

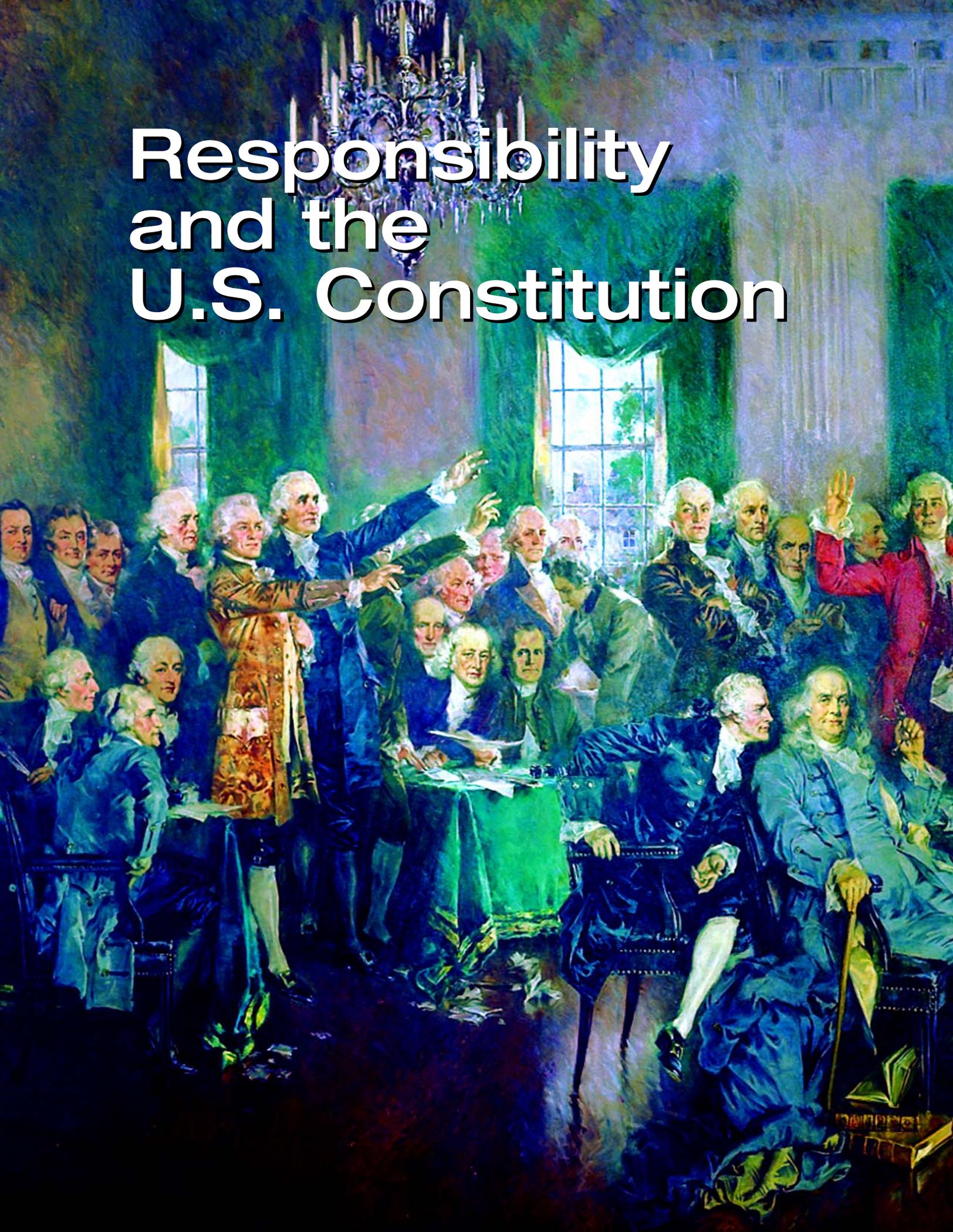
We the People

# Constitution Day

ACROSS THE COUNTRY \* SEPTEMBER 17 \*\*\* [constitutionday.civiced.org](http://constitutionday.civiced.org)



# Responsibility and the U.S. Constitution





## ABOUT CONSTITUTION DAY

In 1952, President Harry S. Truman signed a bill that moved I Am an American Day from the third Sunday in May to September 17 in order for the holiday to coincide with the signing of the U.S. Constitution in 1787. Congress renamed the holiday Citizenship Day. A joint resolution passed in 1956 requested that the president proclaim the week beginning September 17 and ending September 23 each year as Constitution Week.

