

Lesson 1: The Rule of Law and Public Virtue

Content Areas:

- Civics, History, Government (Citizenship)
- Fine Arts (Composition, Symbolism, Interpretation)

Grade Level:

- Middle and High School

Objectives:

The student will:

- Interpret primary documents and explain varying views of the Founders in relation to their beliefs about citizenship in a republican form of government.
- Interpret a painting and a sculpture in relation to the concept of citizenship in a republican form of government.
- Discuss the importance of public virtue to the preservation of the rule of law.

Lesson:

This lesson involves students confronting an important question as old as the United States: Now that the people have a republic, how will they keep it? In the 18th century, most political theorists believed that notions about democracy and republican forms of government that went back to the ancient Greeks were accurate: democracies naturally devolve into tyranny. Yet even with such beliefs, those at the Constitutional Convention building on the ideals of the Enlightenment, created a republican form of government based on the rule of law that they hoped could endure and evade this alleged natural devolution. Yet the checks and balances provided in the Constitution were not enough. The rule of law was not enough. Certain extra ingredients were needed to insure that laws were respected and that checks and balances worked and remained in place. Through the examination of documents from the Founders and artistic representations of two Founding Fathers, the students will explore these extra needed ingredients; ingredients that are a necessary element for preserving the rule of law and guaranteeing its protections to all citizens.

Pre-Lesson Prep:

1. Transfer the images of Paul Revere and George Washington, found below in [Appendix A](#), to a transparency or into a PowerPoint presentation, depending on your technology capabilities. You will need to project this image so that the entire class can view it.
2. Provide each student with a copy of the [REED-LO Matrix](#).
3. Make copies of the primary sources related to the Founding Fathers' thoughts on citizenship found in [Appendix B](#). You will need to divide the students into groups of three to four with each group receiving one copy of each document found in [Appendix B](#).

4. Make copies of the Document Analysis Sheets found in [Appendix C](#). Be sure to make enough copies for each student even though the students will be working in groups of three to four students.

The Lesson – Day 1 (Note – this lesson may easily take 2 days. The teacher should simply end the lesson at a suitable point on the first day and then pick up where the class left off on Day 2):

1. Begin the lesson by giving each student or each pair of students two copies of [REED-LO Matrix](#). Explain that REED-LO is a [scaffolding approach](#) to interpreting works of art and that the students will use this guide as they examine John Singleton Copley's *Paul Revere* and Jean-Antoine Houdon's statue of George Washington. Be sure to note that this lesson is intended to be driven through dialog as the students share their thoughts about the works of art examined.
2. Project the images of *Paul Revere* and *George Washington* on a screen so that the entire class can view them.
3. Before introducing the two works of art to the class, it may be helpful to review the definition of the rule of law with them. Then proceed to read or paraphrase the following information:

“Allegedly in 1787 after the Constitutional Convention disbanded, ‘A lady asked Dr. [Benjamin] Franklin: Well Doctor what have we got a republic or a monarchy--A republic replied the Doctor if you can keep it.’ Franklin’s response gives a moment to pause. This quick-witted-quip put forth by Franklin succinctly reminds us that it is the citizenry’s responsibility to insure the republic survives. Historically, from the age of Plato political philosophers had argued that democracies devolve into tyranny; democracies, and even republican forms of democracy, were dangerous. And yet, building on the thoughts formulated during the Enlightenment, the 55 delegates who attended the Constitutional Convention in 1787 created a republican form of government based on democratic principles. How would the nation insure that it would not suffer the fate so many honored political theorists from ancient Greece on had predicted? The Founders had their ideas about this – and it is this question we will explore by examining two works of art and several excerpts from the Founders’ writings.”

4. After relating this information to the students, have them begin to complete each [REED-LO](#) interpretive model as they examine both the painting of Paul Revere and the statue of George Washington. Alternate between the two works for each step. Students will begin by recording their answers to the questions in Step 1, React, and then sharing their thoughts with the class – they will complete the step for both works, using both REED-LO sheets to record their answers. After sufficient discussion, being sure to compare and contrast their responses to each work, have the students advance to Step 2 on REED-LO, Embrace. Again, after the students share their thoughts, proceed to Step 3, Explore. Continue this process of having students react to the guiding questions in each step to each work of art and then sharing and discussing their responses until the students reach Step 5, Locate.

