

# Exploring Government

*Exploring Government* is a one-semester course on American government that fulfills the high school requirement for government. It also provides a one-semester credit in English. In states where a year-long course is considered one high school credit, the government and English components count as one-half credit each. In states where a year-long course is considered two high school credits, each course is counted as one credit.

To complete both courses, the student should:

- Read the lessons in the text.
- Read the assigned documents in *We Hold These Truths*.
- Complete a project for each unit (see explanation below).
- Read the four assigned books.
- Read the literary analysis for each book in the *Student Review*.
- Complete the assignments found at the end of the literary analysis for each book.
- Optional: Complete daily review questions, quizzes, and exams in the Student Review Pack.

If you do not wish to use *Exploring Government* for English credit, you can omit half of the projects and the four assigned books, but we encourage you to include them because they greatly enhance your student's understanding of government.

**Unit Projects.** Our design for students earning one-semester credits in both government and English is for the student to complete one project per week as suggested in the unit introductions. The student can choose to do *either* a writing assignment or a project as the parent decides. For students completing the one-semester English credit, we recommend that the student choose the writing assignment at least six times during the semester.

**Time Required.** A student should complete each day's assignments, listed at the end of each lesson, on that day. The actual time a student spends on a given day might vary, but you should allow your student about one hour each day for government and one hour for English. If you are using the *Student Review* material, the work for the last day of each unit should include the unit quiz, which will require a few more minutes that day. Three days in the semester will include taking an exam over the previous five units, so you should allow some more time for this activity.

**We Believe in You.** We believe that you are in charge of your child's education and that you know how best to use this material to educate your child. We provide you with tools and instructions, but we encourage you to tailor them to fit your child's interests and abilities and your family's situation and philosophy. Being able to do this is one of the benefits of homeschooling!

## Course Descriptions

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You can use the following course descriptions as you develop your school records, produce a high school transcript, or report grades.

**Government (or American Government).** The student will study Biblical teachings about government and leadership, definitions and historical examples of different forms of government, and the background to the American constitutional system. The course provides a thorough study of the U.S. Constitution and the workings of the federal government today. The student will also study state and local government, the revenue and budgeting process, international relations, specific issues that government faces today, and ways that the individual citizen can be involved in government. The student will read a significant number of original source documents and essays about government while studying the narrative of lessons. The student will also complete a project each week, either an essay or another creative project related to the study of government.

**English (American Biography and Composition).** The student will read two biographies and two autobiographies/memoirs of important American political figures. The student will read literary analysis of the books and discuss them in writing. The student will also complete a project

each week, either an essay or another creative project related to the study of government.

## Student Review Pack

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The *Student Review Pack* has material that you might find helpful for increasing your student's understanding of the course and for giving you a way to know and grade your student's grasp of the content. It is an optional supplement that contains the following three components.

The *Student Review* includes review questions on each lesson and literary analysis of the books assigned in the curriculum (the literary analysis is also available on our website at [www.notgrass.com](http://www.notgrass.com)).

The *Quiz and Exam Book* has a quiz to be taken at the end of each unit that is based on the lesson review questions. In addition, after every five units, it has an exam that is based on the quizzes from those five units. This makes a total of fifteen quizzes and three exams over the course of the semester. The lesson review questions can serve as a study guide for the quizzes, and the quizzes can serve as a study guide for the exams.

The questions at the end of the literary analysis for the four books provide the material needed for grading English.

The *Answer Key* contains answers for the lesson review questions, literary analysis questions, and the quizzes and exams.

## Suggestions for Grading

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To earn credit in both government and English, the student should complete the assignments listed on the second page of each unit introduction and at the end of each lesson (completing the *Student Review* and *Quiz and Exam Book* assignments is up to your discretion as parent/teacher). A weekly assignment checklist is available on our website.

You can give equal weight to each assignment, or you might choose to give different weight to each component. Grades are usually assigned on a percentage basis for an individual assignment and as letter grades for a semester on the basis of the cumulative assignment grades. We recommend giving an A if the average weighted grade is 90% or above, a B for 80-89%, a C for 70-79%, and a D for 60-69%.

