

Student centered strategies by Gerry Foley to supplement Chapter 12 of the Ethics Workbook, Public Ethics: Pages 102 - 107

OVERVIEW:

The formation of the United States government is of critical importance to any in depth understanding of U.S. History. If we are to understand how our government works, we must know about the intellectual origins of the Constitution and the beliefs of the influential philosophers who impressed the Founding Fathers.

PURPOSE:

This lesson is used as the basis to discuss the successes and drawbacks of the Articles of Confederation and how the Constitution was a more inclusive plan for the United States. It is also the basis for an analysis of the Constitution's ability to promote natural rights. Most importantly, it introduces students to the concepts of natural rights and ethical decision making. Students use an inquiry model to discover for themselves what the purpose of our government is and they use this model to evaluate the successes and failures of governments in promoting basic human rights.

OBJECTIVES:

Students will be able to:

- 1) Identify Locke's three natural rights.
- 2) Recognize the role of Locke's Philosophy on the Founding Fathers.
- 3) Demonstrate the impact of Public Ethics on the Framers of the Constitution.
- 4) Evaluate several forms of government to determine which is most conducive to the advancement of Public Ethics.
- 5) Create a fictional society with concern for the promotion of natural rights, justice and equality.

Preliminary information:

In my classroom students are involved in a mock economy for 3 weeks during our regular lessons. They can buy and sell desks, form companies, and perform jobs for payment. Students are paid an arbitrary amount for coming to school each day. At the end of the four weeks the person with the most money will get a prize, as does the class with the greatest per capita gross domestic product. Students keep track of their income on Cash Accounting Sheets

Students have defined Anarchy, Autocracy, Oligarchy, and Democracy.

Students have been introduced to Machiavellian philosophy from the homework assignment (Attached as *Machiavelli Philosophy*).

ACTIVITIES:

1) Go over the definitions assigned for homework. Point out the deviant forms of the forms of government as Tyranny, Aristocracy, and Mob Rule. Teacher leads discussion so that the students can “pair up” the proper form of government and the deviant form (In our school students have studied Aristotle in the 7th grade and have a memory of these forms of government.).

2) When students have a grasp on the different forms of government, Go over the Machiavelli homework sheet. The students are always very lively in proclaiming that Machiavelli was wrong. Most say that people are basically good and do the right thing. However, even if they say that Machiavelli was right, it can be shown that even Machiavelli believed that people (sometimes) had to advance the group to meet their own interests.

3) Pass out cash accounting sheets (This activity will work without Cash Accounting Sheets but it is better if the students believe that there is really something at stake.).

4) Students are presented with *Chart 1* on the overhead or front board (AUTHOR: Rob Bishop, Box Elder High School, Brigham City, Ut.) . Choose 13 volunteers and inform them that they must choose either red or blue and that they may not discuss their choice with anyone else. Give them 45 seconds. Record the results and award the proper payment to students.

5) Repeat step 3.

NOTE:

The teacher will find that some students pick red and some blue. Naturally some realize that the group would be better off if everyone picked red, but others pick blue because they are individually better off even though the group suffers. Whatever they choose, encourage students to debate the reasons why they chose red or blue. Ultimately we want the students to understand that there may be a trade-off between the welfare of the group and the freedom of individuals. During an appropriate point during the ensuing discussion write on the front board: “How do we, as a community, define what is right and wrong?” Many will intuitively see that humans are pulled in the two directions because of human nature.

6) Present students with the handout (page 1) of the *Philosophy of Government* and have them define the State of Nature. When they finish this section reconnect with them to make sure that they understand this key concept. Have the students finish page 1 of the worksheet and again reconnect with them. When they finish the second part of the worksheet the instructor must steer them to see that Locke reasoned that people were

born with the rights of life and liberty and because liberty would be violated if property were taken, then property must be a third natural right.

Present students with the handout (page 2) of the *Philosophy of Government*

7) Have students define the Social Contract and ask for their opinions. At this point they are very much interested and they are all junior philosophers. Some of my most challenging students show the most interest in Locke. The innate ethical sense in them tells them that it is unfair to take what is not yours and it is common sense that this should not happen. Most kids are easily able to define the Social Contract when they are prompted that a contract is an agreement between two parties who promise each other different things.

8) Give *HOMEWORK #2* on the BIG QUESTION and the influence that Locke had on Jefferson and the Declaration of Independence.

