

# ELA Unit Plan: Take Action! Civic Engagement Unit

*This unit was developed for an Adult Diploma Program (ADP) social studies class with a focus on content-area reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Students take a separate ELA class.*

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Class/Level, GLE Range: <b>ASE History/Level D &amp; E, GLE 8.0+</b>	Last Revised: <b>May 2022</b>

<b>PART 1: OVERVIEW</b>	
<p><b>UNIT TOPIC/TITLE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Frame titles around topics relevant to adults and related to other content areas (e.g., civics/current events/social studies, science and technology, health, literature, workforce preparation, etc.).</i></li> <li>• <i>Aim for a pithy topic-related title that can be remembered and used by teachers when referring to the unit.</i></li> </ul>	<p>Take Action! Civic Engagement Unit</p>
<p><b>TIME</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Indicate the estimated # of hours (and weeks) required to complete the unit.</i></li> </ul>	<p>Minimum: 16-20 hours; 4-5 weeks at 4 hours per week</p> <p><i>For an Adult Diploma Program, the unit may last 11-12 weeks (up to 40 hours) to include multiple rounds of feedback for revisions and edits.</i></p>
<p><b>RATIONALE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Explain why this unit is important for adult learners (e.g. how it relates to typical goals of learners at this level).</i></li> </ul>	<p>In this unit, students learn about the fundamentals and limitations of three levels of government and gain a sense of ownership through applying this knowledge to pressing issues in their lives. The unit is about communication as well, with a strong emphasis on students crafting clear writing to effect change for their families and communities.</p> <p>Reading, writing, and civic/government content knowledge are required for students who will be taking a Social Studies HSE exam or completing an ADP portfolio.</p>
<p><b>ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Include “open-ended, thought-provoking and intellectually engaging questions that call for higher-order thinking.”</i></li> </ul>	<p><i>What is a government’s responsibility to its people?</i></p> <p><i>What role do active and engaged community members play in government?</i></p> <p><i>How can citizens influence the way the government works?</i></p>

<p><b>UNIT OUTCOME / CULMINATING ASSESSMENT</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Describe, in a few sentences, the desired outcome, focusing on the central texts and end products students will use to show their ELA learning (and understanding of the content topic).</li> <li>When possible, include one or more authentic performance task(s).</li> </ul>	<p>Students will read informational texts presented in different formats in order to learn about the structure, powers, and functions of the three levels of government—federal, state, and local—and how they can use that information to take action.</p> <p>Students will demonstrate their understanding of the different levels of government by writing a formal letter to an appropriate elected official at the local, state, or federal level about an issue important to them. A checklist will be used to evaluate the letter for content, clarity, organization, style, and mechanics.</p>
<p><b><u>PRIORITY ELA STANDARDS</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>List only the ~3-5 level-specific CCRSAE-ELA standards that will be explicitly taught and assessed.</li> <li>Include standards from across the Reading, Writing, Speaking/ Listening, and Language domains.</li> </ul>	<p><b>R7D: “Diverse media and formats”</b> Integrate information presented in different media or formats...as well as in words to develop a coherent understanding of a topic or issue.</p> <p><b>W4D: “Clear, coherent, and appropriately styled writing”</b> Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.</p> <p><b>W5D: “Writing Process”</b> With some guidance and support from peers and others, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well the purpose and audience have been addressed.</p> <p><b>W8D: “Research Process”</b> Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources...and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism...</p> <p><b>L3D: “Language Choices for Style, Tone, and Message”</b> a. Vary sentence patterns for meaning, reader/listener interest, and style. b. Maintain consistency in style and tone. c. Choose language that expresses ideas precisely and concisely, recognizing and eliminating wordiness and redundancy</p>
<p><b><u>KEY STUDENT MATERIALS</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>List authentic and relevant resources (texts, videos, websites, podcasts...) that students will read, listen to, or view.</li> </ul>	<p>League of Women Voters <a href="#">Levels of Government: How Federal, State, and Local Government Work Together</a> [average readability GLE 9-10]</p> <p>Newsela <a href="#">Infographic: What Do Different Levels of Government Do?</a> [chart format; readability GLE 12]</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include digital sources and attend to representations of different cultures and perspectives.</li> <li>• Provide text complexity levels.</li> <li>• Include texts with lower and higher text complexity levels to support differentiation.</li> </ul>	<p>(free Newsela account required for access; see also <a href="https://sabes.org/content/newsela-statewide-account-and-pd">https://sabes.org/content/newsela-statewide-account-and-pd</a>)</p> <p>iCivics <a href="#">Who Represents Me?</a> [worksheet to fill out] (free iCivics account required for access)</p> <p>Datamade.us <a href="#">My Reps</a> [website for identifying representatives at all levels]</p> <p>MCAE <a href="#">Writing to State Legislators</a> [bulleted list of tips; readability GLE 7]</p> <p>MCAE <a href="#">6 Steps to a Successful Lobbying Visit</a> (cartoon format)</p> <p>Various teacher-made presentations and activities</p> <p>Additional lesson-specific resources will be provided in lesson plans</p>
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PART 2: IN-DEPTH VIEW	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>UNIT OBJECTIVES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These should align with the Priority ELA Standards.</li> <li>• Include objectives for both ELA Skills (directly correlated to the leveled priority standards) and Content Knowledge (related to science, social studies, literature, careers, etc.).</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ASSESSMENT OF OBJECTIVES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider how teachers will capture evidence for each objective.</li> <li>• How will each objective be assessed through the culminating assessment mentioned in Part 1? (e.g., paper, project, problem, presentation)</li> <li>• (Optional) Attach evaluation tools (e.g., rubrics, checklists) or provide other guidance for teachers.</li> </ul>
<b>By the end of this unit, students will be able to:</b>	<b>Student output will be assessed by:</b>
1. gather information from various sources to create or defend understanding of the three levels of government	teacher analysis of completed notetaking tables, student quick-writes
2. match the roles and responsibilities of citizens and government to a targeted issue	teacher analysis of concept sorts/entrance slips mentioned in Lesson 2; evidence in final product of matching of student’s constituent concern to the proper level of government (checklist)
3. use digital tools to identify their government representatives at the local, state, and federal level	teacher analysis of completed worksheet (“Who Represents Me?”) in which learners fill in their various representatives
4. tailor organization and style of writing to the task, purpose, and audience	teacher analysis of formal letters, using a checklist

