

## NEW CANAAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

# SOCIAL STUDIES - Civics CURRICULUM OVERVIEW

All Social Studies classes are aligned in terms of skill development. The emphasis is on higher order thinking skills, such as close reading of primary sources and the analysis of pro-con, continuity and change over time, compare and contrast, and point of view. Students consistently learn to make connections between past and present. In addition, all students engage in research to solve problems and demonstrate life skills, such as oral presentation skills and their analysis of visual literacy, including charts, graphs, political cartoons, and art. The major difference between regular sections and advanced placement is the complexity of rubrics, content, materials and the rigor of scoring. Full AP course descriptions can be found at the website [advancedplacement.collegeboard.com](http://advancedplacement.collegeboard.com). The curriculum is aligned with the [Connecticut Secondary Social Studies Frameworks](#).

### **Course Text:**

GOVT 6, Sidlow and Henschen

## Unit 1: Constitutional Foundations

People structure governments in response to historical events and circumstances, political philosophies, and compromises among competing groups.

### Unit Topical Enduring Understandings and Essential Questions:

#### Topical Enduring Understanding

American government reflects the political philosophies of Greco-Roman and European political theory.

#### Sample Essential Questions

What is power?

Is power wielded by the few?

Should government reflect the will of the people?

What happens in the absence of effective government?

How does the Declaration of Independence reflect the natural rights philosophy?

#### Topical Enduring Understanding

Federalism is a compromise between the potential tyranny of a unitary system and the possible anarchy of a confederation.

#### Sample Essential Questions:

What are the risks and disadvantages of confederation?

Why is a national economic policy necessary?

Where is the line between state and federal power?

#### Topical Enduring Understanding

The US Constitution was the product of tension between the democratic impulse and the fear of mob rule.

#### Sample Essential Questions

How do competing interests influence how power is distributed and exercised?

Was the Constitution designed to limit the voice of the masses?

How does economic self-interest drive decision-making?

What Constitutional structures were designed to limit the risk of tyranny?

## Unit 2: Civil Rights and Liberties

While their scope and meaning have evolved over time, civil liberties and civil rights are essential to American democracy.

### Unit Topical Enduring Understandings and Essential Questions:

#### Topical Enduring Understanding

American citizens are guaranteed certain fundamental rights.

#### Sample Essential Questions

Why are the freedoms of speech, religion and the right to privacy essential to a democracy?

Are some rights more important than others?

Why is there so much disagreement about the scope of our civil liberties?

#### Topical Enduring Understanding

The Constitution protects the rights of all people against government overreach.

#### Sample Essential Questions

What are the limits on government investigation, prosecution, and punishment of crime?

How do we balance the rights of individuals with concerns for the security of all?

#### Topical Enduring Understanding

Civil rights protect individuals from discriminatory treatment.

#### Sample Essential Questions

Should the government treat people differently based on membership within a group?

Should private individuals or institutions be allowed to discriminate against certain groups?

Is affirmative action ever justified?

## Unit 3: Parties, Interest Groups and Media

Political groups compete, bargain and compromise to determine who gets power and what policies are pursued.

### Unit Topical Enduring Understandings and Essential Questions:

#### Topical Enduring Understanding

Political parties and interest groups are essential to self-government. (theory/nuts and bolts)

#### Sample Essential Questions

What role do parties/interest groups play in forming public policy?  
What strategies do interest groups use to influence policymaking?  
Do parties/groups create more conflict or consensus?

#### Topical Enduring Understanding

Access to political resources determines the extent of power and influence in American politics.  
(reality/practicality today)

#### Sample Essential Questions

Who shapes policy?  
Why does wealth or socioeconomic status provide access to political power?  
In advancing their own interests, do parties/groups advance the public interest?

#### Topical Enduring Understanding

Third parties in the United States tend to fail.

#### Sample Essential Questions

Why do minor parties remain minor?  
Do third parties make positive or negative contributions to the American political system?  
Do third parties have more success on a national or local scale?

#### Topical Enduring Understanding

Shifting coalitions result from social change and economic pressure.

#### Sample Essential Questions

How have history and tradition dictated party platforms?  
Why are the elections of 1828, 1860, 1896, 1932 considered critical elections?  
What causes voters to stop identifying as a member of one of the two major parties?

## Unit 4: Political Values, Campaigns and Elections

Civic participation in the political process is a function of our background, experiences, values and beliefs.

### Unit Topical Enduring Understandings and Essential Questions:

#### Topical Enduring Understanding

Who we are and where we come from determines our political identities and points of view.

#### Sample Essential Questions:

How does environment affect the beliefs, values, traditions, and actions of a society?

What factors influence one's political ideology?

Does one's political ideology evolve over time?

How are political beliefs transmitted from one generation to the next?

Why is important to know where others' political ideologies comes from?

#### Topical Enduring Understanding

Media and communications technologies influences and shapes political behavior.

#### Sample Essential Questions:

How do the media influence the outcome of an election?

What role does social media play in American political life?

What is the impact of campaign advertising on public participation and election outcomes?

What is public opinion and how do we measure it?

How does polling shape the political process?

#### Topical Enduring Understanding

The American election system provides the essential link between citizens and their representatives in government.

#### Sample Essential Questions:

How are American elections organized?

What factors affect voter turnout?

Is informed voting a responsibility or a choice?

Is the American election system fair and effective?

## Unit 5: Institutions of National Government

Government structures are established to provide order, manage conflict, and address the needs of the people. Effective government requires interdependence and cooperation among its institutions.

### Unit Topical Enduring Understandings and Essential Questions:

#### Topical Enduring Understanding

The American legislative process is inefficient by design.

#### Sample Essential Questions

- What is the representational role of a member of Congress?
- Should Congress reflect the demographics of American society?
- How does a bill become a law?
- What are the various influences on legislative decision-making?
- Is the legislative process too slow and complicated?

#### Topical Enduring Understanding

The various roles, powers and institutions of the American executive branch have evolved and expanded over time.

#### Sample Essential Questions

- Has the presidency exceeded its Constitutional intents/limits?
- Are the most influential presidents those who have pushed the limits of their Constitutional authority?
- Should the presidency have greater power in times of crisis? Is there a “right” balance of power?
- Is the power with the president or the bureaucracy?
- Is the bureaucracy accountable? Is government too big?

#### Topical Enduring Understanding

Through its interpretative powers the American judiciary makes policy.

#### Sample Essential Questions

- Is the Constitution a living document?
- Is the judiciary too powerful or too weak?
- Are judges political actors?
- What are the constraints on judicial decision-making?
- What factors should influence the selection of federal judges?