

We The People Book Overview - Summer Assignment 2020-21

Team XXI

I will post scans of each chapter in the “We The People Summer Group” in Schoology, but as the pandemic situation develops in mid-June I will also post dates in our summer group to allow you to pick up physical copies of the book in a safe, socially distanced way if you wish. Those dates will likely begin on June 8, dependent on physical safety.

In order to get a head-start on the year, we do what many of the most competitive We The People classes around the country do - read and work on the We The People textbook over the summer. This has three purposes, which you need to keep in mind and review while you are working over the summer. Keeping these three big goals in mind can keep reading the book from seeming like a slog.

1. To review and reinforce some of the most important concepts from AP Government, so that they can become second nature to you and do not get forgotten over the summer.
2. Introduce a few new ideas and, most importantly, connections between ideas which are not elaborated in the AP Government curriculum - like what rights and liberties court cases have to do with Enlightenment philosophy, or how the rules of the Convention might matter for evaluating Congressional rules of procedure.
3. Introduce you to the “Unit structure” of We The People and help you begin thinking about which Units you are most interested in working on.

You are going to read the whole text book -- all the lessons in each unit. It would benefit you a great deal **to take notes on the units as you read** - the information contained in them is invaluable as a set of “basics” **which you will find yourself returning to as a foundation** for your most advanced knowledge many months from now. **I cannot emphasize enough how important sticky noting, taking notes on, or keeping a terms list for quick reference back to the main textbook is.** In addition to reading the book, you will be answering some of the “What Do You Think” questions from each lesson, as a check-in to make sure you’ve read the unit and can deploy the ideas in each lesson.

For each lesson – for example, Unit 1 contains 7 lessons – you should choose any *one* of the ‘What Do You Think’ questions from the lesson and draft a response to each question you chose that is no less than one long-ish, solid paragraph of 6+ sentences, and no more than three such paragraphs. You must cite, in these responses, examples from the book reading. Examples are attached to this packet. In terms of time commitment, I would suggest allowing 20-40 minutes to read a single ‘Lesson.’ Answering the two questions per lesson should take another 20-40 minutes. This means that each lesson will take, on average, an hour to an hour and a half. **There are 38 lessons in the book – you cannot possibly hope to do this assignment at the last minute, since it represents at least a week of work if you put in 2-3 hours per day.** All the WDYT questions will be due on the first day I see you of the school year. *The questions from each lesson form the basis for rapid-fire discussion and debate in class. I use extensive cold-calling, so you must be prepared in class to discuss each lesson.* When we return, there will be little work due for class each day. Instead, you will be writing three We The People papers and participating in three We The People rounds as participants and three as judges. Every Friday, we will have one We The People round. As you are doing this summer assignment, pay attention to which Units have the questions and ideas you find most intriguing – this will help serve as a guide to which units you will want to work on when the year begins. **I can be reached all break via email or Schoology.**

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EXAMPLE RESPONSES

Unit 1, Lesson 7: What Do You Think #1

Short but Acceptable Response: “The writers of the post-Revolutionary state constitutions included bills of rights or declarations of rights in their state constitutions for several distinct reasons. First, many of the framers of state constitutions saw the documents as a reflection of their basic philosophical ideas about government – Mason and Madison relied on Locke, for example (P53), and Pennsylvania’s state constitution began with an elaborate articulation of social contract theory (P53). Second, they were emerging from a period of intense conflict with the British over proper representation and protection of rights, and the Revolutionary period saw a large number of brutal rights violations by both sides (P44). This meant they included specific procedural and common law rights they had seen violated in the colonial and revolutionary periods to ensure the more effective protection of those rights (P55).”

Unit 3, Lesson 17: What Do You Think (Box 2 of 2), #2

Strong Response: “The Constitution isn’t clear on what the limits of Presidential power are, and are especially unclear about what those restrictions mean when the President is acting as the Commander in Chief during a security crisis. Lincoln took advantage of this ambiguity to engage in practices like muzzling the press and political opponents, suspending habeas corpus, and expand the financial and commercial powers of the government during the war – and even issue powerful Presidential executive orders like the Emancipation Proclamation (P120, 121). I think the power of the President in wartime should be sharply limited on the domestic front, even though some Presidents have used those powers effectively. The Bill of Rights and the various protections of procedure, equal treatment and private property in the Constitution should not have ‘security exceptions’ which the executive can define. When Presidents want to curtail rights because of security or wartime concerns, they must wait for the courts or Congress to approve, or have those exceptions later curtailed by the Courts and Congress. This is true even if it would be *very tempting indeed* to test a weapon on the area already occupied by someone’s cornfields or lock someone up because they have political views sympathetic to our wartime opponents. These examples aren’t in the lesson, but I think the difference between the Court’s shameful acceptance of Japanese internment in the 1940s as opposed to its praiseworthy willingness to prevent the Bush Administration from keeping suspected terrorists prisoners with no due process or habeas corpus, illustrate what I think we should strive towards.

