

# Grade 8 Civics

## Oak Meadow Coursebook

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Grade



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# America's Political Heritage

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Before the pilgrims left the *Mayflower* in November of 1620 and set foot on land along the coast of Massachusetts, the men held an important meeting. Shocked to discover themselves far from the Virginia colony where they had planned to settle, they realized that they were not going to be part of an established colony with existing laws and leaders, but of their own community in which they would have to decide their own laws and leaders.

In this historic meeting these men, who had always lived in a country where laws were imposed on them by others, made an agreement that “just and equal” laws would be made for the “general good of the colony.” We remember this agreement today as the Mayflower Compact.



signing the Mayflower Compact

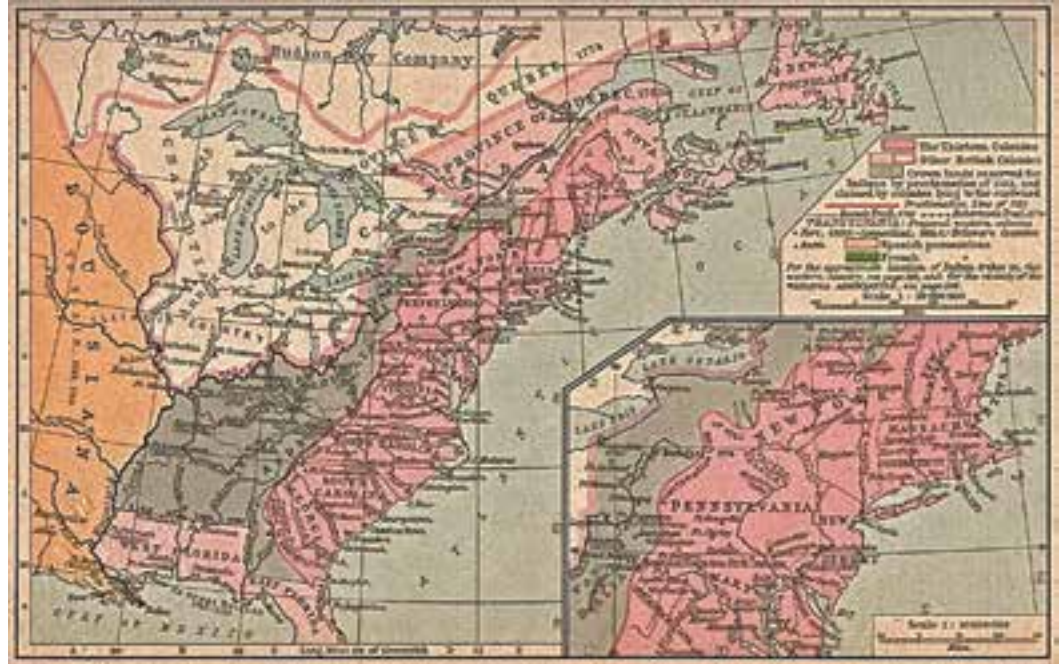
The Mayflower Compact said, in part, “We whose names are underwritten... covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil body politick, for our better ordering and preservation, and furtherance of the ends aforesaid; and by virtue hereof do enact, constitute, and frame such just and equal laws, ordinances, acts, constitutions, and offices, from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general good of the colony...”

These pilgrims didn't set out to create their own government, but were forced to do so. They were far from their “mother country” of England, and in order to create peaceful coexistence in their new land, rules of some kind were required.

By 1750 there were three different kinds of colonies in America. The *royal colonies* (Georgia, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York,

## America's Political Heritage

(continued)



the British Colonies in 1775

North and South Carolina, and Virginia), were ruled directly by Britain through a royal governor and council who were appointed by the king. The colonists elected their own lower council which had limited freedom. The governor was able to veto decisions by the lower council, but the lower council couldn't veto decisions by the higher council or the governor. As time went on, these colonists became increasingly frustrated and angry about their lack of decision-making power.