If your child consistently gets grades lower than 60%, you might need to evaluate his readiness to study a course with this level of difficulty. On the other hand, you might need to adjust your expectations. You might consider

an additional grading element based on your perception of your child's overall grasp of the material. This is another advantage of homeschooling: you can judge how well your child understands the material and how he or she is growing from the study in ways that test and assignment scores do not reflect.

We designed this curriculum to cover our best understanding of what a high school student should learn about government. Helping a student pass a CLEP or AP test was not our primary goal. However, this course provides a good foundation for preparing for those tests, when combined with one of the test preparation books that are available.

## Teaching Writing

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The three most important activities to help a student write well are reading good writing, writing as frequently as possible, and having his or her writing critiqued.

You can find many aids to help you in teaching writing. The Online Writing Lab from Purdue University is an excellent source that is available on the Internet. We have found *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White to be concise and helpful. This book is available from Notgrass Company and many other sources.

Other resources that people have recommended to us include *The Elegant Essay* by Lesha Myers, *Format Writing* by Frode Jensen, *Writing Skills* by Diana Hanbury King, and *Teaching the Essay* and *Teaching the Research Paper* by Robin Finley. The Institute for Excellence in Writing offers comprehensive instructional courses, and Reconciliation Press offers writing instruction services. We offer these as suggestions which you can investigate. We do not endorse one program or publication over another.

## Grading Writing Assignments

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Teaching writing skills can sometimes feel more like an art than a science. We know good writing when we read it, but trying to explain why we like it is like trying to explain why we like a particular flavor of ice cream. Good writing engages the reader and makes him or her want to keep reading. It covers the subject well and uses proper mechanics (spelling, grammar, and punctuation). Good writing informs, inspires, and sometimes challenges the reader. Above all, good writing says something of significance.

Because defining good writing is difficult, giving a grade to a writing assignment can be somewhat subjective. What is the difference, for example, between an A paper and a B paper? One student might write the best that he or she can, and it still might not be as good as what another student produces with less effort. What grade should you assign to each student's work? In addition, how can the grades you give reflect a student's improvement over the course of a semester? After all, we hope that the student will be writing better at the end of the semester than at the beginning.

A grade for a writing assignment usually has two elements: one is mechanics, and the other is coverage of the subject matter. Noting errors in spelling and punctuation is relatively easy. Misused words and awkward sentences might be more difficult to detect. The most difficult part of grading is determining whether or not the paper is organized well and covers the topic adequately.

Beginning with the highest possible grade of 100, you might want to take a point off for every misspelled word, punctuation error, or grammatical error. An awkward sentence might count two or three points off. A paragraph that does not flow well or have a clear purpose might cost five to eight points. You can also consider whether the paper is well-expressed but has mechanical errors as opposed to its being poorly expressed but mechanically good.

We suggest not giving a grade on the writing assignment until the student submits the final version of the assignment. Use the rough draft as a teaching opportunity. It is fair to have higher expectations later in the course. Also, if a student has numerous mechanical or grammatical errors in a paper, covering the paper with red ink might do more harm than good. Instead, focus on what appear to be the three most serious or common mistakes and don't worry about the rest at that point. When the student has corrected these problems, move on to other problems to correct in later papers.

The website of the College Board, which administers the SAT and CLEP examinations, has an Essay Scoring Guide that its graders use. On their website, you can read this guide and also read sample essays and see why those essays received the scores they did. In addition, the National Assessment of Educational Progress program of the U.S. Department of Education has information available online about its writing assessment.

You may find it helpful to have someone outside your family read one or more of your student's essays and give constructive feedback at some point during the school year.

## **Notes About the Literature**

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We scoured many possible titles to suggest literature that is quality and upbuilding and that won't assault your faith or sense of decency. Some of the books we included have words or ideas with which you will be uncomfortable, as we are. We want to let you know about them in case you want to do some editing before your child reads the books or in case you want to substitute another book. You might want a parent to read a book aloud to the student and skip over inappropriate words. However you decide to use them, we believe that the overall impact of these books for good outweighs their use of inappropriate words. The editions listed below are the ones that are available from Notgrass Company.

