



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative  
2019 Volume III: American Democracy and the Promise of Justice

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## **Understanding Democracy in the Elementary Grades**

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by Carol Boynton

Young children often have a natural inclination to problem-solve through fairness. But the question arises, what is fairness? How is equity determined and by whom? This six-week unit introduces a variety of governmental structures with the plan for students to role-play each as they organize and determine the rules of classroom. They will explore monarchy, anarchy, dictatorship, communism and finally, democracy with the hope that they will discover the advantages of governing through a core set of values, combining individual choice and equal opportunity, and striving for the common good.

The learning begins with two foundation-setting picture books: *Let's Chat about Democracy: Exploring Forms of Government in a Treehouse* by Michelle A. Balconi and *We the Kids: The Preamble of the Constitution of the United States* by David Catrow. The experience provides knowledge about the democratic system along with an opportunity for students to decide how our classroom might run like a democracy. They will work like the founding fathers to create an age-appropriate, student-designed constitution that will guide our classroom throughout the year.

The essential questions, *What makes a good citizen? What makes a good leader? How do members of a community help each other? Why do we need rules?* provide some specific context as the students explore government.

(Developed for Social Studies, grade K; recommended for Social Studies, grades K-3)

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