Delaware, Maryland, and Pennsylvania were *proprietary colonies*. They were ruled by individuals or groups who had been given grants of land by the King of England. The king was still the ultimate ruler in these colonies, but the proprietors had a great deal of freedom. They appointed the upper council or legislature and the governor, and the colonists themselves elected the lower council. As in the royal colonies, the governor could veto decisions made by the lower legislature.

The King of England granted a charter to groups of settlers in some colonies which allowed them to create their own government. Connecticut and Rhode Island were *charter colonies*. The charter colonies elected their own governors and both councils, or houses. In these colonies the king could approve or disapprove the choice of governor, but the governor had no power to veto the decisions of the councils.





## America's Political Heritage

(continued)

### The Articles of Confederation

The American Revolution was won in 1783. The United States became an independent country with thirteen states, but as you have read above, there was no constitution or group of laws that operated in all thirteen states.

There was no central government at that time, so the Continental Congress (a group of men gathered together specifically for this purpose) created a plan called the *Articles of Confederation*.

The Articles of Confederation were supposed to unite the colonies in “friendship with each other, for the common defense, the security of their Liberties, and their mutual and general welfare...” Under the Articles, each state retained most of its own power; because of their experiences with England, the colonists were still cautious and concerned about the possibility of a central government having too much authority over them.

While the Articles of Confederation were an important first step toward uniting the colonies, they fell far short. Under this arrangement the Congress had no authority to make anyone obey the laws. It had no power to charge taxes, so couldn't raise any money to establish programs to benefit the colonies. There was no money even to build a navy to protect American ships from pirates! In fact, there wasn't even any standard form of money from one state to another, because most states printed their own paper money and some states used tobacco or whiskey instead of the coins and bills we consider to be money.

The states began to argue with each other and several of them almost entered into war about issues involving land boundaries, taxes, and trading. Leaders such as George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and James Madison, who had helped to bring the new nation to independence, started to speak out about the need for a stronger national government which would unify all of the states.



George Washington





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# The Constitution

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The challenge that faced the delegates at the Constitutional Convention was to establish a strong national government without making the states weak. With the new governmental system that emerged, Americans would be citizens of both the national government and the government of their own particular state. Some of the power would be held by the federal government, so it could make some laws to be applied to the whole country. Other powers would be kept by each of the state governments, to make laws that would apply to the people in that state.

There was also a great deal of debate and discussion about the decision making power of the northern states versus the southern states. These two parts of the country had very different geographies, types of crops, and economies. While the North ran small farms, factories, fishing and trapping operations, the South grew cotton, tobacco, and used slaves on large plantations. Each side feared that a federal government would pass laws regulating shipping and trading that would have negative effects on it. More important was the issue of slavery. There were many slaves in the South, and southern states wanted to include them in the population count so they could have more representation in the new government. At the same time, the southern states didn't want to count the slaves in the population when it came to determining federal taxes. In opposition, the northern states argued that slaves shouldn't be counted in determining the number of representatives in the new federal government, because the slaves were treated as property, not as people. At



**Independence Hall in Philadelphia, where the Constitutional Convention met**

## The Constitution

*(continued)*

the same time, the North wanted to include slaves in the population count so that more taxes could be collected from the southern states. A strange compromise was reached: it was decided that five slaves would be counted as three people in deciding how many representatives each state could have, and how much tax would be demanded from each state. A slave was not constitutionally considered to be equal to one whole person until 1865!

The basic framework proposed by James Madison was finally adopted in principle. It provided for a strong national government with three branches (similar to the system the individual states were currently operating under). These branches are the Legislative, the Executive, and the Judicial Branches. You will be learning more about each of these in turn later.

It was also decided that the Legislative Branch would be a two-house legislature, or Congress. The two houses of Congress would be the House of Representatives and the Senate. In order for a law to pass, both the Senate and the House of Representatives would have to approve it. The House of Representatives would be elected based upon the state's population, so a larger state would have more Representatives. In the Senate, however, each state would have two Senators regardless of population, so the small states would be represented. This plan, along with the issue of how to count slaves, became known as the Great Compromise. Each side gave up part of what it wanted in order to reach an agreement that would benefit both.

