

[Chapter 5]

Young Political Scientists:
Future Citizens in Action

Maxim
Dynamic Social Studies for Constructivist
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[What does Civics look like?]

- Saving Vietnam Pond turtles – service projects and service learning
- Building and running a town
- Using children’s literature
- Class meetings
- Lessons on US Constitution
- Flag research project
- Election activities
- “Hero Week”: Paper bag timeline, Coat of Arms
- Decision trees

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[What Is Civics?]

- Study of the political and legal system
- Study of our rights and responsibilities
- Study about how our government works

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[Why Is Civics Important?]

- Goal of public education: prepare effective citizens
- Expand civic knowledge
- Develop participation skills
- Support the belief that in a democracy the actions of a person make a difference

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[How Should Civics Be Taught?]

- Informal Methods: include all the strategies teachers use to establish a cohesive, supportive, democratic classroom
 - Classroom management techniques
 - Classroom meetings
 - Rule setting
 - Classroom symbols
 - Classroom holidays
- Formal experiences: content-based instructional strategies that foster critical thinking

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[Formal Civics Instruction]

- Goal is to develop a greater insight and appreciation for civic life
- Civic knowledge must have relevance to the students’ lives
- Children understand civics more by participating in the processes they are learning about
 - Elections and voting
 - Civic responsibility
 - Civic dispositions and virtues
 - Critical thinking

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Civic Responsibility

- Goal: shift from imparting knowledge to producing citizens who are committed to civic participation
- Engage students in community service projects
- Kids Around Town model
 1. Knowing the local government
 2. Choosing a local issue to explore
 3. Researching the issue
 4. Analyzing the issue
 5. Solving the problem
 6. Taking action
 7. Assessing the project

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Academic Controversies

1. The students choose a topic on which two well-documented positions can be prepared
2. Students are assigned to groups of four
3. Each pair is assigned its tasks of knowing the position, locating information on the position, and preparing persuasive arguments to defend the position
4. Each team presents its side of the issue
5. Teams reverse perspectives by presenting the opposing position
6. Teams drop their advocacy and attempt to reach a group decision by consensus
7. The class develops a plan of action to implement its final position

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Civic Dispositions and Virtues

- In elementary grades, civic dispositions are introduced when students experience life in democratic classrooms
- Center for Civic Education identifies:
 - Individual rights to life, liberty, property, and happiness
 - Public or common good
 - Justice
 - Equality of opportunity
 - Diversity
 - Truth
 - Patriotism

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Literature

- Literature is a good source for learning about character
- Five themes of citizenship
 1. Honesty
 2. Responsibility
 3. Compassion
 4. Respect
 5. Courage

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Critical Thinking

- Children must retain information and also think deeply about the material
 - Learn from it
 - Reason with it
 - Analyze it
 - Solve problems with it
- Critical thinking is a complex mental process; widely debated

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Graphic Organizers

- Graphic organizers help students systematize their thinking
- Climbing a Decision Tree
 1. Decide what question to examine
 2. Abbreviate the decision
 3. Identify alternatives
 4. Discuss positive and negative consequences of each alternative
 5. Record the consequences

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[Fact versus Opinion]

- Facts: statements that are generally accepted as true and can be validated by evidence
 - Must be backed up with evidence
- Opinions: statements about what people believe or feel about something; cannot be proven true
 - Clue words signal opinions

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[Political Cartoons and Editorials]

- Attempt to sway one's opinion about a particular issue
- Political Cartoons
 - Deal with one central ideas
 - Fairly uncomplicated
 - Use symbols to express ideas
- Editorials
 - Serve same function as political cartoons
 - Use words to express ideas

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