Introduction for Educators

BUILDING DEMOCRACY FOR ALL

Interactive Explorations of Government and Civic Life

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Awards and Recognitions

- High-quality Educational Resource, **Massachusetts Materials Guide to Grade 8 Civics** Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (October 2021).
- **Featured Educator Resource**, Educating for Democracy Initiative (2021).
- Featured Open Access Textbook, MERLOT - the Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning Online and Teaching

Read a review of Building Democracy for All from the Open Textbook Library

Learning Technologies Team Award (2021) from ELCC (eLearning Consortium of Colorado)

Welcome to the eBook

Welcome to *Building Democracy for All* - an interactive, multimodal, multicultural, open access eBook for teaching and learning key topics in United States Government and Civic Life. **Open access** means these materials are "digital, online, and free of charge" (Billings, 2019). This book is available online to anyone with an internet connection. The eBook can also be viewed and printed as a PDF file.

Designed as a core or supplementary text for upper elementary, middle and high school teachers and students, *Building Democracy for All* offers instructional ideas, interactive resources, multicultural content, and multimodal learning materials for interest-building explorations of United States government as well as students' roles as citizens in a democratic society. It focuses on the importance of community engagement and social responsibility as understood and acted upon by middle and high school students—core themes in the [2018 Massachusetts 8th Grade Curriculum Framework,](#) and which are found in many state history and social studies curriculum frameworks

around the country.

Building Democracy for All has been developed by a collaborative writing team of higher education faculty, public school teachers, educational librarians, and college students who are preparing to become history and social studies teachers. The primary editors and curators are from the University of Massachusetts Amherst College of Education. Contributing teachers come from school districts in the Connecticut River valley region of western Massachusetts (Amherst, Gateway, Westfield, Hampshire Regional, and Springfield). As an open resource, the book is being revised constantly by the members of the writing team to ensure timely inclusion of online resources and information.

[Watch on YouTube https://edtechbooks.org/-dZrK](https://edtechbooks.org/-dZrK)

eBook Overview

We began writing this book in summer 2019 and are continuing through 2021 within the context of what Joe Biden in his 2021 presidential inaugural address called the "**cascading crises of our era,**" including the COVID-19 pandemic, accelerating climate change, widespread economic inequality, long-denied demands for racial justice, America's shifting position in the world, and Trumpism and its attacks on democracy and the rule of law. The challenging impacts of these six crises on our government and our lives are present in every chapter.

This book has emerged as well from the intense current political divisions over what should be the **role of government** in people's lives and communities. On one side, emerging on a wide scale during the 1980s and now accentuated by the Trump Presidency, is an aggressive embrace of **individualism** by the Republican Party and conservative media outlets like Fox News. Individualism favors cutting taxes, dismantling government regulations, opposing labor unions, and cutting back social safety networks for low-income people. It favors allowing businesses and corporations to

operate as they wish without protections for consumers or workers. This commitment to individualism is seen in opposition to vaccinations, mask mandates, online schooling, and other actions by federal, state, and local governments to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This ethos of individualism is dramatically contrasted with an **activist role for government** that has been promoted since the New Deal by the Democratic Party and liberal/progressive individuals and groups. This viewpoint stresses the importance of government as a source of support and protections for all members of society, with an emphasis on providing resources and opportunities for the poor and historically disenfranchised groups. This viewpoint embraces, as historian Heather Cox Richardson has suggested, Abraham Lincoln's 1854 view in which he said,

> "The legitimate object of government, is to do for a community of people, whatever they need to have done, but can not do, at all, or can not, so well do, for themselves---in their separate, and individual capacities" ([Fragment on Government,](#) July 1, 1854).

It remains unclear which of these visions about the role of government will prevail going forward and it is our hope that the information and activities in this book will help teachers and students alike to understand the issues and decide for themselves the kind of future that will occur.

We recognize that in teaching and learning about government and civic life at this time in our country's history means recognizing in the words of *[The 1619 Project](#)'s* Nikole Hannah-Jones that "the United States is a nation founded on both an ideal and a lie" ([2019, para. 9](#)). The American ideal, articulated in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, is that all people are created equal and have the inalienable rights to full participation in free and just democratic society. The lie, or fundamental contradiction, is that the promise and reality of democracy has been denied Black Americans, women, Native Americans, Latinx Americans, and LGBTQ individuals from the nation's beginnings and is still denied to many today.