These are the four books we chose for the English component of *Exploring Government*:

### ***Mornings on Horseback***

*Mornings on Horseback* is David McCullough's highly-acclaimed account of Theodore Roosevelt's youth and early adult life. It tells the story of the fascinating and close-knit family into which he was born and the influences that helped him become the man and president he was. The book concludes as Roosevelt is poised to enter politics again in earnest. Roosevelt was a remarkable man and a pivotal character in American history. David McCullough's masterful storytelling helps the reader understand Roosevelt and his times. There are a few elements in the book that we want you to know about before your child begins reading:

- There is a brief description of Theodore's uncle who reportedly had many "lady friends" and had a secret second wife and family (page 22).
- Theodore Roosevelt Sr. visited an Irish regiment during the Civil War and drank with the officers "nearly until dawn" (page 61).

- [in a discussion about asthma, not related to Theodore Roosevelt] “. . . French novelist Marcel Proust (1871-1922), . . . thought his asthma, like his homosexuality, was rooted in the unconscious and was part of a price he had to pay for his creative gifts” (page 107).
- Brief mention of Senator Roscoe Conkling’s long-term extra-marital affair (pages 153-154)
- Theodore’s affectionate talk to a sister in a letter would raise eyebrows in today’s world (pages 164).
- A Boston paper angrily denounces Harvard students “gazing with watery eyes upon half-clad ballet girls and burlesque actresses . . .” (page 202).
- Theodore gets “high” on wine at his initiation to a Harvard club, followed by a mention that afterward he drank sparingly if at all (page 204-205).
- “d---ed” (page 214)
- Mild references to affection between Theodore and his first wife Alice during their engagement: “kiss her,” “hold her in my arms,” “. . . yet when we are alone, I cannot bear her to be a minute out of my arms” (page 223-224, 230).
- References to Theodore’s brother Elliott drinking too much (page 227 and a few times following)
- Years after the fact, Theodore’s second wife described her brother-in-law Elliott: “He drank like a fish and ran after the ladies. I mean ladies not in his own rank which was much worse” (page 247).

- There is a summary of a short story written by Elliott that concludes with the main character “about to pull the trigger in front of a mirror” (page 248).
- “d---” page 271
- A canyon is described as “the work of millions of years” (page 321).
- “By Godfrey . . . “ (page 323)
- Referring to isolated ranchers, “A few who could not wait [for the end of a bad winter] blew their brains out” (page 345).
- “d---ed” (page 363)
- There is a brief synopsis of Elliott’s adult life following the period covered in the book. He struggled with alcoholism, was involved in a paternity suit, and when he died at 34 he was living with a mistress (pages 368-369).

### *The Autobiography of Calvin Coolidge*

Calvin Coolidge is one of our great American success stories. He was raised in rural Vermont and instilled with humble, sincere Christian values. He was an attorney who gradually and unassumingly climbed the political ladder from local office to the White House. Sadly, he is remembered in history almost exclusively for being “Silent Cal,” a man of few words. But there is much more to this man, who served his country with wisdom, commitment to doing the right thing, and humble honesty.

### *Born Again*

Charles W. Colson first became famous as a top adviser to President Richard Nixon, whose presidency was beset by controversy and scandal, culminating in the Watergate investigation. As a mover and shaker in politics, Colson often tried to blur the line between right and wrong as



he worked for a candidate and an agenda he believed in. But after years of pursuing power and influence, he felt an emptiness that wouldn't go away. The meaning in what he had worked for evaporated.