In addition to the Legislative Branch, which would make the laws, the Executive Branch was established to enforce the law, and make sure it was carried out properly. In addition, a Judicial Branch was established to act as the interpreter of federal law and the Constitution. The convention finally drew to a close with 38 delegates signing the Constitution on September 17, 1787.



**Patrick Henry addresses the Constitutional Congress**













## Grade 8



# Champions of Freedom

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Franklin D. Roosevelt, U.S. President from 1933-45, once said, “Freedom from war is ideally linked with freedom from want.” Both Franklin and his wife, Eleanor, were tireless champions of his dream of “peace and a more abundant life for the peoples of the world.” Eleanor Roosevelt became the world’s foremost spokesperson for human rights.

Dr. Linus Pauling, a chemist who won the Nobel Prize for his work in antibiotics, filed suit against the U.S. Department of Defense, the Atomic Energy Commission, and their counterparts, to protest their right to conduct nuclear bomb tests. Dr. Pauling wrote a book entitled *No More War*, encouraging people to find peaceful ways to coexist. He believed that the way to avert nuclear war was to begin making safe, just, and effective international agreements, and that the first of these should involve the ending



**Eleanor Roosevelt**



**Dr. Linus Pauling**

# Champions of Freedom

(continued)



Nelson Mandela

of all nuclear weapons tests. Needless to say, he was not very popular in many circles. One city paper even commented philosophically, “Nonconformists often play a lone role in our society, but society for its own health needs them.”

Martin Luther King, Jr. was another tireless champion of freedom, leading the Civil Rights movement during the 1960s with peace and dignity. Nelson Mandela continues the fight for freedom for all Africans as the President of South Africa today. Mother Theresa,

who died in 1997, was a nun who worked nearly all her life to help poor children living in the streets of Calcutta, India.

The United Nations was formed in order to promote peaceful relationships among nations of the world.

1. Cut out newspaper or magazine articles this week about the United Nations. At the end of the week, write a brief summary about the many activities of the U.N. in the world today.

**NOTE:** If you are unable to find news of the U.N. this week, keep looking until you find at least five articles. Keep your teacher informed of your progress, and send your summary when you have collected at least five articles to discuss.

### Extra project idea:

- Choose one of the “champions of freedom” mentioned above, or someone else in whom you have an interest, and learn about him or her. Write a brief report about this person’s altruistic work.



General Assembly, United Nations headquarters





## Grade 8



# Community Leaders

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You have learned a lot about the way your community functions. It is every citizen's duty to understand how the government works, what opportunities are available to the community and its individuals, and what the issues of the community are. Finally, it is every citizen's responsibility to vote, as each vote makes a difference in local, state and national outcomes. Every person makes a difference in the local community.

1. Write a two-page report on a person who has made a difference in the quality of life in your community. Interview this person face-to-face. If this is not possible, a telephone conversation is acceptable.

If it is not possible to speak with the person you would like to write about, either find another person to research, or find another way to gain the information you need in order to complete the assignment. You may have to speak with people who work closely with the person you are interested in.

If it is truly impossible to write about someone in your own community, you may select someone else, anywhere in the world, who is currently alive and actively involved in contributing to the quality of life in his or her community or in the world.

Generate your own list of questions to ask before you begin the interview. As you talk to this person, make notes about the following points to include in your report:



**teaching bicycle safety**

## Community Leaders

*(continued)*



**collecting for a food bank**

- a. Character: Give specific examples of this person’s character traits and how these are manifested in his or her actions.
- b. Ideals: How does this person live his or her ideals? How does his or her life portray these ideals?
- c. Achievements: Give examples of past achievements, and ideas this person has for future contributions and projects.

## Community Programs

There are many wonderful programs in most communities that are designed to help the people of that community. The Civil Air Patrol (CAP) trains young people for search and rescue in emergencies. The SHARE program offers people a monthly grocery allotment from surplus food for a nominal cost, in return for two hours of public service each month. This is available to all people, regardless of income. Some communities also have special programs for senior citizens, the homeless, or others in need.









