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## U.S. Government and Civics

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Dear Friends,

Can you believe we have turned the corner and summer is winding down? It's almost time to dust off the books and set up the desks.

This may be the year you're planning to teach U.S. government and the Constitution or to simply entice your child with a civics course. What a privilege you have to stir the hearts and minds of your children to appreciate anew the freedoms and liberties embedded in the founding documents of our country. In spite of all the troubles and problems our nation is facing, your children may one day have the awesome opportunity to lead this country into better times, and we're counting on them!

Let's look at ways you can take what often sounds like a "dry" subject and make it come alive.

### Definitions

Defining terms is important. Civics, according to Wikipedia, is the study of the rights and duties of citizenship. This course covers the citizen's role in government. It will often compare and contrast different philosophies and forms of government. Many times a civics course will also include a study of the founding documents and the structure of our government.

A U.S. government course, on the other hand, often focuses on federal, state, and local government and studies the U.S. Constitution in depth.

### Preparation

One of the reasons U.S. history or civics is often taught prior to U.S. government is the necessity of knowing what events took place to launch America as a country and the resulting need for governance of our country. Even though in a history course students are taught the rudiments of the form of government chosen for America, a government course probes deeper into the political systems, elections, branches of government, and foreign policy. Better understanding results in productive citizens who will participate in the process.

Another way to prepare to delve into government and the Constitution is taking time to look at what the Bible says about our participation, duties, and responsibilities to those in authority. This will provide the lens through which to evaluate our system versus other forms of government.

Now you are ready to choose curriculum and resources and jump in! To help you get started you may want to consider some of the [offerings for government](#), [constitutional law](#), and [civics courses](#) from a variety of publishers.

### Production

The more your teen is practically involved in the course, the more fun it'll become. For example, when you are studying government at the local level, suggest that your teen write one of the officials about something in the community he recognizes

that needs changing or improving. Maybe a stop sign ought to be installed at an intersection near your home to increase safety.

Take time to participate in local political campaigns and elections. The relationships forged may be helpful to your teen in the future. If you're not sure how to get involved, ask our Generation Joshua team. They will enthusiastically connect your teens to others in your area as well as provide activities to consider.

Field trips can be an essential part of a government or civics course. Again, on the local level, consider attending a town hall or city council meeting. Maybe a tour of your state capitol will give your teen a visual of government in action. Of course, the ultimate field trip to consider is a visit to Washington, D.C. HSLDA's Federal Relations Department compiled a list of sights to help you. (One word of advice: it'll mean more to your teens if they understand the different branches of government prior to the visit.)

While studying the events leading up to the formation of our government, supplement your curriculum with biographies of the Founding Fathers or speeches written by them. One such resource you may enjoy is For You They Signed by Marilyn Boyer. Your teen could research the origin of the Liberty Bell or why Philadelphia was chosen for the Constitutional Conventions. Another idea could be to use works of art created during the different time periods to visualize occurrences. Movies can also help your student to imagine the scope of what was happening. For example, Z-Guides to the Movies offers a study guide for Johnny Tremain.

You might decide to teach American government the spring semester of the school year. Then if your teen plans to participate in one of GenJ's summer camps or Patrick Henry Teen Leadership Camps, they'll be better prepared to be involved in the governing process in a memorable way. Doesn't this just make you want to experience this subject again?!

Enjoy these final days of summer, taking time to become refreshed. We'll see you in September as we talk about homeschooling and the daily interaction with family.

Thankfully celebrating our freedoms,

Becky Cooke and Diane Kummer  
HSLDA High School Consultants



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