

American Experiments

Ideals and Images

Since the founding of the American republic, when the power of the nation was entrusted not in a monarchy but in its citizens, each generation has questioned and considered how to form “a more perfect union.”

The American Experiments suite of educational games builds off of this question by challenging students to think about their roles and responsibilities within their democracy. *Ideals and Images* invites students to share their own understandings of and perspectives on core American concepts, through a playful and thought provoking dialogue-based game.

The learning begins with the guiding questions:

Do Americans have shared ideals? What do they look like?

Students investigate this question by closely examining words that express American ideals, selecting images from a provided deck that best illustrates their interpretation of the word, and then comparing their choices to others in their group. Through this, students will:

- Engage in energetic and playful dialogue with the intention of listening to and learning from viewpoints that differ from their own, rather than simply rejecting them.
- Collaboratively examine how and why shared ideals can mean different things to different people and connecting that understanding to how we can successfully participate in a democracy.
- Practice forming and articulating their own viewpoints on complex topics through low-stakes game-based learning.

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Aligned Standards

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards

- D2.Civ.8.3-5. Identify core civic virtues and democratic principles that guide government, society, and communities.
- D2.Civ.8.6-8. Analyze ideas and principles contained in the founding documents of the United States, and explain how they influence the social and political system.
- D2.Civ.10.6-8. Explain the relevance of personal interests and perspectives, civic virtues, and democratic principles when people address issues and problems in government and society.
- D2.Civ.10.9-12. Analyze the impact and the appropriate roles of personal interests and perspectives on the application of civic virtues, democratic principles, constitutional rights, and human rights.

Common Core Anchor Standards for Reading and Speaking and Listening

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1. Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Assessments

This lesson builds critical thinking, empathy and discussion-based skills. Throughout the lesson, student learning can be formatively assessed through their participation in the small- and large-group discussion activities. This can be recorded using a simple tally like the table shown below. This tally could be completed by teachers or individual students to record their own progress.

Student Name	Participating in the learning task	Demonstrating skills of civil dialogue	Respectfully discussing multiple perspectives	Responding to others with empathy
Student A	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓
Student B	✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓

Conduct a summative assessment using students' sketches and reflections. Students should demonstrate an understanding that certain ideals, while considered American, have different meanings to different people, and that it is important to have an awareness of this concept to foster empathetic and productive conversations around pressing and often contentious topics. Sample questions are provided on page 7 of this guide.



Pacing Guide

Ideals and Images is a flexible lesson that can be conducted over the course of one or several class periods. The pacing guide below shows an example of how to facilitate this as a 45- or 90-minute activity.

Learning Task	45-Minute Lesson	90-Minute Lesson
Warm-Up Task	5 minutes	15 minutes
Game Procedures Review	5 minutes	5 minutes
Game Rounds	20 minutes	30 minutes
Class Debrief	10 minutes	30 minutes
Reflection and Assessment	5 minutes	10 minutes
Total	45 minutes	90 minutes

Glossary of Terms

Citizen: An inhabitant of a particular place (for the purposes of this activity, legal status of an individual does not need to be considered).

Discussion: The action or process of talking about something with the purpose of exchanging ideas.

Empathy: The ability to understand and share the feelings of another.

Engaged Citizen: A person who feels responsibility for a community and takes informed action to promote positive social change.

Ideal: A principle or idea that sets a high standard that is worth striving for.

Facilitation Note: The “ideals” that will be examined during this activity have intentionally been left undefined to encourage students to respond based on their own perception of each term.

If students are unfamiliar with some or all of the terms, have them brainstorm lists of what the terms mean to them and record these on anchor charts that are visible during the activity.



Materials and Room Arrangement

Create a deck of image cards for each student and a deck of “ideals” cards for each small group, using the cards included at the end of this guide. The cards can be printed on blank 8.5” x 11” business card sheets available at office supply stores, or printed on copy paper and cut to size. Each card is numbered to help students maintain and organize full sets during and after the activity. To increase the durability of the sets, laminating cards is recommended.

Arrange desks into groups for three to four students. These will be used for small-group gameplay and discussion.

