

# What are Civic Virtues?

Lesson Estimated Time: 90 minutes

## Essential Question

- How do civic virtues ensure a healthy civil society and constitutional republic?

## Guiding Questions

- What are civic virtues?
- Can virtues be taught or acquired through practice, or do humans possess virtues by nature?
- How do we define civic virtues?

## Objectives

- Students will define civic virtues and civil society through personal reflection and civil discourse.
- Students will explain the connection between civic virtues and a healthy civil society.
- Students will practice speaking and listening skills in a structured discussion.

## Resources

- [Student Handout- What is Virtue?](#)
- [Student Handout- Fishbowl Activity](#)
- The [Principles and Virtues Organizer](#) provides BRI's explanation and definition of civic virtues.

## Engage

- Have students respond to the following prompt either as a quick write or with a shoulder partner/small group: *Think of a time when you had to work in a group and did not choose your group members. What was required for the group to function successfully? Or, if the group did not work successfully, what was missing that prevented a successful collaboration?*
- Have students share their responses with a shoulder partner or in small groups before leading a class debrief.

- Ask for volunteers to share their responses. Encourage students to share both positive and negative examples of group work.
- Ask for students to look for patterns in the responses they see. For example, groups work best if each member assumes a certain responsibility for the outcome.

## Explore

- To begin, ask students to think about civil society and government by sharing or posting the following definitions:
  - **civil society:** A society composed of community members linked by common interests, purpose, and activity. Civil society is composed of institutions and organizations that are not associated with the government—including families, schools and universities, service groups, churches, sports clubs, businesses, professional associations, and cultural institutions.
  - **constitutional republic:** A system in which a representative government is bound by a written, legal document that defines its powers and limits
- Ask students to think about how working in a group connects to either of these terms. Encourage students to think about how living in a civil society and a constitutional republic require people to work together. This can be challenging because our society represents such a large group of diverse people. The following activity will help students think about what unifies or unites Americans.
- Distribute the [Student Handout](#) and review the directions with students.
- Give students approximately 15–20 minutes to write their own answers to the six questions in the handout in the left column.
- Distribute the [fishbowl discussion guidelines](#) and review them with students.
- Have students brainstorm a list of norms or rules for civil discussions. Post these rules in the room, or have students write them down on their fishbowl guidelines. Some ideas for discussion roles are:
  - Refer to speakers by their names.
  - Be conscious of your speaking time.
  - Invite others into the conversation who have been quiet or have struggled to interject.
  - Do not interrupt the speaker.
  - Ask for clarification if you are confused.

- Assign students to one of two groups. Group 1 will begin in the fishbowl or inner circle, and Group 2 will begin in the outer circle, observing.
- Arrange the room for the fishbowl discussion. The inner circle should consist of roughly half the class, and the circles should all face each other. Outer-circle participants can stand or sit around the inner circle and add to the right column of their student handout.
- **Scaffolding notes:** If students are new to the fishbowl technique, begin with a five- to ten-minute practice round with a simple prompt, such as, “Should homework be assigned over the weekend?”
- Options for the fishbowl discussion:
  - You may wish to assign each group specific discussion questions to reduce redundancy.
  - Set a time limit for each inner circle to discuss. When that time has passed, announce that it is time to switch. The inner circle moves to the outer circle, and the roles reverse.
  - More information on the fishbowl technique can be found at: [bit.ly/3NGjxTT](http://bit.ly/3NGjxTT)

## Assess & Reflect

- Give students time to respond to the assessment and reflection questions at the end of their handout. If time allows, ask for volunteers to share their reflections with the class.
- Have students write down their definitions of important virtues and post throughout the classroom. Refer to them throughout their study in the civics/government classroom.

## Extend

- Explore the idea of civic virtues further in this lesson from “Being an American” which can be found at: [bit.ly/3vX3FEn](http://bit.ly/3vX3FEn)