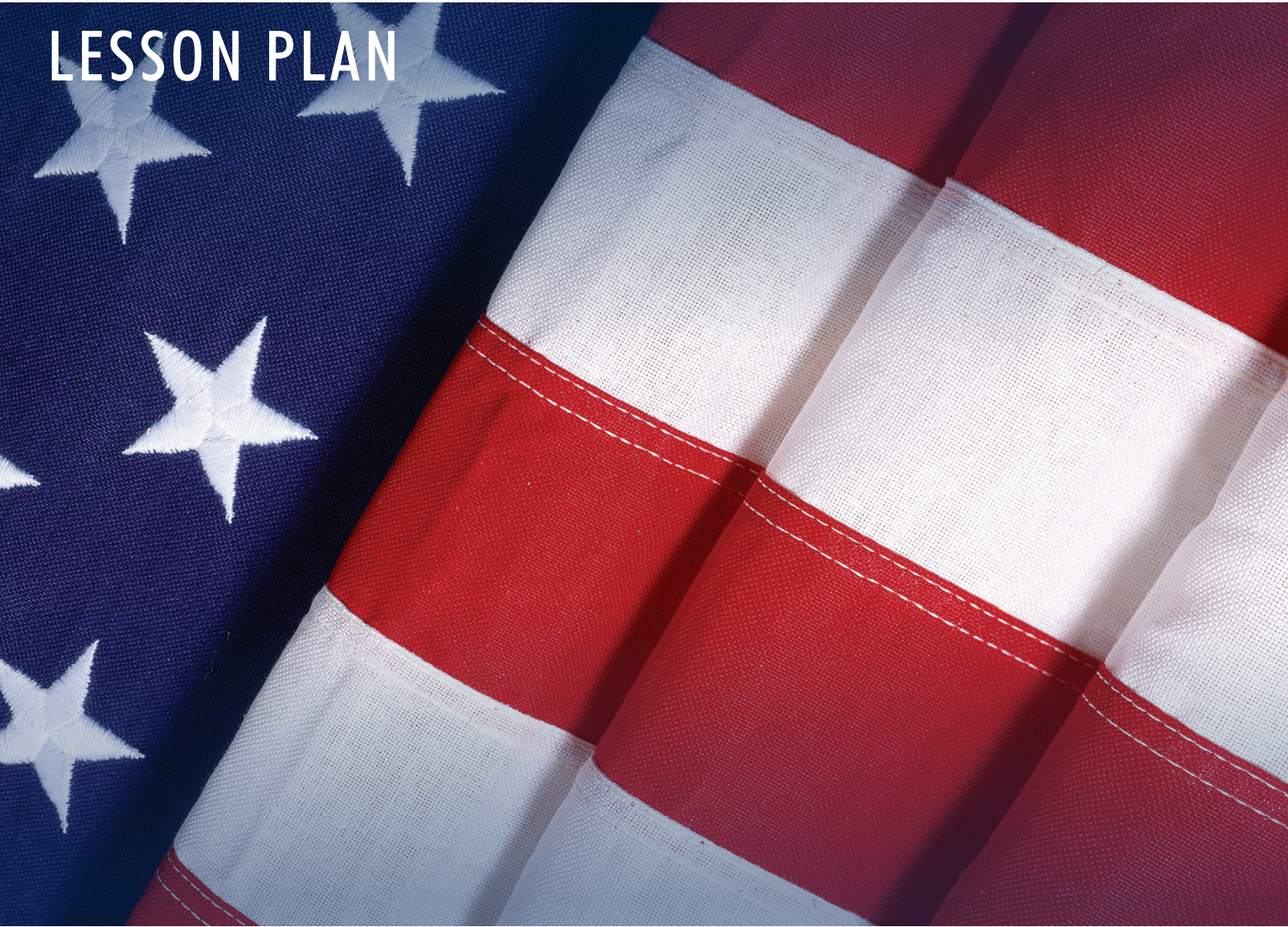


INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL VALUES

LESSON PLAN



LESSON PLAN: INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL VALUES



Goal: Students will consider what political values Americans use to make decisions on important policy issues.

Time: 30 minutes

Procedures:

Anticipation (2 minutes)

1. Explain to students that over the next few months, we will be engaging in classroom discussions about current controversial issues. In order to do this, we will spend some time today thinking about the different ways that people think about politics and the different values people use to evaluate policy options.

Main Learning Activity (25 minutes)

2. Explain that people in the United States believe in many different values that inform their political decisions. These values can be based on American founding ideals, personal moral or ethical codes, or the evolution of our understanding of these values over time.
3. One value that is prized in the United States is equality. Many Americans see equality as one of our founding ideas as espoused in the Declaration of Independence. Equality is understood as everyone being treated the same—by the law and within democratic institutions (voting, accessing public education, etc.).
4. Have students turn to a partner and discuss the meaning of equality. When we say this is a value, what do we mean? What does this look like in everyday life? Have students share out their definitions, calling attention to the fact that people have different understandings of this value.
5. Ask students to brainstorm with a partner other values that they think are important in the United States.
6. Have students share out their responses and record them in a central place.
7. As students are sharing out, consider asking one or more of the following questions:
 - What is the definition of that value?
 - Do you think everyone agrees with that definition?
 - Do you think everyone shares that value?
 - Why do you think that value is important in the U.S. political/social context? (Does it come from the Constitution? The Declaration of Independence? U.S. tradition? Religion?)
8. Ask students to consider how these values relate to one another. Use a series of think-pair-shares to ask:
 - Do any of these values conflict with one another?
 - Can you think of any issue, either in history or today, where two values have come in conflict with one another?
9. Explain that in the United States, there are many recurring conflicts with our political values. For example:
 - Any foreign conflict can connect to questions about the role of the United States in the world and how to balance competing interests. Some foreign policy debates center around questions about the use of diplomacy vs. the use of military force.
 - Domestic economic issues can typically connect to debates between freedom and equality and a focus on the limits of laissez faire capitalism.
 - Social issues can often be framed in terms of majority rule vs. minority rights or liberty vs. order.

Reflection (3 minutes)

10. Inform students that as they approach new issues, debates, and deliberations over the course of the year, they should think back to this value conversation. As they examine different issues, they should consider what values are at play, and what values compete against one another.



Sample Political Values:

EQUALITY: Equality means that all people should be treated the same; what the government does to or for one person, it must do to or for everybody.

EQUITY: Equity means that various factors (such as age, race, gender, or income) should be considered when policy decisions are made. It means that the government can provide assistance to one person or group that most needs it without providing the same assistance to other people.

JUSTICE: Justice means that people are treated on the basis of their circumstances or needs.

LIBERTY: Liberty means the freedom to act without constraint or interference. In political debates, it means the ability to act without government interference. In other words, as long as people are not directly hurting others, they should be able to do what they want.

SECURITY/ORDER: Security means that the government provides order and stability. In political debates, security means that government needs the authority to encourage people to behave in certain ways and to stop people from behaving in other, harmful ways.

PRIVATE INTERESTS: Private interests refer to the government's responsibility to protect each person's private property and other interests. This means that the government should protect the interests of businesses and individuals.

COMMON GOOD: The common good refers to the government acting in the interests of the entire citizenry (this can be a town, county, state, or national government). This means that, sometimes, governments will act in ways that harm one or a few people but help many.

Common Tensions:

Domestic:

- Fairness vs. Justice
- Liberty vs. Equality
- Majority Rule vs. Minority Rights
- Order vs. Liberty
- Private Good vs. Public Good
- State Authority vs. Federal Authority

International:

- Diplomacy vs. Use of Force
- Ideology vs. Security