5. When the students reach Step 5, Locate, divide the students into groups of three or four and give each group the packet of primary sources found in [Appendix B](#) and give each student the Document Analysis Sheets found in [Appendix C](#). Have the students examine these documents and complete the Document Analysis Sheets for each document. The students should also formulate conclusions about how these documents relate to the painting of Paul Revere and the statue of George Washington.
6. After the students examine the documents, lead a group discussion in which the students share their thoughts as to how the works of art reflect some of the ideals expressed in the documents. In particular, focus on how the artists portray their subjects in a manner that suggests these men have public virtue (For help with interpreting the works of art, refer to “For the Teacher” below).

Homework:

1. After the discussion related to Step 5, Locate, comes to a close, assign the students Step 6, Opine, for homework.
2. Each student is to write a one to two paragraph “label” for either work of art. This label should be grammatically correct, and it should discuss the work of art in relation to the concept of the rule of law and public virtue, good citizenship, and how the work of art possibly answers the question put forth in the introduction to the lesson: how will the republic survive?

Students should have their labels completed before the next class. As a closing activity, teachers should have some of the students read their labels and then have a class discussion about the students’ thoughts.

For the Teacher:

The teacher should read the following material before conducting this lesson so that he or she can help the students explore the works of art that serve as the focus for this activity:

http://picturingamerica.neh.gov/downloads/pdfs/Resource_Guide_Chapters/PictAmer_Resource_Book_Chapter_2A.pdf

<http://www.history.org/foundation/journal/autumn03/houdon.cfm>

Appendix A



Paul Revere
John Singleton Copley
Oil on Canvas
Ca. 1768



George Washington
Jean-Antoine Houdon
Marble
1785-1791

Appendix B

Document 1: Thomas Jefferson, Preamble to a Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge

Experience hath shown, that even under the best forms [of government], those entrusted with power have, in time, and by slow operations, perverted it into tyranny; and it is believed that the most effectual means of preventing this would be, to illuminate, as far as practicable, the minds of the people at large, and more especially to give them knowledge of those facts, which history exhibits, that . . . they may be enabled to know ambition under all its shapes, and prompt to exert their natural powers to defeat its purposes; And whereas it is generally true that that people will be happiest whose laws are best, and are best administered, and that laws will be wisely formed, and honestly administered, in proportion as those who form and administer them are wise and honest; whence it becomes expedient for promoting the public happiness that those persons, whom nature hath endowed with genius and virtue, should be rendered by liberal education worthy to receive, and able to guard the sacred deposit of the rights and liberties of their fellow citizens, and that they should be called to that charge without regard to wealth, birth or other accidental condition or circumstance; but the indigence of the greater number disabling them from so educating, at their own expense, those of their children whom nature hath fitly formed and disposed to become useful instruments for the public, it is better that such should be sought for and educated at the common expense of all, than that the happiness of all should be confided to the weak or wicked: . . . (Fall 1778)

Document 2: Samuel Adams to John Scollay

I love the People of Boston. I once thought, that City would be the *Christian Sparta*. But Alas! Will men never be free! They will be free no longer than while they remain virtuous. Sidney tells us, there are times when People are not worth saving. Meaning, when they have lost their Virtue. I pray God, this may never be truly said of my beloved Town. (30 Dec. 1780)

Document 3: Richard Henry Lee to Henry Laurens

But in a popular state, one spring more is *necessary*, namely *Virtue*" . . . I know there are Mandevilles among you who laugh at virtue, and with vain ostentatious display of words will deduce from vice, public good! But such men are much fitter to be Slaves in the corrupt, rotten despotisms of Europe, than to remain citizens of young and rising republics. (6 June 1779)