In designing and writing this book, we have sought to value both the ideals of America and the realities of people's historical and contemporary experiences. To build democracy for all, as the book is titled, we seek to move beyond a fact-based government and civics curriculum, that while important does not often face hard histories, address controversial topics, confront false narratives, and teach students to how to become active, engaged citizens committed to freedom and justice for all ([National Council for the Social Studies](#), 2020).

Our goal is to build interactive and inquiry-based learning experiences for students in upper elementary, middle and high schools, as well as college courses. When thinking about teaching, learning, and school curriculum, writer Daniel Osborn (2020) reminds us, that "we have to remain vigilant of the role this institution plays in shaping collective memory and forming identities" ([para. 6](#)). In his publication, [Let's Rethink How We Teach Black History](#), Osborn asks:

- What narratives are we privileging as educators?
- What narratives are we silencing?
- What can we do to change this today, tomorrow, and in a sustained way moving forward?"

Building Democracy for All is based on our belief that civic learning will be impactful and lasting when teachers and students act together as pedagogical partners. We offer ways for teachers and students to explore the ideals of the United States as set forth in its founding documents, its

governmental institutions, and its laws and policies to envision how a government and a society that follows democratic principles can function equitably and fairly for everyone. At the same time, we provide resources and learning plans for examining the hard histories and untold stories of how decisions and structures have blocked those ideals from becoming reality for many people. Understanding the tensions between the ideal and the reality of American life includes exploring how oppressed groups and courageous individuals have fought for social justice and political change through ongoing struggles and protests with the goal of realizing the dream of democracy for all.

Topics

Building Democracy for All is organized around seven major topics and 50 learning modules based on civics, government, and history standards set forth in the [Massachusetts 8th Grade History & Social Science Curriculum Framework](#). The Massachusetts standards received an "exemplary" rating from the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, one of only 5 states nationally to be so recognized ([The State of the State Standards for Civics and U.S. History 2021](#)).

Here are the topics:

- [Topic 1: The Philosophical Foundations of the United States Political System](#)
- [Topic 2: The Development of United States Government](#)
- [Topic 3: The Institutions of the United States Government](#)
- [Topic 4: Rights and Responsibilities of Citizens](#)
- [Topic 5: The Constitution, Amendments, and Supreme Court](#)
- [Topic 6: The Structure of Massachusetts State & Local Government](#)
- [Topic 7: Freedom of the Press and News/Media Literacy](#)

An future eighth section will be devoted to strategies for conducting civic action/community engagement projects with students, as mandated by [Massachusetts Law S2631: An Act to Promote and Enhance Civic Engagement](#).

Modules for Learning

Each module includes an INVESTIGATE, UNCOVER**,** and ENGAGE module that students and teachers can use to explore topics in greater depth in face-to-face classes and online learning formats.

INVESTIGATE, UNCOVER, ENGAGE MODULES

1. **INVESTIGATE** offers **learning field trips** with historical context and online links to primary source materials, historical timelines, biographies of influential people, interactive websites, and relevant factual information to promote awareness and understanding of the principles, values, institutions, and practices of American democracy. Investigating our nation's governmental history and foundations introduces students to their rights and responsibilities as members of a democratic society.

2. **UNCOVER** presents **little-known histories and untold stories** of women, Black Americans, indigenous peoples, LGBTQIA individuals, Asian American and Pacific Islanders, Mexican Americans, Latinos/Latinas, children and teens, and others who are under-represented or marginalized in textbooks, curriculum frameworks and learning plans. These sections are designed as "counternarratives" or "stories that reflect the critical perspectives of storytellers and challenge injustice" (Hickman & Portfilio, 2021, p. 36). UNCOVER invites students to connect major events and institutions of United States democracy to the struggles of diverse individuals and groups to achieve equal status in American society. We focus on inquiry where questions, rather than answers, are the focus of the learning activities (Lesh, 2011). You can learn more little-known histories and untold stories from the [Retropolis](#) (meaning, "the past, rediscovered") series from *The Washington Post*.

3. **ENGAGE** poses **public policy issues and questions** for students to analyze and act upon through discussion, writing, and civic action projects. ENGAGE questions ask students to think deeply about the choices they face as members of a democracy and then act on their decisions as engaged members of their communities. Researchers have documented that **political-based discussions** among students in classrooms **increase civic knowledge and dispositions** while expanding individual perspectives beyond one's immediate group of family and friends (Hess & McAvoy, 2014; Korbey, 2019).

Each module includes the following resources.

Suggested learning activities provide interactive explorations of the topic. These activities encourage higher order thinking and learning by students as they explore issues, discuss ideas, analyze documents, design solutions to community problems, formulate personal positions about public policies, and create knowledge to share with others. Activities emphasize higher-order thinking using interactive web-based learning materials and digital tools and apps to support and extend student thinking and learning.

