the government would collapse, and [tyranny](#) or [anarchy](#) would be imminent.

Important aspects of civic virtue were:

1. civic conversation (listening to others, trying to reach an agreement),
2. civic education (keeping yourself informed so you can have a relevant contribution),
3. civilized behavior (decent clothing, accent, containing feelings and needs),
4. work (people had to make a useful contribution to the society).
5. religion- (emphasis on freedom of conscience) and plurality of thought. (Founding Faith, Steven Waldman)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civic_virtue#Republican_virtue

civ·ic [**siv**-ik] [Show IPA](#)

adjective

1.

of or pertaining to a city; municipal: *civic problems*.

2.

of or pertaining to citizenship; civil: *civic duties*.

3.

of citizens: *civic pride*.

Origin:

1535–45; < Latin *cīvicus*, equivalent to *cīv* (*is*) citizen + *-icus* -ic

vir·tue [**vur**-choo] (dictionary.com)

noun

1.

moral excellence; goodness; righteousness.

2.

conformity of one's life and conduct to moral and ethical principles; uprightness; rectitude.

Origin:

1175–1225; alteration (with *i* < Latin) of Middle English *vertu* < Anglo-French, Old French < Latin *virtūt-* (stem of *virtūs*) maleness, worth, virtue, equivalent to *vir* man (see [virile](#)) + *-tūt-* abstract noun suffix

Lesson Plan: Civic Virtue (Three class sessions)

Session #1

1. Make a copy of the paragraph about "Civic Virtue" for each member of the class. Conduce a "Close Reading" activity with the paragraph.

a. Have the class follow along as the teacher reads the paragraph outloud. When a student encounters a word he/she doesn't understand, have him/her circle the word with a pencil.

b. Model how you would like to have the class members work with vocabulary by defining the words "civic" and "virtue" for them. (A study of the Latin roots of these words might make them excellent spelling words for the week.)

c. Reread the title having discussed the meaning of the words. Ask the class members to use different words to describe "civic virtue".

d. Have each class member choose one word from the paragraph to look up in the same fashion. Allow for discussion as to what their vocabulary words mean.

e. Hand out the Venn diagram and go through the paragraph again- looking for similarities/differences between republics and monarchies. Fill out the diagram with the class. While doing this, note what transition words are used to clue the reader that a different topic is going to be discussed ("by contrast", "rather than") and the punctuation that is used to off-set these comparative ideas.

2. Split the class into two groups- and conduct a British debate as to the best form of government- monarchy or republican. Be sure that the class members draw out the reasons given in the paragraph.

Session #2

Ask the class why they think the Founders were more interested in a republican form of government than a monarchy. Then pose the question- if a republican form of government depended on civic virtue- what would that look like? (Have the class refer to the last sentence of the close read about civic virtue.) How would members of a republican society need to live in order for that form of government to work well?

a. Take notes on the board as class members discuss what the behavior would need to be.

b. Have the class create categories for the behaviors they suggest. Such categories might be:

- *civic conversation
- *civic education
- *civilized behavior
- *work
- *plurality of thought

c. Break the class up into five groups and have each group come up with a general statement that is true for all of the categories. Each statement must begin with the words "Civic virtue". As each group presents their statement, decide as a class whether or not it is true for all of the categories listed on the board.

d. Post the generalizations- and tell the class that from now on, the class will be using the generalizations to influence what goes on in the classroom.

Session #3

Review the progress of the class in living by the generalizations regarding "civic virtue". Ask them to discuss how they find it working. Pose the question- what happens, say in a friendship, when two people disagree? How could the ideas about civic virtue influence the conduct of the friends?

Share the book, Worst of Friends, by Suzanne Tripp Jurmain, with the class. This is a picture book about the relationship between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson.

a. Prior to reading, hand out small sticky notes of two different colors to each class member. As you read, have the class listen for times when civic virtue was practiced or not practiced. For each practiced civic virtue, have them put one of the lighter of the colored sticky notes at the RH corner of their desk. When civic virtue is not practiced, have them put one of the darker of the sticky notes in the LH corner of their desk. Pause at the end of each couple of pages- so that the class members can record in one word what the virtue was or wasn't.

b. After reading the story, have the class post their sticky notes on the board- grouping them according to color. Collect the data- did civic virtue influence the friendship of John Adams with Thomas Jefferson more than it did not? What was the outcome?

c. Share the story of George Washington and James Madison. These two were also very different, but were good friends. James Madison was helped by George with his health and invited many times to Mount Vernon. James helped George a lot too- writing his first inaugural address as well as providing much of the material for George's farewell address. Unfortunately, they also had a falling out about the time that John and Thomas did- over many of the same issues. But George and James never talked to each other after that. James got angry that George listened to someone else (Alexander Hamilton) over an issue more than he listened to him. And so he called George bad names, and worked with Thomas to create a group of people (a political party) that worked against George. James and Thomas even wrote to someone in secret (but that came out in to the open) that George was not interested in republicanism anymore. George was very sensitive to criticism, especially criticism about his intentions. He was very hard on himself to always act honorably and with civic virtue, and so it really hurt him to have his friends say this about him. Imagine how George must have felt when he learned his friends, whom he had trusted, accused him of being an apostate to the Revolution and the republic. After George Washington died, James spoke to the Virginia State House and Senate and said what a great man he thought George Washington was. It's too bad that he never said that to George, himself, after their disagreement.

d. Ask the class- using the ideas of "civic virtue", how could these two men have behaved differently so that their friendship could have been preserved? Divide the class in half- and have one half pretend to be James Madison and the other to be George Washington. Have the members write a letter to the other "person" to try to restore the friendship. Pair class members (James and George) and have them read their letters to each other.

e. Ask the class- "How could the ideas of civic virtue be used by you as you build friendships? Let them discuss as a class.

USOE Objectives met:

5th grade Social Studies- Standard 2, Objective 1b, 2a; Standard 3, Obj. 2

5th grade ELA- RL1,2,3; RI 1,2,3,4,5,6,9; RFS 3,4a; W3; SL 1,2,3; SL 1,2,3; L 1a, 2a, 2b, 2e, 3a, 4