In 2004, Senator Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia entered an amendment to the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2005 to change the name of the September 17 holiday to Constitution Day and Citizenship Day. The purpose of Constitution Day and Citizenship Day is to commemorate the creation and signing of the supreme law of the land and to honor and celebrate the privileges and responsibilities of U.S. citizenship for both native-born and naturalized citizens.

Byrd's amendment, known as Public Law 108-477, requires that all schools receiving federal funds hold an educational program for their students on September 17 of each year. This lesson, which is adapted from curricular materials on the Constitution produced by the Center for Civic Education, is designed to assist schools and federal agencies to meet the requirements of this law.

OBJECTIVES	PROCEDURE
<p>By the end of this lesson, students will be able to</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 identify and describe examples of responsibilities;</li> <li>2 compare and contrast the benefits related to fulfillment of responsibilities and costs related to the failure to fulfill these responsibilities;</li> <li>3 identify and describe sources of various responsibilities;</li> <li>4 identify situations in which responsibilities have been freely chosen, have been imposed, or have been assumed unconsciously;</li> <li>5 apply the concept of responsibility to segments of the U.S. Constitution.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Introducing the Lesson</b></p> <p>Begin the lesson by asking the students to take a couple of minutes to answer the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 What is responsibility?</li> <li>2 What are three examples of responsibilities that you have?</li> </ol> <p>Place student definitions on the board, and list some of their examples.</p> <p><b>Sources of Responsibilities</b> (Transitional Point)</p> <p>Ask the class: “Where do responsibilities come from?” List as many sources as they can come up with. Then, share Student Handout 1 to identify additional sources of responsibility.</p> <p>Working with the three individual examples each of the students jotted down for themselves, ask the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 From which sources did the responsibilities originate?</li> <li>2 In thinking about your responsibilities, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• which did you take on freely or voluntarily?</li> <li>• which were placed on you from external sources?</li> <li>• which have you assumed more or less unconsciously?</li> </ul> </li> </ol> <p>Have students share their answers with the class.</p>
<p><b>TERMS TO KNOW + IDENTIFY</b></p>	
<p><b>benefits and costs</b></p> <p><b>Constitution</b></p> <p><b>Preamble</b></p> <p><b>responsibility</b></p>	
<p><b>MATERIALS</b></p>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Board or chart paper</li> <li>2 Student handouts (pages 7–12)</li> </ol>	

## Costs and Benefits Associated with Responsibilities

(Transitional Point)

Lead the students through a short discussion based on these questions:

- What happens if we fulfill our responsibilities?
- What happens if we do not fulfill them?

Many students will give responses that deal with rewards and punishments.

Introduce the broader concept of the benefits and costs associated with responsibilities. Share Student Handout 2 with students.

Ask students to look at their three examples and determine what would be the benefit or cost of fulfilling or not fulfilling their responsibilities.

## Do Others Have Responsibilities Toward Us?

(Transitional Point)

The discussion thus far has revolved around the responsibilities that students have. Ask them to look outward and determine if anyone has responsibilities toward them specifically.

Have students list five of the most common responsibilities other people have toward them. For each one, have them identify

- 1 the rewards others might receive for fulfilling their responsibilities and the punishments for not doing so;
- 2 the sources of each of the responsibilities;
- 3 whether those responsibilities were taken on voluntarily or involuntarily.

Ask “What is the importance of the responsibilities, and what might be the consequences to yourself or others if you do not fulfill them?”

Have some of the students share their answers with the class.

## The Responsibilities of the Government

(Transitional Point)

Some of the examples provided above may have dealt with employees of government agencies or political officeholders, such as police or firefighters, the president, teachers, and so on.

Lead the students in a discussion on the responsibilities of government, government officials, and citizens in general.

To help start the discussion, place this quotation on the board:

“ I often wonder whether we do not rest our hopes too much upon constitutions, upon laws and upon courts. These are false hopes; believe me, these are false hopes. Liberty lies in the hearts of men and women; when it dies there, no constitution, no law, no court can save it; no constitution, no law, no court can even do much to help it. While it lies there it needs no constitution, no law, no court to save it. ”

Learned Hand, “Liberty,” *Yale Alumni Magazine* (June 6, 1941).

Ask students some or all of the following questions:

- In this quotation what responsibilities are implied?
- Who is responsible for each?
- To whom are the responsibilities due?
- What might be the reward for fulfillment?
- What might be the punishment for nonfulfillment?
- What civic and moral principle can you identify as the source of each responsibility?
- Would such responsibilities be taken on freely, be imposed by others, or be assumed unconsciously?

