



Commons

DIGITAL TOWN
SQUARE

Curriculum Guide



Commons – Digital Town Square™

Commons – Digital Town Square™ is EverFi’s digital course for civic engagement. *Commons* aims to both inform and empower students, preparing them for a life of active participation in local, state, and national communities. Students, teachers and school systems benefit from *Commons* in a number of ways:

- *Commons* helps students develop a deeper understanding of civic institutions and processes, and how individuals fit into the bigger picture.
- *Commons* provides teachers with high-impact learning content for their students, and in-depth assessment tools for gauging and tracking student learning.
- *Commons* simplifies the management of complex activities such as debates and simulations, providing these in-depth learning experiences to students without a heavy burden of planning and classroom management for teachers.
- *Commons* cultivates the skills laid out in the Common Core State Standards, helping districts and teachers to provide students the instruction they need to prepare for college and careers, and to perform well on end-of-year tests.

Upon completion of the *Commons* course, students will be able to:

- Define key civics-related concepts and terms.
- Identify the role of individual citizens in American society, and opportunities for civic participation.
- Apply critical thinking skills to real-world simulations and interactive exercises.
- Develop a clear point of view in a short persuasive essay.

STANDARDS

Our curriculum is developed in alignment with relevant curriculum frameworks at both the state and national level. *Commons* maps to state-level Civics and Social Studies standards and the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts. For more information, please visit www.EverFi.com/Standards.

HIGH LEVEL COURSE FACTS

- **Course Overview Video** and **10 Learning Modules** (approximately 30-45 minutes each)
- **Capstone writing activity**, consisting of a scaffolded outlining segment followed by a short persuasive essay composition.

- Cumulative course time is estimated to be between **6 to 8 hours of computer seat time**, depending on each student’s learning level.
- **Attitudinal and behavioral surveys** to measure students’ existing civics-related attitudes and behaviors and any changes that occur in taking the course.
- Upon completion of the learning modules, essay, and assessments, students earn an **Empowered Citizen Certification**.

Each module includes:

- **Animated Introduction:** A 3-5 minute animated sequence introducing students to the concepts for each module
- **Interactive Learning Content:** Students explore and apply the targeted concepts through games from iCivics, interactive text activities, slideshows, etc.
- **Knowledge Check Quizzes:** At the end of each module, students will demonstrate understanding of key concepts through short quizzes.
- **In-class critical thinking and group activities:** Teachers will have access to supplemental in-class lesson guides to encourage students to apply the concepts they have learned in the modules to real-world decisions and issues.

DETAILED COURSE OUTLINE

Module 1: “My Rights”

- **Overview:** Students explore the rights, responsibilities, and roles of individual citizens in the US, using the Bill of Rights as a primary source.
- **Learning Objectives:**
 - Students will be able to recognize the articles in the Bill of Rights that address the rights of individual citizens.
 - Students will be able to paraphrase the rights protected by a given Constitutional amendment.
 - Students will be able to identify the appropriate amendment violated in a given situation.
- **Activities:**
 - Animated Introduction
 - iCivics Game: “Do I Have A Right?” (See Appendix A for descriptions of iCivics Games)
 - Interactive Text: “The Bill of Rights”
 - Knowledge Check
- **Standards:**
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8/9-10.1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10

Module 2: “Who Speaks For Me?”

- **Overview:** Students explore the role of the Legislative Branch, the duties of elected officials, and how laws are created.
- **Learning Objectives:**
 - Students will be able to identify the Legislative Branch as the governmental branch responsible for creating laws.
 - Students will be able to outline the basic legislative process including ideation, sponsorship, committee review, amendments, passage, review and passage by the other house, and approval or veto by the President.
- **Activities:**
 - Animated Introduction
 - iCivics Game: “Represent Me” (See Appendix A for descriptions of iCivics Games)
 - iCivics Game: “LawCraft”
 - Knowledge Check
- **Standards:**
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8/9-10.4, 7, 10

Module 3: “A Leader For The People”

- **Overview:** Students investigate the role of the President and the Executive Branch as laid out in the Constitution, and how it has evolved over the course of American history.
- **Learning Objectives:**
 - Students will be able to explain the concept of checks and balances as it applies to the Presidency.
 - Students will be able to outline the general duties of the President, including signing or vetoing legislation passed by Congress, appointing and overseeing the Cabinet, and enforcing federal laws.
 - Students will be able to paraphrase key concepts from Washington’s Farewell Address.
- **Activities:**
 - Animated Introduction
 - Interactivity: “Building a Cabinet”
 - iCivics Game: “Executive Command” (See Appendix A for descriptions of iCivics Games)
 - Interactive Text: “Washington’s Farewell Address”
 - Knowledge Check

- **Standards:**
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8/9-10.1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

Module 4: “Justice For All”

