

# Civics Bowl!

## Learning the Basics of U.S. Government in a Fun Way

*This unit is geared toward Level 5 through Transition and requires several activities for successful preparation.*

### Objectives:

- Learn fundamentals of American history/government.
- Understand the reasons for and significance of: *The Declaration of Independence* and the *U.S. Constitution*, with emphasis on *The Bill of Rights*.
- Understand the issue of slavery and the Civil Rights Movement.
- (Grammar Objective) Be able to pronounce and write historic dates within the context of simple past tense sentences.\*

### Pre-Test:

Students are given their own copies of the 100 questions. (They should also be made aware that these questions are available on-line in written and audio form. The latter was of special value to a student with limited vision.) Working in groups of 3-4, students quiz each other informally, checking questions they know. This should be done in sections, as 100 questions at once can be a bit overwhelming. Students are often pleased and surprised by how much they already know. They should write a question mark by questions they are completely unfamiliar with. The teacher may create an informal chart based on student responses, giving the teacher a clear idea of which questions need more focus.

### Procedure:

A. Students cut and fold their own pocket-guide from a printed handout and use it to familiarize themselves with a timeline. After students read the guide both silently and aloud, the teacher models a question/answer exchange based on the timeline, then allows students to question each other. Example: *Which happened first/earlier, World War I or the California Gold Rush? The California Gold Rush happened first.* (I do not specifically teach the passive voice during this unit, but I model it and encourage students to use it. *Who wrote the Declaration of Independence? Thomas Jefferson. Yes, it was written by Thomas Jefferson.*)

B. \*Grammar Objective; procedure: 1.) students review dates of events included in timeline. Example: *When did the California Gold Rush take place? It took place in 1848.* 2.) Student-led follow-up: One student silently writes a date from the timeline on the whiteboard, such as “Oct. 12, 1492.” A second student must read the date correctly. The process may then be reversed, with one student reciting a date and the other writing it correctly. (It is important that the students themselves, not the teacher, do most of the talking, to emphasize the importance of speaking loudly and clearly enough to be understood.) 3.) Additional practice pronouncing numbers: Civics Bowl practices are student-led. One student draws the number of the question to be answered and reads it aloud. The importance of clearly enunciating the difference between “13,” “30” and “33” becomes self-evident.

C. Direct instruction/*The Constitution/ The Bill of Rights*: Students read and complete *Ventures Civics* workbook page 54; Review reasons for the writing of *The Declaration of Independence* as compared to the purpose of *The Constitution*.

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*Materials for game*: game wheel; container with slips of paper numbered 1-100 for random selection of questions; two moderators, one to draw numbers and record scores, the other to read the questions aloud.

(**Note**: I made the game wheel from the top of an old plastic storage container, cut into a circle; plus the spindle from a CD/DVD pack; plus a rubber band to hold the wheel on the spindle and a couple of magnets (tape works too) to secure the whole contraption to a whiteboard. Detailed illustration attached.)

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D. **Civics Quiz Bowl** requires both knowledge and a bit of luck, which makes the game more exciting and levels the field if competing teams have different levels of preparation or English skill. A rotating panel of 3-5 students (depending on space and the total number of players) from each team is asked a question selected at random. Members of the panel may confer before giving their “final answer,” but other team members must not respond until they themselves are on their team’s panel. A correct answer gives a panel member the right to spin the game wheel. The spin may win the team 0, 500 or 1000 points. Each panel participates in three rounds of questions before others on their team take a place on the panel. (This rotation permits all students to play, but prevents any one strong player from dominating a game.)

This game may be “tweaked,” to suit a particular group. For example, to make this game either more or less challenging, the instructor may eliminate easier or more difficult questions by number. (I removed question 23, asking the name of one’s representative in the House of Representatives, because our students come from various congressional districts.)

“Practices” for the final competition between two teams should be completely student led. Students may choose a team captain.

**Post-Test/ Evaluation**: Students may take a written test based on this unit, if the teacher wishes to use this activity as an “outcome,” but the practice games and Quiz Bowl itself give teachers a clear indication of students’ mastery of the material. (I have included a copy of an “outcome” based on this material.)

**Activity extension - almost limitless writing prompts**: Which of the freedoms guaranteed by *The Bill of Rights* do you think is the most important and why? What can happen to a government without these guarantees? If you could add an amendment to the U.S. Constitution, what would it be?

### **Resources:**

#### **STUDENT HANDOUTS**

*Pocket guide to U.S. History*, may be printed out from attachment or from:  
<http://classes.nancypaulinesimpson.com/index.php?p=427>  
(Note that there are two sides to this guide.)

*A Summary of the U.S. Constitution*, may be printed out from attachment or from:  
[Teachers.sumnersd.org/shs/cbirklid/documents/constitution\\_summary.pdf](http://Teachers.sumnersd.org/shs/cbirklid/documents/constitution_summary.pdf)

Video of this project is available at: <http://www.youtube.com/profile?user=08nancita24#p/a/u/0/z4vTXVSKdlo>

*100 Questions on American History and Government*, may be printed out from attachment or downloaded from:

<http://www.uscis.gov/USCIS/Office%20of%20Citizenship/Citizenship%20Resource%20Center%20Site/Publications/100q.pdf>

## **BOOKS**

*Ventures Civics Worksheets*: 54 (The Bill of Rights), 55 (The Three Branches of the U.S. Government), 88 (Causes of the Civil War), 89 (The Civil Rights Movement)

*The Oxford Picture Dictionary*, pps. 114-116, and accompanying worksheets and workbook pages

*Skill Sharpeners 3*, pps. 6-7, (These pages include a simplified timeline and focus on the

## **VIDEO/ONLINE**

*A Promise of Freedom: An Introduction to U.S. History and Civics for Immigrants*; produced for U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services by the National Constitution Center, Philadelphia. (The DVD of this beautiful 12-minute video is included in the citizenship pack and is available online, both to watch and download, at:

<http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/menuitem.acfc8bb2d633f506e34f4a10526e0aa0/?vgnextoid=1a9bd63b1a43b210VgnVCM100000082ca60aRCRD&vgnnextchannel=3f40d63b1a43b210VgnVCM100000082ca60aRCRD> (Or simply Google the title of the video!)

You Tube: *The History of Slavery In America* (parts 1 through 3), The History Channel