### **Responsibilities within the U.S. Constitution**

(Transitional Point)

The U.S. Constitution is the source for the structure of American government and the responsibilities that lie within it. Ask students to brainstorm what they know about the U.S. Constitution. Write their responses on the board.

At this point, students will look at certain parts of the U.S. Constitution from the perspective of responsibility as discussed throughout the lesson.

Divide the class into five groups. If the class is large, create more groups, and have multiple groups assigned to the same segments.

Assign each group a segment of the U.S. Constitution from the Student Activity Sheet. Groups are to read the assigned segment and answer the questions that follow.

Have each group report their responses.

### **Close the Lesson**

Conclude the lesson by asking students to think about what their responsibilities might be as citizens of their communities and of the United States. What might be the benefits and costs of fulfilling those responsibilities?

# STUDENT HANDOUT 1

## What Is Responsibility?

Responsibility is a duty or obligation to do something or not to do something.

## Sources of Responsibility

As you read about each of the sources of responsibility described below, think about responsibilities you might have that are similar to those in each category.

- 1 **Promises** When one individual makes a promise to another, that individual takes on the responsibility or obligation of keeping the promise, or “living up to his or her word.” Sometimes people make promises in the form of legal agreements called contracts. At other times, promises are informal. You should recognize that when you make a promise, you consent or agree to fulfill a responsibility or obligation.
- 2 **Assignments** Sometimes people assign or impose responsibilities on others. Whether working as a student or an employee, in industry or government, one is often assigned certain responsibilities. For example, in school you may be assigned responsibility for doing homework.
- 3 **Appointment** In some situations, people may be chosen or appointed to positions that carry responsibilities. For example, a person might be appointed by a governor to serve as a judge or to serve the rest of a term left vacant in a legislature.
- 4 **Occupation** Each occupation or job carries certain responsibilities.
- 5 **Law** Laws place responsibilities on almost everyone in society.
- 6 **Custom** Some responsibilities come from customs—traditions or standard practices developed over time—that people in society are expected to follow.
- 7 **Citizenship** In the United States, people have certain responsibilities just because they are citizens.
- 8 **Moral principles** Moral principles are rules or standards of conduct based on principles of right and wrong

Source: *Foundations of Democracy*, Center for Civic Education, 2003. “Responsibility,” Units 1 and 2.

## STUDENT HANDOUT 2

### Benefits and Costs of Responsibility

There are numerous potential benefits and costs of responsibility. They will be different in various situations. Many are interrelated. It is important to take benefits and costs into account in order to determine whether to take on a particular responsibility and decide which responsibility should be given priority over others.

Some of the potential benefits of the fulfillment of responsibility include the following:

- 1 Predictability** When people consistently assume and fulfill responsibilities, others may anticipate this behavior.
- 2 Security** Being able to predict or assume that a person or group will fulfill certain responsibilities may enable those affected (or involved) to feel secure.
- 3 Efficiency** When a number of people are fulfilling their responsibilities on related and interdependent tasks, work may be accomplished more efficiently.
- 4 Cooperation** When people working together on a task fulfill their responsibilities, cooperation is enhanced.
- 5 Fair distribution of benefits and burdens** If benefits and burdens are fairly distributed to begin with, and all those involved fulfill their related responsibilities, it is less likely that some individuals will have more or less than their fair share.
- 6 Autonomy** Establishing a record of fulfilling responsibilities may make it more likely that a person will be allowed greater autonomy in fulfilling ongoing responsibilities and other matters.
- 7 Self-esteem** A person who consistently fulfills responsibilities may have increased feelings of competence, self-worth, and self-esteem.
- 8 Acceptance and approval from others** A person who takes on responsibilities may generally be accepted and approved by others, particularly by those who may rely to one degree or another on the fulfillment of the responsibilities.
- 9 Gains in knowledge, skills, and experience** A person who takes on and successfully fulfills various responsibilities may gain knowledge, skills, and experience from such behavior.
- 10 Rewards** The fulfillment of responsibilities commonly results in rewards ranging from increases in self-esteem and approval by others to opportunities for new positions, honors, awards, and increased payment for services.