- **Overview:** Students explore the role of the Judicial Branch, the court system, and juries.
- **Learning Objectives:**
 - Students will be able to distinguish between civil juries, petit juries, and grand juries, given definitions of the three.
 - Students will be able to explain the basic role of the Judicial Branch in evaluating whether laws are Constitutional.
- **Activities:**
 - Animated Introduction
 - iCivics Game: “We The Jury” (See Appendix A for descriptions of iCivics Games)
 - iCivics Game: “Supreme Decision”
 - Interactivity: “In The Courthouse”
 - iCivics Game: “Court Quest”
 - Knowledge Check
- **Standards:**
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8/9-10.1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

Module 5: “Paying For Progress”

- **Overview:** Students explore the basic function of taxes and government revenue, and the budget process.
- **Learning Objectives:**
 - Students will be able to identify the basic definitions of income taxes, property taxes, and sales taxes.
 - Students will be able to describe the necessity of taxes in funding government functions and programs that are vital to society.
- **Activities:**
 - Animated Introduction
 - Interactivity: “Creating a Budget”
 - iCivics Game: “People’s Pie” (See Appendix A for descriptions of iCivics Games)
 - Knowledge Check
- **Standards:**
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8/9-10.2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

Module 6: “Global Affairs and My Role”

- **Overview:** Students examine the role of the US government and individuals in international affairs.
- **Learning Objectives:**
 - Students will be able to identify foreign relations as the official responsibility of the federal government.
 - Students will be able to identify the Department of State as the primary diplomatic arm of the federal government.
 - Students will be able to recognize that individuals and organizations also play a key role in international affairs.
- **Activities:**
 - Animated Introduction
 - iCivics Game: “Crisis of Nations” (See Appendix A for descriptions of iCivics Games)
 - Knowledge Check
- **Standards:**
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8/9-10.4, 7, 8, 10

Module 7: “My State, My Hometown”

- **Overview:** Students learn about the similarities and differences between the structure and role of national, state, and local government.
- **Learning Objectives:**
 - Students will be able to explain that state and local governments have a three-branch structure, similar to the federal government.
 - Students will be able to identify the basic functions of local government including education, public works, law enforcement, recreation, and public records.
 - Students will be able to distinguish between the powers given to the federal government and those reserved for the states, local governments, or individuals.
- **Activities:**
 - Animated Introduction
 - Slideshow: “The Special Case of the Federal District”
 - iCivics Game: “Counties Work” (See Appendix A for descriptions of iCivics Games)
 - iCivics Game: “Power Play”
 - Knowledge Check
- **Standards:**

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8/9-10.2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10

Module 8: “My Voice, My Vote”

- **Overview:** Students explore the electoral process, eligibility for elected office, and the role of individuals in elections.
- **Learning Objectives:**
 - Students will be able to identify the ages at which citizens are eligible for Federal elected offices.
 - Students will be able to identify ways that citizens can participate in elections besides voting, including running for office, helping on campaigns, debating issues, and working at polls.
- **Activities:**
 - Animated Introduction
 - Interactivity: “Ages of Eligibility”
 - iCivics Game: “Cast Your Vote” (See Appendix A for descriptions of iCivics Games)
 - Knowledge Check
- **Standards:**
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8/9-10.1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10

Module 9: “Information Exchange”

- **Overview:** Students learn about ways to evaluate information in the Internet age, and how to engage in effective and responsible debate.
- **Learning Objectives:**
 - Students will be able to identify the basic tenets of ethical journalism given a list of options.
 - Students will be able to correctly match position statements with appropriate supporting statements.
- **Activities:**
 - Interactive Animated Introduction
 - iCivics Game: “Argument Wars” (See Appendix A for descriptions of iCivics Games)
 - Knowledge Check
- **Standards:**
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8/9-10.1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

Module 10: “Taking Action”

- **Overview:** Students explore various forms of civic participation, using the First Amendment as a guiding framework.
- **Learning Objectives:**
 - Students will be able to describe how each of the rights in the First Amendment lay the foundation for civic engagement.
 - Students will be able to identify which First Amendment rights are evident in a given description of civic activity.
- **Activities:**
 - Interactive Animated Introduction
 - iCivics Game: “Activate!” (See Appendix A for descriptions of iCivics Games)
 - Knowledge Check
- **Standards:**
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8/9-10.1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

Capstone Essay: Op-Ed

- **Overview:** Students select a topic that is important to them, then create an outline based on a set of guiding questions. Based on their outline, students compose a 250-word persuasive essay on their topic, create a headline for it, and write a short byline for themselves.
- **Learning Objectives:**
 - Students will be able to select an issue or topic that is of personal significance to them, and articulate it in a topic statement.
 - Students will be able to create an outline for a short persuasive essay by answering a series of guiding questions.
 - Students will be able to write a short persuasive essay based on their outline, incorporating the content of the outline into the larger composition.
 - Students will be able to craft a coherent argument, using supporting examples that align with their topic statement.
- **Activities:**
 - Topic Selection
 - Scaffolded Outline
 - Essay Composition
 - Essay Revision
 - Headline Creation
 - Byline Creation
 - Layout Selection
- **Standards:**

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.9-10

Appendix A: iCivics Games Descriptions

“Do I Have A Right?”