DAY 2:

ACTIVITIES

1) Have students consider this prompt at the start of class:

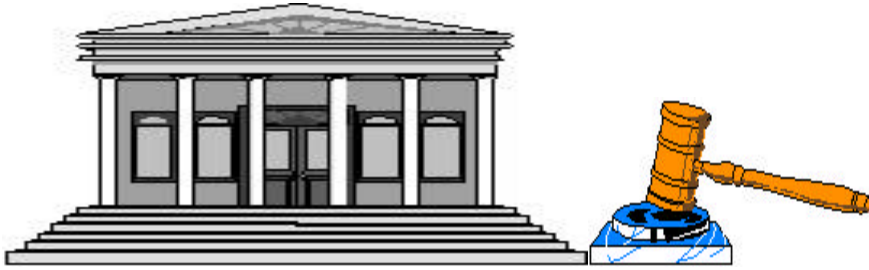
Imagine that you were put in charge of the school. There are 500 eighth-graders, 300 seventh-graders and 150 sixth-graders. The principal said you could either have a democracy or an aristocracy but not an autocracy or anarchy. Which would you choose? Do you think that is the fairest form of government in this case? How could you make sure that the “rights” of all students are not taken away by your government.

NOTE:

I teach eighth grade and most students easily recognize that the eighth grade will be in the majority and the students immediately say direct democracy would be the fairest. After some discussion, I change the prompt by saying what if the situation were 500 sixth graders and only 150 eighth graders. This changes their idea of what is fair and a discussion ensues. Through deliberate and careful discussion, we explore the fairness of democracy and its deviation and the fairness of aristocracy and its deviation.

2) Have students form groups and *Create Your Own Government* (worksheet). Students must pay careful attention to the promotion of natural rights.

3) Debrief students when they finish to determine if democracy is the most just and equitable form of government.



Congratulations you have taken over Mansfield. There is now no government, school, police, fire etc...

You have renamed it _____ . (Now the hard part):

FIRST: THE PHILOSOPHY OF GOVERNMENT:

John Locke was a philosopher during the period called the Enlightenment (remember, the Enlightenment was a period of time when people tried to figure out **WHY** things were like they were. People wanted to find logical reasons for everything. This even included what determined right and wrong for the whole group.). Locke imagined a place where people had no government just like your new town. He called this a “state of nature.” In your own words define what you think a state of nature is like:

State of Nature:

Locke said that in a state of nature everyone is entitled to protect their life and liberty by any means necessary. That meant that if someone tried to kill you or make you a slave you had the right to do whatever it took to prevent that from happening. It also meant that if you tried to make someone else a slave, they could do whatever it took to stop you. Since people were born into this state of nature with these rights these were called natural rights. Today we call these basic human rights.

***Assume that all the natural resources in your town are inexhaustible (they cannot be used up no matter what happens).

Using Locke's philosophy try to decide what is right or wrong in the following situation.

Mrs. Holster has cut down a tree and worked all day to cut it up in order to make a house for herself. Mr. Foley came along and made her give up all of the wood under the threat of physical violence.

Who should get the wood? Why?

How is this consistent with Locke?

Locke would say that since Mrs. Holster worked on that natural resource, she added some value to it and it became her property. If Mr. Foley just took the wood, it would make Mrs. Holster his slave and that is a violation of her right to liberty. Locke concluded that a problem like this meant that there was a third natural right called property.

Do you agree that everyone should have a right to life, liberty and property? Why?

Is there ever a time when the right to property should be taken away? Why or Why not?
(thank the Enlightenment for all the why and why not questions.)

Locke argued that people create government in order to make sure that their natural rights are protected. It is in the best interests of the group to do this even though it may not be beneficial to each individual. We call this agreement a social contract. In your own words define what you think a social contract is.

SOCIAL CONTRACT-

In 1690, Locke wrote that the reason people form governments is to protect the people's basic natural rights. Since government was created to do this, he said, then it made no sense for the government not to perform this task. What do you think he would have advised people to do if government did not protect these natural rights?

HOMEWORK #2

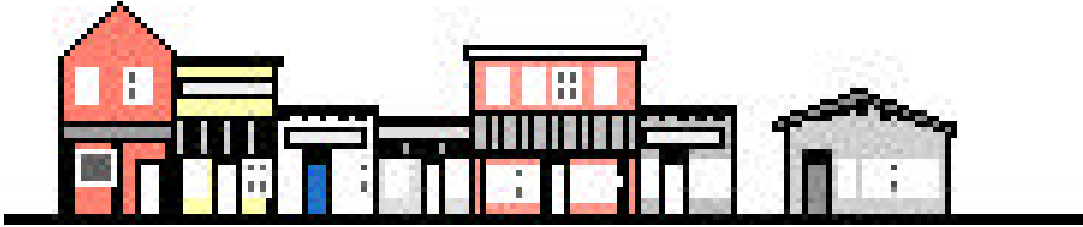
The Big Question was:

How do we determine what is right and wrong as a community? What do you think Locke would say? Do you agree?