Online resources include links to digital primary sources, secondary source background materials, historical biographies, multimedia resources, landmark court cases, LGBTQ history resources, women's history materials, and other online information drawn from reliable and trusted academic and educational sites. Many topics feature links to pages in ***[resourcesforhistoryteachers wiki](#)***, a free online multimedia/multicultural resource edited by Robert Maloy from the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Additional Features

Teacher-Designed Learning Plans are located in boxes throughout the book. These plans can be adapted to in-person, online, remote, and blended learning formats. We encourage book readers to submit their own lessons to be included in the text.

Learning Pathways enable teachers and students to explore material in the book thematically by topic rather than sequentially through standards. Learning pathways include: [Black Lives Matter](), [Student Rights](), [Influential Women](), [Election 2020](), [Media Literacy](), and [Current Events.]()

Audio Introductions are provided at the beginning of each of the 50+ curriculum standards presented in the book. These short summaries highlight key civics, government, and history topics explored within each standard's learning modules.

Digital Choice Boards invite interactive high-tech and low-tech explorations of curriculum topics. A choice board is a "graphic organizer that allows students to choose different ways to learn about a particular concept" ([Reinken, 2012, para. 1]()). Each box on the choice boards features higher-order thinking activities for students to complete when using the board for learning. To use choice boards, students work in teams or individually to explore the content and engage in design-based learning tasks, such as:

- Coding a [Scratch story]()
- Creating an [interactive digital story]()
- Constructing [3D digital artifacts]()
- Designing a [multimodal book]()
- Constructing an [augmented reality exhibit]()
- Building an [interactive map]()
- Creating an [Interactive Timeline]()
- Creating a [video]()

Go to [History, Government, and Civic Life Digital Choice Boards]() for a complete collection developed by Torrey Trust and Bob Maloy.

How to Use This Book

This book is designed for teachers and students working together in collaborative learning environments. Topics and standards are accompanied by easy-to-read introductions, designed to interest readers. Links throughout the sections make the book an interactive reading and viewing experience. Learning activities for each module in each standard are written to encourage students to connect with and act on issues facing our democratic society.

The book may be a core or supplementary text for 8th grade classes. It can also be useful in high school government and history courses, including Advanced Placement (AP) United States Government and Politics. The Table of Contents is organized based on the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework, but topics presented can be aligned to curriculums in middle and high schools around the country that are teaching government and civic life.

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medium or format. You can also remix, transform, and build upon the material as long as the remixed materials feature a similar Creative Commons license.

References

A list of references to the sources cited throughout the chapters can be found on this Google Doc: [Building Democracy for All eBook References](#).

Critical Media Literacy Companion eBook

We are also developing a companion ebook to *Building Democracy for All* entitled ***Critical Media Literacy and Civic Learning***. This book features 50+ interactive media literacy learning activities for students organized around the topics from the Massachusetts 8th Grade Civics and Government curriculum framework. It provides opportunities for students and teachers to critically investigate media and its influence on education and society.

Each chapter includes short written introductions followed by step-by-step activities for students to complete, individually or in small groups. Every activity is designed to promote creative self-expression and critical thinking among students. Like *Building Democracy for All*, the Media Literacy Companion Edition will be available online to anyone with an internet connection, free of charge.

A Companion YouTube Channel, ***UMass Democracy for All*** provides video introductions to critical media activities found throughout the book. These videos highlight how students can apply critical media literacy skills while exploring U.S. government and engaging in active roles as members of a democratic society.

About the Book Team

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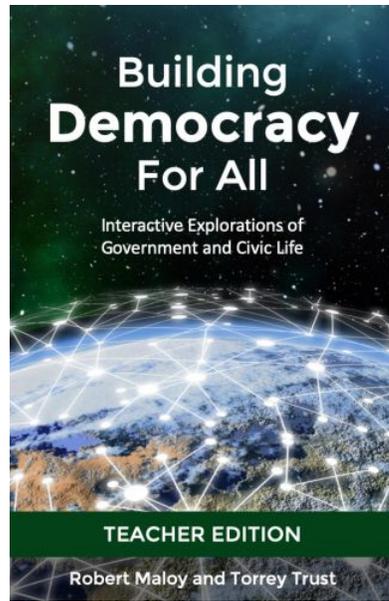
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Maloy, R. W. & Trust, T. (2020). *Building Democracy for All*. Equity Press. https://equitypress.org/democracy