

8SS Newsletter – 9.10.20

Hello 8th Grade Families,

The students have begun their first Thematic Unit, which focuses on American Democracy. Please see the attachment for more information about the unit.

Tomorrow, the students will begin their enrichment unit on Political Science. Students will begin to study politics by first defining key governmental terms - Autocracy, Oligarchy, and Democracy. We will then discuss the six major forms of government - Monarchy, Aristocracy, Dictatorship, Theocracy, Direct Democracy, and Representative Democracy. Students will then debate which type of government the United States truly is. Students will discuss political ideologies and philosophies, and we will define the terms liberal, moderate, and conservative. Students will then analyze what characteristics make a good political candidate and discuss the presidential election process in the United States. They will also research a variety of current political issues and examine the various viewpoints surrounding those topics. Finally, students will discuss the current voting status in the United States and debate the proposal for mandatory voting laws.

Please let me know if you have any questions. Have a great weekend!

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Mrs. Esquivel

American Democracy Unit Overview:

In this unit, students will explore the roots of democracy in North America, from Native American innovations to the ideas of our 44th president. They will read not only the perspectives of leaders such as Thomas Jefferson and John F. Kennedy, but also the views of critics of the U.S. government, including Frederick Douglass and Susan B. Anthony. Thomas Paine and James Madison will tell students how democracy is supposed to work, and political cartoons about Andrew Jackson may give them a sense of how it has not worked for marginalized people or Native Americans. They will end by considering the criteria upon which the United States could be considered a great democracy.

Students will also gain exposure to the contemporary political spectrum, from the liberal views of Barack Obama to the conservative outlook of Ronald Reagan. It is important to emphasize that the meanings of the terms liberal and conservative have changed over time and are used in different ways today around the world. Likewise, political parties in the United States have shifted significantly over the past 200 years. The "Basic U.S. Political Spectrum circa 2017" diagram that the students will examine provides a sketch of current political orientations in the United States, which students may find helpful as they try to relate the views of historical figures to the vocabulary of the present.

As these discussions can be controversial, it is important to understand that students will be making connections between the material they study and their own opinions. There are no "correct" or "incorrect" answers when it comes to these questions. Exposing students to a variety of viewpoints will make them better informed as citizens. Over the course of this unit, students will have a chance to build up their own understandings of our form of government and how it influences their lives.