Document 4: Thomas Jefferson to James Madison

After all, it is my principle that the will of the Majority should always prevail. If they approve the proposed Convention [Constitution] in all its parts, I shall concur in it cheerfully, in hopes that they will amend it whenever they shall find it work wrong. I think our governments will remain virtuous for many centuries; as long as they are chiefly agricultural; and this will be as long as there shall be vacant lands in any part of America. When they get piled upon one another in large cities, as in Europe, they will become corrupt as in Europe. Above all things I hope the education of the common people will be attended to; convinced that on their good sense we may rely with the most security for the preservation of a due degree of liberty. (20 Dec. 1787)

Document 5: Noah Webster, On the Education of Youth in America

In our American republics, where [government] is in the hands of the people, knowledge should be universally diffused by means of public schools. Of such consequence is it to society, that the people who make laws, should be well informed, that I conceive no Legislature can be justified in neglecting proper establishments for this purpose. When I speak of a diffusion of knowledge . . . An acquaintance with ethics, and with the general principles of law, commerce, money and government, is necessary for the yeomanry of a republican state. This acquaintance they might obtain by means of books calculated for schools, and read by the children, during the winter months, and by the circulation of public papers. (1788)

Document 6: James Madison to Edward Livingston

Every new & successful example therefore of a perfect separation between ecclesiastical and civil matters, is of importance. And I have no doubt that every new example, will succeed, as every past one has done, in showing that religion & Govt. will both exist in greater purity, the less they are mixed together . . . I cannot speak particularly of any of the cases excepting that of Virga. where it is impossible to deny that Religion prevails with more zeal, and a more exemplary priesthood than it ever did when established and patronised by Public authority. We are teaching the world the great truth that Govts. do better without Kings & Nobles than with them. The merit will be doubled by the other lesson that Religion flourishes in greater purity, without than with the aid of Govt. (10 July 1822)

Document 7: John Adams to Mercy Warren

Such a Government is only to be supported by pure Religion or Austere Morals. Public Virtue cannot exist in a Nation without private, and public Virtue is the only Foundation of Republics. There must be a positive Passion for the public good, the public Interest, Honor, Power and Glory, established in the Minds of the People, or there can be no Republican Government, nor any real Liberty: and this public Passion must be Superior to all private Passions. Men must be ready, they must pride themselves, and be happy to sacrifice their private Pleasures, Passions and Interests, nay, their private Friendships and dearest Connections, when they stand in Competition with the Rights of Society . . . Every man must seriously set himself to root out his Passions, Prejudices and Attachments, and to get the better of his private Interest. The only reputable Principle and Doctrine must be that all Things must give Way to the public. (16 Apr. 1776)

Document 8: Massachusetts Constitution of 1780

Wisdom, and knowledge, as well as virtue, diffused generally among the body of the people, being necessary for the preservation of their rights and liberties; and as these depend on spreading the opportunities and advantages of education in the various parts of the country, and among the different orders of the people, it shall be the duty of legislators and magistrates, in all future periods of this Commonwealth, to cherish the interests of literature and the sciences, and all seminaries of them; especially the university at Cambridge, public schools, and grammar schools in the towns; to encourage private societies and public institutions, rewards and immunities, for the promotion of agriculture, arts, sciences, commerce, trades, manufactures, and a natural history of the country; to countenance and inculcate the principles of humanity and general benevolence, public and private charity, industry and frugality, honesty and punctuality in their dealings; sincerity, good humor, and all social affections, and generous sentiments among the people. (*Handlin 467*)

Document 3:

Author:

Date:

Type of Document: Letter Legislative Bill Diary
 Commentary State Constitution

3 Most Important Points: 1 –

2 -

3 –

Answer this Document Gives for the Guiding Question:

Document 4:

Author:

Date:

Type of Document: Letter Legislative Bill Diary
 Commentary State Constitution

3 Most Important Points: 1 –

2 -

3 –

Answer this Document Gives for the Guiding Question:

Document 5:

Author:

Date:

Type of Document: Letter Legislative Bill Diary
 Commentary State Constitution

3 Most Important Points: 1 –

2 -

3 –

Answer this Document Gives for the Guiding Question:

Document 6:

Author:

Date:

Type of Document: Letter Legislative Bill Diary
 Commentary State Constitution

3 Most Important Points: 1 –

2 -

3 –

Answer this Document Gives for the Guiding Question:

