

SEAL-EARNING UNIT

Unit 7: The Student-Led Civics Project (Middle School Capstone and Universal Format)

Subject	Civics, Government, Research, Public Speaking
Grade Level	6-8 as written; 9-12 version noted in Differentiation
Possible Seal Credit	New York Middle School Capstone Project, 1 point (Civic Participation; grades 7-8 only). Rhode Island Civic Literacy Act student-led civics project, if the district accepts it. Connecticut portfolio evidence.
Time Allotment	6 weeks, one 45-minute class or program session per week plus short homework. Built for a middle school Youth and Government delegation, a classroom, or a YMCA after-school group, with minimal materials.
Youth and Government Process Practiced	The middle school resolution: investigate a real problem, write a resolution with findings and a recommendation, present it with a partner in parliamentary format, and deliver it to someone who can act on it.
The Project Standard	Rhode Island's 2021 Civic Literacy Act requires each district to provide at least one standards-aligned student-led civics project in middle or high school, designed to help students reason, support claims with evidence, and understand connections between federal, state and local policies that affect their community. New York's Middle School Capstone asks students, under a teacher's direction, to identify an issue, apply civic knowledge, skills and mindsets to it, reflect, and present to a wider audience. This unit meets both with a resolution-based project that middle schoolers can finish and present.

Learning Objectives:

- ▶ Students will be able to choose a real problem in their school or community and explain who it affects.
- ▶ Students will be able to gather three kinds of evidence (an observation or count, a person's account, a document or rule) and tell which level of government or authority is responsible.
- ▶ Students will be able to write a resolution with at least three evidence-based whereas clauses and one specific, doable resolved clause.
- ▶ Students will be able to present and defend the resolution in a chamber and deliver it to a decision maker.
- ▶ Students will be able to reflect on what they learned about how decisions get made.

Materials:

- ▶ Handout: "Problem Finder" (Supporting Document 1)
- ▶ Handout: "Evidence Triangle" (Supporting Document 2)
- ▶ Handout: "Who Decides? Ladder" (Supporting Document 3)
- ▶ Handout: "Resolution Template" (Supporting Document 4)
- ▶ Handout: "Chamber Script for Resource Team Chairs" (Storybook County Lesson 11, Middle School Resolutions, Supporting Document 3)
- ▶ Handout: "Student-Led Civics Project Rubric" (see Assessment section)
- ▶ Placards, a gavel or substitute, chart paper

Pre-Planning:

- ▶ Confirm acceptance with the school (New York: the school's Middle School Capstone Committee; Rhode Island: the civics project record the district keeps; Connecticut: the portfolio).
- ▶ Pairs. Each student keeps an individual Evidence Triangle and writes an individual reflection.
- ▶ Identify the decision makers students are likely to reach: the principal, the student council, the PTA, the town recreation director, the library, a council member. Let them know that student letters are coming.

▲ Week 1: Find a Real Problem (45 minutes)

- 1. (10 minutes) Real means local:** The problem must be something students can see or count here. List examples: the crosswalk with no signal, the lunch line, the park with broken equipment, the bus stop with no shelter, the rule about phones.
- 2. (25 minutes) Problem Finder:** Pairs complete it: the problem in one sentence, who it affects, how we know, and who we think decides about it.
- 3. (10 minutes) Share and choose:** Pairs present in 30 seconds each; the group gives one piece of advice per pair.

▲ Week 2: Gather Evidence (45 minutes plus homework)

- 1. (15 minutes) Evidence Triangle:** Three kinds: something you observed or counted (how many students use the crosswalk at 7:45; how long the lunch line takes), something a person told you (a student, a parent, a crossing guard, a custodian), and a document or rule (the school handbook, the town code, a state law, a news story).
- 2. (25 minutes) Collect the first two:** Plan a count and conduct two short interviews this week. Record on the triangle.
- 3. (5 minutes) Homework:** Find the document or rule with help from the advisor or librarian.

▲ Week 3: Who Decides? (45 minutes)

- 1. (15 minutes) The Ladder:** School (principal, student council), district (school board), town or city (council, departments), county, state (legislature, agencies), federal. Walk through two examples showing how a problem can sit on more than

one rung: the crosswalk is the town's, but the state sets the rules for school zone speed limits and the federal government funds safe routes to school.

2. **(20 minutes) Place your problem:** Pairs place their problem on the ladder, name the actual person or body at that rung, and find the one rule or policy that rung has about it.
3. **(10 minutes) Check the triangle:** Every pair now has all three kinds of evidence or knows what is missing.