Warm-Up Task

Prepare students for this lesson with a word-association activity. Display an image of the 1885 Statue of Liberty souvenir from the National Museum of American History’s collections, found at the end of this guide and at the Smithsonian Learning Lab collection for this activity: <https://s.si.edu/2IRZhfe>. Additional images of museum objects depicting the Statue of Liberty can also be found in this digital collection.

Ask students to identify the statue. Provide each group with a stack of sticky notes. Have students individually write down on a sticky note one word that they think best represents the Statue of Liberty. Put all sticky notes on the board.

As a class, make observations about the different words that were selected and invite students to explain their choices. Prompt discussion by asking:

- What about the Statue of Liberty made you think about certain words?
- Did we all see the same things represented in the Statue of Liberty?
- Did you expect that most people would choose the same word for this image?
- Were you surprised by any of the words that others selected? Why or why not?

Have students, individually or in groups, write on a sticky note one honest question that they have about why they likely had differing perspectives on the same image. Post the questions anonymously on the board. Keep the sticky notes there for the duration of the lesson and explain that they will be revisited at a later point.



Statue of Liberty souvenir,
New York, New York, 1885,
National Museum of
American History

Game Procedures

Prepare students for the activity by reviewing the following. Reviewing these procedures will help build community and ready students for discussions that are productive, civil, and open-minded.

Student Role	Students will step into the role of engaged community members or citizens. They will have to think carefully about the actions they would, or already do, take as active participants in civic life.
Teacher Role	The teacher will move the game forward, make observations, and challenge students to fully and openly participate as they describe their reasoning and compare their perceptions to those of their peers.
Process	In small groups of three to four, students each receive an identical deck of image cards. During each round of play, students individually pick four images to represent an “ideal” that has been chosen at random. As a group, students discuss how they interpreted the word and how and why the perspectives of the group differ.

Facilitation Tip: This game provides a platform for meaningful and fun conversations about diverse viewpoints on complex topics. Having students direct their own conversations can help create a playful and engaging atmosphere that sparks collaborative learning, energetic discussion, and new insights.

Goal	The goal of this game is to collaboratively decide who the class thinks changed America the most. Students must discuss, persuade, negotiate, and build consensus using evidence and logic.
Norms	To help foster thoughtful, reflective, and responsive group work and discussions, have students create a class set of behavioral norms. (They can also be used in future lessons!)

Some suggestions include:

- Be respectful and open to new ideas.
- Share the floor.
- Stay on topic.
- Everyone participates.
- Seek first to understand, then to speak.

Post the list somewhere visible. As the authors, students are responsible for both adhering to these norms and reminding their peers to follow them.

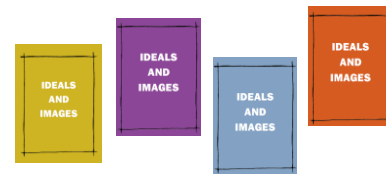


Facilitating the Game

In each group students will take turns facilitating the game. When students are the facilitator for their group, they are responsible for:

- Selecting an “ideal” from the deck. Selecting at random is encouraged!
- Saying when everyone should flip their four image cards over.
- Starting the discussion to examine why images were chosen by each member of the group and how they represent different perspectives on shared American ideals. They can start with their own image cards or ask another group member to share first.

Once the facilitator has randomly chosen the “ideal” card, all members of the group, including the facilitator, pick four cards from their own images deck that they think best illustrates how they interpret or understand the word. All group members should place their four cards face down in front of them and then turn them over at the same time.



Students compare their choices with their group, describing why they chose each image and how they interpreted the word. After the round concludes, the facilitator puts the “ideal” card to the side. Students then start another round, with the next student acting as facilitator and selecting an ideal card from those remaining in the deck.

Debriefing as a Class

Periodically pause students’ games to:

- Check in as a class and have groups share findings or questions from their discussions. Record findings and questions on the board.
- Gather reactions from groups. Did they find anything surprising? Anything that has changed their understanding of an “ideal”?
- Reiterate the guiding question: Do Americans have shared ideals? Ask students to share their thoughts on why we, as a people and as a country, do not always see our shared ideals in the same way.