With your partner, find quotes from the Declaration of Independence which show how influential John Locke's philosophy was on the "Founding Fathers" of America.

FORMING YOUR OWN GOVERNMENT

Now go back to the state of nature that existed when you took over Mansfield. If Locke is right, and the only reason people have government is to protect basic natural rights, then you have to design a government to this. Choose from the different forms of government you defined earlier, and create a government for your new town.



NAMES _____

Our Town's name is:

_____.

Our form of government is _____

We chose this form of government because:

In this government, leaders are chosen by:

This may be a good way to choose leaders because:

This might be bad way to choose leaders because:

Rules are made by:

This is a good way to make rules because:

This might be bad way to make rules because:

Rules are judged to be fair by:

This is a good way to judge rules because:

This might be bad way to judge rules because:

People will know the rules in this town because:

Our town makes sure that rules will not be broken because we:

Pros and Cons of your Town's government:

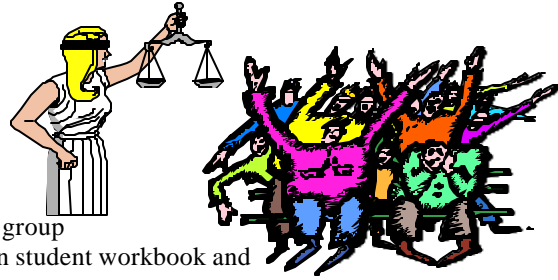
The type of government we have will help in promoting freedom and equality by:
(list 2 ways and explain)

The type of government we have restricts freedom and equality by:
(list 2 ways and explain)

Overall we think that this type of government is _____ when it comes to making sure the natural rights of people are protected and determining what is fair.

- A) Excellent
- B) Pretty Good
- C) Not too bad
- D) Very bad

MACHIAVELLI PHILOSOPHY WORKSHEET



Responsibility to yourself vs. responsibility to your group
(This activity was taken from the Ethics in Education student workbook and adapted for grade 8)

At one point in history, the responsibility of a person to his/her group was unquestioned (you may recall that cities like Sumer developed, in part, because there was a surplus of food and people could help the group by specializing in other areas). At one point, called “The Renaissance”, people began to become more individualistic. That is to say that people began to be concerned with getting things for themselves and less concerned with obligations they might have to a group of people. This is an important concept because we still live in this period of “individualism” and the United States economy is founded on this belief.

During this period a philosopher named Nicolo Machiavelli wrote a book called “The Prince”. This book gave advice to leaders. In this book he basically said the following:

1) People are ungrateful, unreliable, hypocritical, cowardly and greedy. They promise you anything but if you turn your back then, they will put a knife in you. Friends are the worst. Friendship is based on obligations, and people break these most easily of all contracts. The only reason people are friends is because they get something from you.

2) Since the above is true, Machiavelli said, leaders should not be honest and trustworthy but sneaky. Sneaky people get the job done. They get what they want. There are two ways to get what you want, play by the rules or take what you want by any means necessary. Great leaders use both, but they are smart enough to pretend to play by the rules and appear to be good. This way people fall into a trap of thinking that these leaders would never do anything wrong and that is when they are easiest to fool. For the individual, winning is the only thing that is important. The outcome is the only important thing, how you get the outcome is secondary. The individual needs to act in his/her own self interest and not be concerned with the group.

Look back at paragraph one and on a separate sheet of paper and answer these questions:

1. Are people basically good or bad? Is Machiavelli right? What do you think about his assessment of friendship?

Now look at paragraph 2 and answer these questions.

2. Do you agree with Machiavelli with regard to his statements? How important is winning in the things you do? Does the urge to win or succeed sometimes lead to unethical actions (unethical actions are doing things you know are wrong). Can you give examples from your own life? Does this change your responses to paragraph 1 or does it reinforce your answer?

CHART 1

# of RED	PAYOUT	# of BLUE	PAYOUT	TOTAL PAYOUT
0	0	13	100	1300
1	40	12	150	1840
2	70	11	200	2340
3	100	10	250	2800
4	130	9	300	3220
5	160	8	350	3600
6	190	7	400	3940
7	220	6	450	4240
8	250	5	500	4500
9	280	4	550	4720
10	310	3	600	4900
11	340	2	650	5040
12	370	1	700	5140
13	400	0	0	5200