- **Overview:** In Do I Have a Right?, your students run a law firm that specializes in constitutional law. Clients bring various complaints, and students must identify if they “have a right.” As students successfully resolve cases by matching them with the correct attorneys, their law firm grows along with the skills of their lawyers.

“Represent Me”

- **Overview:** Represent Me is a fun and interactive online video game designed to teach your students about the role of constituents in the legislative process. Students work as a legislator and serve their constituents by approving bills that are most likely to help them. The objective of Represent Me is to guide students toward an understanding of the important function of the people back home in influencing bills that become laws, and to help develop their higher level analytic thought processes.

“Law Craft”

- **Overview:** In LawCraft students play a representative or senator in the U.S. Congress. They choose an issue and select from a variety of amendments to create a bill, while paying attention to how much support each amendment has among other members. After passing the bill, the player works to compromise with the other chamber—and, if necessary, the President—to create a bill that will be signed into law.

“Executive Command”

- **Overview:** This interactive online video game will give your students the experience of being the President of the United States! As the president, students will be faced with the daily challenges presidents must balance in running a government and keeping the country safe during one four-year term. They will propose an agenda to Congress, sign bills into law, delegate new laws to the appropriate federal agency, handle international diplomatic, and command the military during times of war.

“Win The White House”

- **Overview:** In Win the White House, your students take on the role of presidential candidate from the primary season all the way through to the general election. The

player strategically manages time and resources to gain control of as many electoral votes as possible over a ten-week campaign. This can only be done by effectively communicating his or her position on issues, and mastering media and public appearances.

“We The Jury”

- **Overview:** In *We the Jury*, your students take on the role of a juror in a civil case. Jurors meet in the deliberation room to weigh the evidence and determine which side should win. As fellow jurors state their opinions, the student uses the evidence to respond and bring about consensus for one side or the other. Jurors deliberate until consensus is reached.

“Supreme Decision”

- **Overview:** “Supreme Decision” is a game that combines animation and interactive activities to give students a peek into the inner workings of the Supreme Court. Students play a law clerk who must listen in on judges’ deliberations, understand each issue, and identify which side of the issue they agree with.

“Court Quest”

- **Overview:** Court Quest is a fun and interactive online video game designed to teach your students about the federal and state court systems, and the appeals process. As your students navigate around the country, they will encounter citizens who need assistance getting their cases to the correct court. They will be responsible for reading each case and analyzing the details in order to assign the case to the right court. The objective of Court Quest is to teach your students about the court system, and develop their higher level analytical and evaluative thought processes.

“People’s Pie”

- **Overview:** People’s Pie is an interactive online video game designed to teach students about the federal budget. The game is a balancing act: Students must fund important programs without setting tax rates too high or borrowing too much money. To succeed, they must keep their citizens happy and avoid a burdensome national debt. Can your students master the People’s Pie?

“Crisis of Nations”

- **Overview:** In *Crisis of Nations*, take the helm of your own country and work together with others to solve international problems! As the leader of your own country, you'll have to make tough choices about how to use military, espionage, and

economic resources to serve both the best interests of your own country and the larger global community. Navigate a shifting landscape of international allies and enemies as you declare war, broker peace, and increase prosperity at home.

“Counties Work”

- **Overview:** Counties Work is a fun and interactive way for students to learn about how counties are run. As students respond to citizen requests, they must make decisions that benefit the community and manage county resources responsibly. Students must analyze and select good requests in order to keep the community running smoothly. When crisis strikes, students must act quickly and sensibly. The objective of Counties Work is to teach young people how counties are run and their role as active county members, while promoting cost-benefit analysis skills.

“Power Play”

- **Overview:** In Power Play, you’ll coach a team of players competing to win power for state or federal government. Teammates will offer arguments that, if persuasive, will pull power statues toward the side you’ve chosen. But use your players wisely — the wrong argument will make a player fall or even move the power toward the other side!

“Cast Your Vote”

- **Overview:** In Cast Your Vote your students will use their personal interests to drive a political debate. Students will have the opportunity to select questions in the debate, rate the candidates’ responses, and vote for the candidate of their choice.

“Argument Wars”

- **Overview:** Argument Wars is a video game that teaches students about landmark Supreme Court cases that clarified key constitutional rights. Each case is a separate game within Argument Wars, so you can choose to have your class learn as many or as few of the cases as your curriculum requires. In each game, students play a lawyer who represents one side in the case. Students identify the main argument in favor of the side they represent, then back up that argument by evaluating a variety of possible supporting statements. Students must correctly choose the best supporting statements to help their side, and must be prepared to satisfy the judge by showing that they understand how the support relates to their main argument. At the same time, students must also evaluate the arguments and supports offered by their computer-generated opponent, who represents the opposite side in the case.



“Activate!”

- **Overview:** Activate! is a fun and interactive way for students to develop an understanding of the concept of being an active citizen. As students work their way through the levels from personal to national, they learn about what it takes to run a successful campaign for a cause of their choice. They are responsible for analyzing and selecting an agenda, as well as managing the resources at their disposal.