Wrap up students’ games by bringing the class back together for a large-group discussion. Review the list of questions that students generated at the end of the warm-up activity. Have students share their responses to the questions, using findings generated during the game. Discuss any unanswered questions and guide students to where they might find information needed to create a response.

Conclude by having students individually sketch a simple drawing to represent their answer to the guiding question, “Do Americans have shared ideals?” Have students post their sketches on the board or around the room. Discuss as a group students’ thoughts and reactions to the guiding question.



© Smithsonian

Reflection

After students have debriefed as a class, have them reflect on this experience and how they might apply what they have learned to their own lives in and out of school. The following prompts can be used to have students think individually or in small groups, and through writing, artistic, or verbal reflections.

Game Review (the what)

- What did it feel like to share your perspectives with others?
- Did you expect that most people would choose the same images for the “ideals”? Were you surprised by any of the images that others selected? Why or why not?
- How did the different ways the “ideals” were perceived by others change the way you thought about them?

Connections to Democracy (the so what)

- Why might “ideals” that are commonly thought of as American be perceived in so many different ways by the students in this class?
- In a democracy, is it important to think and learn about how other people understand these “ideals”? Why or why not?
- How can hearing from a variety of perspectives on a topic help us better understand each other and inform our own opinions?

Next Steps (the now what)

- Discussing challenging and complex topics is an important part of democratic participation. How can you apply the discussion strategies you practiced in this activity to other conversations about public issues?
- What lessons can be learned from this game that can help individuals effectively talk to others, who may or may not share the same perspectives, about tough topics?

**We'd love to know how you are using this lesson!
Email us at HistoryTeachers@si.edu with questions,
feedback, and suggestions.**

**The American Experiments lesson plans are made possible
by a gift from the Julie and Greg Flynn Family Fund.**



Suggested Modifications

- Bell Ringers** Use this as a warm-up activity before starting a lesson that will include a discussion element. Playing *Ideals and Images* can be a great refresher on what respectful and thoughtful dialogue looks and feels like, and can help students think about conversation gambits that they may want to use in the later discussion.
- Fishbowl Discussions** Strengthen students' speaking and listening skills by playing *Ideals and Images* using a fishbowl format. Divide the class into two even groups. Have the first group sit in a circle in the middle of the room and play a round of the game, including card selection and discussion. Have the second group sit around the outside of the circle and observe both the content and the effectiveness of the conversation. Students should note when their peers demonstrate close listening skills, openness to new ideas, respectful dialogue, and expression of thoughtful conclusions. Have the groups switch and repeat the exercise. Afterward, have students respectfully critique their peers by sharing areas of strength and improvement.

Extended Learning Opportunities

- Change Over Time** After playing *Ideals and Images*, launch an inquiry-based project to examine the question "How have perceptions of American ideals changed throughout the country's history?" Have students select one of the ideals from the deck and analyze how it was understood by Americans in the early republic, 19th century, and 20th century. Encourage students to begin their investigation using the National Museum of American History's exhibit *American Democracy: A Great Leap of Faith*, <http://americanhistory.si.edu/democracy-exhibition>. Have students create a multimedia presentation with images to show how the ideal has changed over time.
- Keep the Discussion Going** Reflect on the guiding question for this lesson: Do Americans have Shared Ideals? Have students think about whether or not this was a good question to ask, and evaluate if there are other questions that might be better for helping students think about multiple perspectives on public issues and responding to others with empathy. Have students develop their own "big questions" and examine them through facilitated discussions using prompts similar to those included in this guide.
- Sales Pitch: Additions to the Deck** Challenge students to create a persuasive sales pitch to add other "ideals" to the deck. As a class, analyze either a historical period or current events to generate a list of possible "ideals" that could be added. Students should pick one potential ideal from the list and build their case for why it should be considered. They should include in their proposal at least three historic or modern images that could connect to the "ideal." Once students have created their proposal, have them pitch their ideas to classmates, faculty, or members of your local community.



Facilitation Strategies for Teachers

The American Experiments interactives provide students with the opportunity to lead and engage in their own conversation in which they can examine concepts and issues, learn through discussion, encounter new perspectives, and find common ground with others. As the facilitator, your role is to guide this discussion.

What does it mean to be a facilitator?