5. use the writing process to improve writing	collected drafts show development from first to last draft; students reflect on how their writing changed and why
6. apply knowledge of language to make effective choice for meaning	included in final checklist

**KEY VOCABULARY**

Include academic words or phrases (Tier 2) and key content terms (Tier 3), unless teachers are expected to add these at the lesson plan level. Consider that each set of words will require multiple days of practice.

**Tier 2 (academic, cross-topic):** accountable, advocate, establish, implement, district

**Tier 3 (content-specific):** constituent, federal, legislate, municipal, revenue

**LENSES**

Include brief clarifications for how the unit addresses each [MA priority lens](#), providing further recommendations for lenses not transparently addressed in other sections of the unit plan.

**Evidence-Based Instruction** (including EBRI): vocabulary instruction includes Tier 2 words and Tier 3 words related to the topic, and students are provided with multiple opportunities to practice the words over numerous lessons; writing instruction is appropriately supported through the writing process and sentence frame scaffolds; explicit instruction model provided throughout

**Culturally Responsive Teaching:** discussions sharing different points-of-view embedded throughout; lessons and applications connected to students’ own lives

**Differentiation** (especially for English learners and students with learning disabilities): ideas presented through multiple means (print and oral texts); use of rubrics and student work samples to demonstrate expectations; assessment and feedback provided throughout unit

**Digital Literacy and Technology:** students engage with multiple types of digital texts; use digital literacy skills to find and access information; create letters and memos using Google Docs; draft and send emails; communicate with teacher and government officials electronically

**SUGGESTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS**

Include guidance for formative assessments and other texts/resources not included in the Key Student Materials section in Part 1, and anything else teachers might need to know.

**Suggestions for Formative Assessments of students’ knowledge and attitudes:**

- Pose questions and engage students frequently in quick-writes, class discussions
- Use digital tools like Padlet, Jamboard, and/or Google Forms for check-ins and reflections

**Possible Additional Texts/Materials/Resources:**

*Student or Teacher-Facing*

- iCivics [Local Government: Massachusetts](#) (must register for free account)
- CRFCAP [Toolkit: Setting the Public Agenda](#) (free)
- Edtechbooks [Building Democracy for All](#) (free)
- NHPR [Civics 101: A Podcast](#) (free)
- Cartoon Studies [This Is What Democracy Looks Like: A Graphic Guide To Governance](#) (costs, pay what you can)

*Teacher-Facing*

- Votesmart.org Lesson Plan [Finding and Writing Representatives](#) (free)
- Edutopia [Using Community Challenges for Learning](#) (free)
- [Teacher’s Guide](#) to Public Service Recognition Week, from the [Partnership for Public Service](#) (free)
- Teachervision Lesson Plan [Who are my representatives?](#) (free account required for limited access)