▲ **Week 4: Write the Resolution (45 minutes)**

1. **(10 minutes) Whereas and Resolved, with real evidence:** Each whereas clause must contain one piece of evidence from the triangle. The resolved clause must name the action, who does it, and by when.
2. **(25 minutes) Draft** on the template. Advisor checks that the resolved clause is doable by the decision maker named.
3. **(10 minutes) Partner practice:** Decide who reads which part; rehearse until it fits in 2 minutes.

▲ **Week 5: The Chamber (45 minutes)**

1. **(40 minutes) Hear every resolution** in parliamentary format: sponsors present (2 minutes), two questions, one speaker against and one for (30 seconds each), summation sentence, vote by placard, two gavel taps. A student chair runs it; a clerk records results. Students write down the best question they were asked.
2. **(5 minutes) Revise:** Sponsors change one thing in response to the questions.

▲ **Week 6: Deliver and Reflect (45 minutes)**

1. **(20 minutes) Deliver:** Each pair writes a short cover note and sends or hands the resolution to the decision maker named in it. Where possible, present it in person (student council, principal's office, a PTA meeting, a council public comment period with an adult). Record the date and the response.
2. **(20 minutes) Reflection (200 to 300 words each):** What the problem was, what evidence convinced us, who decides and how we found out, what the chamber asked, what we sent and to whom, what happened, and what we would do next.
3. **(5 minutes) Celebrate** and file the project: Problem Finder, Evidence Triangle, Ladder, resolution, chamber record, cover note, response, reflection.

▲ **Assessment: Student-Led Civics Project Rubric (100 points)**

- ▶ **Student Led (15):** Students chose the problem and the recommendation; adult help was limited to finding documents and contacts.
- ▶ **Evidence (25):** All three kinds present; the count or observation is real; the person is quoted accurately; the document is cited.
- ▶ **Who Decides (15):** Correct rung on the ladder; actual decision maker named; one connection to a higher rung (state or federal) explained.

- ▶ **Resolution (20):** Three or more whereas clauses each with evidence; resolved clause specific, assigned and dated.
- ▶ **Chamber and Delivery (15):** Presented in format; answered questions; delivered to the decision maker; response recorded.
- ▶ **Reflection (10):** Specific and honest.

▲ Differentiation:

- ▶ **Support:** Provide a list of five local problems with the decision maker already identified. Allow the count to be done as a class. Give whereas sentence starters.
- ▶ **Challenge:** Require the pair to present at a public meeting and to add a fourth kind of evidence: data from a state or town website.
- ▶ **High school version (grades 9-12):** Replace the resolution with a bill where the rung is the state (see Unit 2), require five sources, and require the delivery to be an in-person meeting or public testimony. This satisfies Rhode Island's requirement at the high school level and can be submitted as a New York High School Civics Project only if the Seal Committee accepts it as a High School Civics Project.

▲ Supporting Documents

1. Problem Finder

Names: _____ Grade: _____

The problem, in one sentence: _____

Who it affects (be specific): _____

How we know it is real: _____

Who we think decides about it: _____

What we would like to see happen: _____

2. Evidence Triangle

Something we observed or counted: What we counted, when, where, the number, who counted.

Something a person told us: Role (not name if they prefer), date, what they said in their words, permission to quote.

A document or rule: Title, where we found it, what it says about our problem (quote one sentence).

3. Who Decides? Ladder

Federal government. State government (legislature, governor, agencies). County. Town or city (council, mayor, departments). School district (board, superintendent). School (principal, student council, teachers).

Our problem sits on the ____ rung. The actual decision maker is _____. The rule at that rung is _____. The higher rung that also shapes this problem is, because _____.

4. Resolution Template

A Resolution of the [delegation or class] concerning [problem]



Whereas, [evidence: what we counted];

Whereas, [evidence: what a person told us];

Whereas, [evidence: what the rule or document says];

Therefore, be it Resolved, that [decision maker] [specific action] by [date], and that [who] will report back to [us] on [date].

Sponsors: _____ Adopted / Not adopted on _____ by a vote of _____ to _____ Sent to _____ on _____

Response: _____

5. New York Middle School Capstone Note

The New York Middle School Capstone is earned in grades 7 and 8. Keep the complete file for the student; the high school Seal Committee will need it when the student applies for the seal.