

DEMOCRACY CAMP - OVERVIEW

Program Description and Details:

American politics today is a far cry from the civilized and substantive debates that were had decades ago. It is exhausting, if not outright menacing, for all but the most ardent partisans. Our present environment is so divisive from the outset that it either dissuades well-meaning Americans from entering into honest political conversations, or it encourages attitudes, beliefs, and even careers to be founded directly upon the driving factors of our omnidirectional animus.

The purpose of Project NextGen's inaugural Democracy Camp is to get back to basics. We aim to provide comprehensive civic education to inquisitive middle school students which comprises a foundational knowledge of American government and politics. Our program will also explore what it means to be an American citizen, and in what forms meaningful participation in our political processes takes. By definition, what we are doing is not revolutionary. The principal intention of our Democracy Camp is to cultivate prudent and informed students who care about politics — both its gravity and its decency.

The program will span three weeks, and classes will be held on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. The classes are two hours long in total but are broken up into two one-hour sessions, with a half-hour lunch break in between. As the program is largely interactive, we expect participants to be consistently engaged in our activities and discussions. We also welcome the opportunity for students to better know each other and the facilitators beyond the official curriculum and schedules, and will set aside time for such.

Curriculum Outline:

The three weeks of our Democracy Camp are divided such that each week will cover a broadly different topic in American civics and politics.

- Week One will focus on our political history and system of government; how our government works; and the fundamentals of American law.
- Week Two will examine the two major political parties and their respective tenets; the duties and responsibilities of an American citizen; as well as some of our key political issues today.
- Week Three will delve into real political action and its many forms, such as activism, advocacy, communication, networking, among many others.

Below is a list of the topics we intend to cover each week:

Week One:

- Understanding government as it exists today and its various forms.
 - Democracy: its characteristics, upsides, and flaws.

- American democracy and why it is unique.
 - Its influences and historical background.
 - Founding documents of our government and their key themes.
 - Elements of American government, their purposes, and their relevance today.
 - Introduction to lawmaking.
 - Procedures and obstacles involved in passing or obstructing a bill.
 - Distinctions between state and federal processes.
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Week Two

- The two major political parties in the United States.*
 - Broad tenets of each party and their guiding philosophies.
 - Diversity of beliefs within the U.S. political spectrum and within each party.
 - Defining American citizenship.
 - How citizenship is obtained in the U.S. and in other countries.
 - Duties of a citizen.
 - Differences in comparison to permanent residents, undocumented immigrants, etc.
 - Civil liberties.
 - News analysis.
 - Skills involved in reading and understanding current news articles.
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Week Three

- Forms of engagement in politics.
 - Voting.
 - Campaigning, and roles within a political campaign.
 - Activism vs. advocacy.
- Introduction to networking and career building.