Into that emptiness, Christ came and changed his life. Colson became a believer and a new creation, but his past still haunted him. Following his conscience at facing up to his past, Colson pled guilty and was sentenced to serve time in prison for wrongs he committed during his tough-guy political past. Through prison, God led him to service in His kingdom. *Born Again* is Colson's memoir of that story. There are a few elements in the book that we want you to know about before your child begins reading:

- A handful of times, Colson refers to African Americans in a way that could be taken as demeaning. These references have no bearing on the story. We find these references offensive and unfortunate. Charles Colson genuinely embraced fellowship with other people, regardless of color. His narrative reflects a different time in American history, though that does not excuse disrespect. We hope that Americans have made progress in attitudes and understanding toward people who are different, and in using respectful, honoring language.
- Throughout the book, there are mentions of people drinking alcoholic beverages.
- The book contains many quotations of actual dialogue. Where expletives were used in these conversations, a blank has been inserted.
- While working for a campaign, a young woman threatened to expose a phony ploy, and Colson ordered another political worker, "Take this girl out tonight and get her loaded. Keep her diverted, whatever you have to do until Election Day" (page 34).
- A paragraph about the element of physical danger in prisons concludes, "Stories of homosexual rape in the D.C. jail appeared regularly in the press" (page 247).

- Colson’s friend, after serving a prison term, described for him life inside a prison, including, “A guy once had his skull crushed changing a TV station in the middle of a program” and “I slept on the floor right next to the toilet and one night a dude urinated all over me” (page 265).
- An inmate points out to Colson another inmate, reputed to be a “hit man” who had killed 28 people (page 278).
- Describing the setting inside the prison, Colson mentions “tables piled high with girlie magazines” (page 290).
- Colson describes the emptiness of one prisoner’s daily routine, including, “Then he might spend an hour or two reading pornographic magazines before dozing off for the night” (page 312).

### ***God and Ronald Reagan***

Paul Kengor is a Ronald Reagan scholar who has written several books on the 40th president. This book focuses on Reagan’s faith: the influences in his youth, how he lived out his faith, and how his faith influenced his political career, especially as president. A particular emphasis is how Reagan’s faith affected his view of Communism and influenced his relations with the Soviet Union. There are a few elements in the book that we want you to know about before your child begins reading:

- Reagan believed that he heard comforting words from his deceased father at his father’s funeral (page 44).
- Harry Truman refers to Alger Hiss as an SOB (page 78).
- Reagan speaks of mankind rising or climbing “from the swamps.” This sounds like a reference to evolutionary ideas, even though Reagan had doubts about evolution (pages 94, 97).

- Chapter 13 deals with Nancy Reagan’s interest in astrology and how she tried to influence her husband’s schedule based on what she heard from a so-called psychic. No credible evidence exists that President Reagan gave any credence whatsoever to astrology (begin page 183).
- On one occasion Reagan suggested that being an American meant being a member of the kingdom of God (page 226).
- After the death of Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, Reagan said that he and Nancy said a “prayer for the repose of the soul of Chairman Brezhnev” (page 272).

## Alternative Literature

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If you choose not to use one or more of the books that we suggest for this curriculum, here are some other titles for you to consider:

*Reimagining Greenville: Building the Best Downtown in America* by John Boyanoski with Knox White (The History Press, 2013). This book recounts the remaking of downtown Greenville, South Carolina, from a typical rundown inner city to a beautiful and popular setting. It is a great case study that shows how state and local officials and private citizens worked together to bring the renewal about. If you are ever anywhere near Greenville, you will enjoy a visit to experience the transformation yourself.

*Democracy in America* by Alexis de Tocqueville (any unabridged edition) is a classic study of American government and society written by a French sociologist after his visit to America in the 1830s. He has amazing insight into American life, much of which is still applicable today. The book is fairly long, but it is a standard work that students of American government should know.

*The Faith of Ronald Reagan* by Mary Beth Brown (Nelson Current, 2005). This book is similar to *God and Ronald Reagan*, but it has important differences. It includes more about Reagan’s personal life and relations with

his children as well as his movie career. The book also includes the eulogies that various people delivered at Reagan's funeral.

Presidential biographies are numerous and vary widely in quality. Many are quite long and contain bad language, while others are simplistic and general. The field is too large for us to offer specific suggestions; but if you have an interest in a particular president or a particular book, you can email [ray@notgrass.com](mailto:ray@notgrass.com) and we will be happy to share what we know.

**For links to other resources,  
a unit assignment checklist, and  
ideas for using this curriculum in a co-op  
or other group setting, visit:**

**[www.notgrass.com/egov](http://www.notgrass.com/egov)**