Your job is to support the students as they think critically and engage in thoughtful discussions about complex concepts of democracy. Being a facilitator can be a challenging position to be in during a lively and engaging discussion because it requires you to be a neutral guide rather than a participant with an opinion.

But being neutral does not mean that the facilitator is passive! You are impartial about the topic, but not about the process. The facilitator must pay close attention to both the spoken and unspoken dynamics of the conversation to ensure that students feel welcomed and engaged, that the discussion remains civil and thoughtful, and that the activity achieves its intended goals.

This **to-do list** can help you get started:

- | | |
|------------------------------|---|
| Be Prepared | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understand the activity thoroughly. Brainstorm what ideas and views might be brought up and what might not be said. Be prepared to carefully present unvoiced perspectives to help the class dig deeper in to a question or prompt.• Prepare prompting questions in advance, like “What do you think?” “Can you explain your thoughts?” “What example or evidence could you share to help us better understand what you are describing?” |
| Set the Scene | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Go over the objectives so students understand their expectations and the goals of the activity.• Review any procedures or rules. |
| Manage the Discussion | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep track of who is talking.• Take notes to capture points, thoughts, and tensions. Use your notes to develop questions and illuminate connections.• Interject only as needed to clarify statements, move the conversation forward or deeper, defuse tension, and ensure all voices are heard.• Keep an eye on time and know when to start winding down the conversation so that there is sufficient time to reflect individually and as a group. |
| Coach your Students | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• This can require the most energy during the discussion. See the next page for tips on managing a few specific instances that might come up in your classroom. |



Facilitation Strategies for Teachers, continued

Below are tips you can use when students:

Don't stick to the class norms

- Keep the class norms posted where all participants can see them! Students will often moderate each other by reminding everyone of the rules.
- Take a five-minute break. During this time, invite a rule-breaking student to be a co-facilitator and talk with them about what it means to moderate the conversation. Putting a student in a new role may help them see the conversation differently.

Dominate the conversation

- Ask the student to pause and invite others to react to what has been said.
- Give a general reminder that the goal is to hear all voices and a range of discussion, meaning the floor must be shared.

Choose to not participate

- Start by going around the room or table and having each student say something. Simply saying a few words out loud in front of a group can release a bit of the pressure a student might be feeling and make it easier for them to speak later on.
- During the discussion, let the student know that you are going to ask for their thoughts after the next few people talk. This gives them time to either check back into the conversation or prepare what they want to say.
- Explain that part of this learning experience is to understand that even if someone opts out, they are still making a conscious choice to participate or not—which is a key concept of democracy. If a student chooses to not participate, ask them to explain their choice to “sit this one out,” or invite them to be a co-facilitator.

Struggle to explain their thoughts

- Encourage students to think of an example that could illustrate what they are thinking. For example, a student might not be able to say which amendment gave women the right to vote, but they may be able to describe the woman suffrage movement.
- Pause the activity for a ten-minute research break. During this time, students can grab a textbook or access the internet to pull together evidence that might help them make their case.

Are ready to find common ground or reflect

- As the conversation or available time winds down, encourage students to reflect on what they learned about themselves as a member of a democracy and about the role of discussion in making wise decisions about public issues.
- Ask students to share their thoughts on why discussion is an important part of a thriving democracy. Identify where students' ideas overlap—in other words, where do they share common ground?



Statue of Liberty souvenir, New York, New York, 1885



This is one of the first models of Liberty cast in the United States. Often described as the American Committee Model, this statuette was produced in the tens of thousands. It was sold to subscribers to finance the construction of a pedestal for the full-size statue in New York Harbor.

The campaign disseminated likenesses of Liberty throughout the United States and the world, turning the figure into a household souvenir while raising more than enough money for the construction of the monumental stone pedestal. The finished monument, *Liberty Enlightening the World*, was dedicated October 28, 1886.

Statue of Liberty souvenir, New York, New York, 1885, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; gift of Richard Butler



1

Charity

2

Participation

3

Security

4

Dissent

5

Diversity

6

Independence

7

Equality

8

Prosperity

9

Freedom

10

Happiness

1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9



10



11



12



13



14



15



16



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19



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