Unit 6, Lesson 33: What Do You Think (Box 1 of 3), #1

Too Short response: The federal nature of our government – with both national and state sovereignty – still creates many powerful tensions. Three that come easily to mind are the debate over proper regulation of marijuana, and immigration, with some state encouraging ‘sanctuary city’ or ‘sanctuary state’ policies. Sometimes these issues can be resolved by the Supreme Court, but tensions remain.

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Unit 3, Lesson 21, What Do You Think (Box 2 of 3), #1

Acceptable response: Gerrymandering doesn't technically violate the principle of one person one vote, since each person's vote still 'counts' equally. It has numerous other negative effects though, and should be curbed. Since *Wesberry* (P150), *Veith v Jubelir* (Scotusblog), and other cases make this hard to do without using the one person one vote rule as the basis (it's the main acceptable reason to overrule state district line choices), it's worth asking whether it limits the one person one vote rule more subtly. I think it does. By making the Democratic votes in GOP gerrymandered districts virtually impossible to cause a change in the result and vice versa, it causes a damaging chilling effect, dissuading people from voting since their vote seems unlikely to be important. This unequal treatment of voters, though not violating strict numerical equality, can and should be seen as a violation of the one person one vote principle. In *Gill v Whitford*, it should be deciding some of these questions, so a good student might use it in their answer.

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Optional Summer Extension - We The People Paper Writing Guidelines

If you have the time and inclination over the summer, I would strongly suggest choosing the unit you are most interested in and writing one practice paper. Though this is optional, it will help me get a sense of your writing, give you a head start on unit selection, and get you comfortable with the format, which is important because you will be writing three of these in the first eight weeks of the course. Prompts and a sample paper are attached. Additional instructions follow.

Instructions

- For each unit, you have NINE prompt choices. Choose the one that interests you most.
- Each prompt has three parts - answer all three parts with a supported analysis including your own opinions. None of these are “pure factual” questions where you can simply recite the content of the lessons you’ve read.
- Do not “bullet point” - all three prompts are meant to blend together into one paper with smooth transitions and conceptual connections.

Technical Requirements

- Between 650-850 words, Times New Roman 12 font.
- Chicago style citation, including of the We The People book. Don’t sweat the details of if your comma is in the wrong place or something, though - the citations are so I can see evidence of your reading and research, not to work on Chicago style technicalities.
- Attached Chicago-style works cited page.
- Grading will be: 40% for answering all three prompts clearly and with strong positions, 20% for use of the We The People Book extensively, 25% for effective logical argument, organization, and use of evidence, 5% for technical correctness in citations, and 10% for stylistic originality - clever writing, use of quotes, personal voice, and so on.

Tips and Hints

- Make sure to answer all three parts of the prompt thoroughly - but that doesn’t mean equally. If one part interests you more, it’s perfectly OK to elaborate your arguments on that part more than the other two parts of the prompt.
- If the prompt has a quote, book, author, or names a Federalist paper, go look up and investigate it! It will inevitably help you understand the question better.
- Use the We The People book itself! It may have silly, simplistic cartoons but the facts, definitions, and conceptual outlines the book (and its companion website) provides can be a great guide to how to get the basic elements of your essay in place before you build up the rest of your argument. Do not hesitate to refer to it extensively - it will help.
- Use *actual books* like Akhil Reed Amar’s *America’s Constitution*, available at your local library, and *reliable web databases* like the Heritage Foundation’s Online Constitution or the National Constitution Center’s Interactive Constitution.

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- Have fun and be provocative - don't hesitate to disagree with the prompt, take a politically radical question, or find an unusual way to extend the question to the modern world. These questions can be dry if you don't take it upon yourself to spice them up.
- There's no right answer (though there are wrong facts and weak analyses) so don't feel constrained to get it *right* - instead make the strongest, best researched, most interesting case you can for your take on the question.
- Show off your personal beliefs, writing style, and takes on each question. I use these papers to help figure out people's strengths and weaknesses before assigning you to units, and to help you improve prior to state and regional competition, so I need something which reflects you - and that's a lot more fun to write, too.
- Remember that this is as much a *speech* as it is a paper - you need to make writing and rhetorical choices that are punchy and effective in an oral delivery. This rules out long and winding sentences ruled by commas, colons, and dashes.