**Additional Recommendations:**

- Use graphic organizers, like this [writing planner](#), to scaffold writing instruction, assess students’ writing skills, and provide feedback during the culminating assessment stage
- Provide students with examples of the final products. (Example: [letters](#) and [memos](#)) Examine work samples and discuss them in terms of content, quality, etc.
- Make videos for students to watch and rewatch when modeling important skills. (Example: [Teacher Video: Calling my representative](#))
- Integrate writing activities throughout the unit in the forms of quick-writes, reflections, brainstorm, exit tickets, etc.
- Students need many opportunities throughout the unit to use tier 2 and tier 3 vocabulary words in order to really acquire them. Some ways to do that are:
  - Provide practice opportunities in daily lessons by encouraging students to use vocabulary in writing and speaking
  - Direct students to notice vocabulary words in oral and written texts
  - Play games with words
  - Use digital tools, like Quizlet, for additional practice opportunities and reinforcement
- Track what students are working on and give feedback with tools like Google Forms. (Example: [Topic Selection Form](#))
- Because some students finish fast and others fall behind, keep students aware of their progress and remind them of important deadlines. (Example: [Progress Tracker](#))
- Do the project with your students and share your progress along the way. (Example: [Teacher letter exemplar](#) and [Teacher memo exemplar](#))

**SUGGESTED SEQUENCE OF LESSONS**

*\*Three lesson plans from this sequence are also published: #2, #3, & #6.  
Find them at <https://sabes.org/content/ela-curriculum-hub>.*

**1: Introducing the unit:** Engage students with topic and unit; introduce culminating assessment and checklist or rubric; have students complete a pre-assessment of their word knowledge before the lesson; provide vocabulary instruction of tier 2 and 3 words; explain the words and model their use for students, provide guided practice with a fill-in-the-blank activity.

**2: \*Levels of power:** Lead a think/pair/share activity about students’ daily interactions with government-provided goods and services. Brainstorm the appropriate level of government for various community issues (e.g., litter = local; immigration reform = federal).

Students then gather information from teacher-provided sources to learn about the roles and responsibilities of different levels of government, taking and organizing their notes across each source.

*Information learned from this lesson should be periodically reviewed throughout the unit, using the following activities as time permits:*

- [Wordwall concept sort activity](#)
- [Jamboard sorting activity](#) (view only; copy to be able to edit)
- Entrance/exit slips (see plan for Lesson #2)

**3: \*Who represents me?:** Guide students to answer the question, “Who are my representatives?”. Students use web-based tools to learn who their federal, state, and local representatives are, completing a note-taking sheet that captures that information.

**4: Getting started: brainstorming:** Brainstorm with students issues that concern them, recording on either a Padlet, digital whiteboard, or chart paper. Work with the class around one topic (adult education) in order to model how to organize thoughts before reaching out to government leaders. The class brainstorms reasons why adult education is important and what three key points could be. Then students brainstorm and organize thoughts around their own selected issues.

**5: What’s a “formal letter”?:** Review a variety of business letters and emails, focusing on the body of the letter. Discuss as a class: What works? What doesn’t work? What do we want to include in our own letters?

**6: \*Writing to your representatives: introduction:** Model constructing a formal letter up through the first paragraph, using the adult education topic, and then provide time for students to begin constructing their own letters to their government representatives about their own selected topics, up through the first paragraph. Students assess their paragraphs against the template, and with a checklist for the final finished letter.

**7: Writing to your representative: finishing the letter:** Model drafting the 2nd and 3rd paragraphs for the letter re: adult education. Have students finish their own letters about their selected topics. Focus attention on using formal and polite language.

**8: Revising and reflecting:** Focus attention on using the appropriate format for addresses, clear organization, complete and coherent sentences, and making effective word and language choices. Students check their letters against the checklist, and compare their first and last drafts and submit them to the teacher, accompanied with a short reflection on 2-3 changes they made in their letters across the drafts and what led to the changes.

**Note:**

This unit was originally structured so that students communicate with officials at all three levels of government, utilizing different methods of communication (letters, emails, memos, phone calls, and/or speaking in meetings).

The number of additional lessons depends on whether you choose to have them communicate more than once, and on various other factors such as your students’ knowledge and skill level in writing; students’ comfort level and attitudes toward the assignment; technology skills; how long students spend on writing and revising; and, of course, attendance.

**If you choose to continue this unit,** the recommended next steps after completing the first letter are:

- A. Refer students to the previously brainstormed list of topics (from lesson 4). Have students go through the writing process again, this time with more independence, to compose an email, selecting a new “issue”, different level of government, and consequently, a different government official. (Email and letter formats are mostly similar, but finding out how to send an email to a representative sometimes poses a challenge for students to solve.)
- B. Have students go through the writing process for a third time, choosing a different mode of communication from formal letter or email. To assess and document this last communication, students write a short memo report providing details about the issue, and other important information.

For this third and final interaction with the government, students have used a variety of methods, including attending a community meeting, logging a complaint using the city’s 311 service, calling a representative’s office and speaking with a staff member about their concern, etc.

Most students have really enjoyed the options that are available in the last step of the project because they are “way quicker/easier than writing a whole letter” and it pushes them out of their comfort zone. In the case of calling a representative, it is necessary to provide extra support and encouragement to students by doing it yourself, such as modeling it in class on speakerphone and by videorecording yourself making the call.