## STUDENT HANDOUT 2 \_\_\_ CONTINUED

Some of the potential costs include the following:

- 1 **Burden of fulfillment** The fulfillment of responsibilities commonly requires time, effort, and possible financial costs.
- 2 **Feelings of resentment** Resentment may be felt toward those who have placed unwelcome responsibilities on one's shoulders, and resentment may be felt by those who wish to have been given responsibilities that were given to another person.
- 3 **Anxiety related to possible failure** Fear or uneasiness may result from uncertainty of one's ability to adequately fulfill a responsibility and concern over the possible punishments that might result from nonfulfillment.
- 4 **Sacrifice of other interests, needs, or values** Acceptance of responsibilities may mean that other values, needs, or interests must be set aside.
- 5 **Abdication of responsibility by others** If one person or group appears to have primary responsibility for a task, others might ignore their obligations or duties to share the responsibility for the task.

Source: *Law in a Free Society*, Center for Civic Education, 1979. "Responsibility," Level IV, Units 1 and 2.

## STUDENT ACTIVITY SHEET

### Instructions

Read the assigned excerpt from the U. S. Constitution printed below and answer the questions that follow.

### Preamble

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

#### What do you think?

- 1 Identify each of the responsibilities the Preamble sets forth.  
Who is responsible for them?
- 2 What rewards might be related to fulfillment of the responsibilities?  
What penalties might be related to failure to fulfill the responsibilities?
- 3 What are the sources of the responsibilities?
- 4 What might be the results of society's failure to fulfill the responsibilities?
- 5 What costs and benefits are related to the responsibilities?

### Article IV

**Section 1** Full Faith and Credit shall be given in each State to the public Acts, Records, and judicial Proceedings of every other State; And the Congress may by general Laws prescribe the manner in which such Acts, Records and Proceedings shall be proved, and the Effect thereof.

**Section 2.2** A Person charged in any State with Treason, Felony, or other Crime, who shall flee from Justice, and be found in another State, shall on Demand of the executive Authority of the State from which he fled, be delivered up, to be removed to the State having Jurisdiction of the Crime.

**Section 4** The United States shall guarantee to every State in this Union a Republican Form of Government, and shall protect each of them against Invasion; and on Application of the Legislature, or of the Executive (when the Legislature cannot be convened) against domestic Violence.

#### What do you think?

- 1 What person or group is assigned responsibility?
- 2 What are the responsibilities assigned?
- 3 To whom are the responsibilities owed?

- 4 What are the related costs and benefits?
- 5 What is the source of the responsibilities? Are the responsibilities voluntary or involuntary?

### **First Amendment (Bill of Rights, 1791)**

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.

#### **What do you think?**

- 1 What person or group is assigned responsibility?
- 2 What are the responsibilities assigned?
- 3 To whom are the responsibilities owed?
- 4 What are the related costs and benefits?
- 5 What is the source of the responsibilities?  
Are the responsibilities voluntary or involuntary?

### **Fourteenth Amendment, Section 1 (1868)**

All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

#### **What do you think?**

- 1 What responsibilities are placed on state governments by this amendment?
- 2 To whom are the responsibilities owed?
- 3 What rewards to members of state governments might there be for fulfillment of the responsibilities?
- 4 What penalties might occur to members of state governments for failure to fulfill them?
- 5 What is the source of the responsibilities?
- 6 Might members of state governments take on such responsibilities freely, by imposition, or without conscious or deliberate thought?

**Nineteenth Amendment (1920)**

The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.

Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

**What do you think?**

- 1 What person or group is assigned responsibility?
- 2 What are the responsibilities assigned?
- 3 To whom are the responsibilities owed?
- 4 What are the related costs and benefits?
- 5 What is the source of the responsibilities?  
Are the responsibilities voluntary or involuntary?

## CREDITS

This supplemental lesson celebrating the Constitution is adapted from *Law in a Free Society*, “Responsibility,” Level IV, and *Foundations of Democracy*, “Responsibility,” Units 1 and 2.

This Constitution and citizenship lesson is cosponsored by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), founded in 1865. AASA is the professional organization for over 14,000 educational leaders across America and in many other countries. AASA’s mission is to support and develop effective school-system leaders who are dedicated to the highest quality public education for all children. AASA’s major focus is standing up for public education.

The Center for Civic Education is a nonprofit, non-partisan educational corporation dedicated to fostering the development of informed, responsible participation in civic life by citizens committed to the values and principles fundamental to American constitutional democracy. The Center specializes in civic and citizenship education and international education exchange programs for developing democracies. For additional information on the Center’s programs and curricula, contact the Center for Civic Education.

The **Foundations of Democracy Series** consists of curricular materials for students from kindergarten through twelfth grade on four concepts fundamental to an understanding of politics and government: Authority, Privacy, Responsibility, and Justice. This multidisciplinary curriculum draws upon such fields as political philosophy, political science, law, history, literature, and environmental studies.

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