



**School Phone: 713-688-1361**

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### **U.S. Government 2022-2023**

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**Instructor:** Mr. Gray

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**Room:** 1135

**Tutorials:** After school by appointment

**Conference:** 6th period, by appointment

“The best government is that which teaches us to govern ourselves.” -Goethe

“My fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you,  
ask what you can do for your country.”

-John Fitzgerald Kennedy

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### **Course Content**

U.S. Government is many things. It is the institutions and processes by which we govern our society. It is also the theories, concepts, and ideologies which influence those institutions and processes. In this class, we will learn how United States Government was created, how it has changed over time, and what we might do to improve it.

We will do some traditional kinds of things like multiple choice exit tickets, quizzes, and tests, but we will also keep current events journals, interview trusted adults about how their experiences with government, and investigate different ideas for changing the government to make it better.

Students will finish the semester with a better understanding of why governments exist, the strengths and weaknesses of our form of government, and the complexities of participatory democracy.

### **Text**

Course materials are accessible in Canvas and will include Newsela articles, current events articles and videos, and textbook chapters/assignments.

### **About Mr. Gray**

I was born in Ohio, but I've lived in Washington D.C., Atlanta, Las Vegas, New York City, and HTX! After having a “C” average in most of high school, I tested in the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile on those college application exams and wondered why I hadn't done better in my high school classes if I could do so well on those tests. I figured out that I was capable of more than I realized. And now you know why I became a teacher. I know you are capable of more than you realize. I'm here to help you believe that, and to figure out what to do with it going forward.

### **Ongoing Objectives**

The most important goal of this course is for students to thoughtfully participate in American democracy with an appreciation of its history, and a commitment to their own responsibility for its future.

## Assignments

Assignments vary. Some are participatory (grades based on something did, said, or produced) and others are assessed (grades based on how well you answered different kinds of questions). It is best practice for students to complete all assignments, as assignments prepare you for tests and quizzes and low grades do not help the GPA. Be sure to complete any missing work.

## Grading Scale

Tests/Projects:	40%
Quizzes:	35%
Classwork/Homework:	25%

## LATE WORK:

Assignments are considered late if submitted after the due date/time in Canvas. If that happens, here is what happens next:

### Late Work with an excused absence:

3 days to complete and turn in the assignment                      no points deducted                      full credit available

### Late Work with no absence, or an unexcused absence: Number of School Days

1 day late	-10 points	max 90
2 days late	-20 points	max 80
3 days late	-30 points	max 70
4 days late	-40 points	max 60
5 days or later	zero assigned to the grade book	

Strange situations happen in this pandemic modern world, though, so if you have something that prevents you or seriously makes it difficult for you to complete assignments on time, talk to me. You will find I am a good listener and a reasonable person. And I might be able to help.

## Daily Required Materials

Laptop / Charger  
Something to write with  
Notebook of your preference (we will be doing some very real diary style and interview assignments/projects, be sure to have a reliable place to make those happen)

## Classroom Management

The classroom is a sacred place. Learning and education are among the best ways we can improve ourselves. Therefore, I expect anyone who enters it to treat the place and the people with the same respect and courtesy they would for any other place that is special in their lives. This means:

1. Language in the room avoids profanity and swear words. We're better than that.
2. If you are bored or we have a "down" moment, you are encouraged to read your choice book for ELA, review our own work, make up something that is late or missing, and not distract or disrupt anyone trying to use their time productively.
3. **One** bathroom/hall pass at a time. This does not mean there will be a line at the door once someone asks for a pass. If you have a reputation for, or have established yourself, as a Waltrip Tourist don't expect a pass even if you really need one. Your reputation matters. Protect it with your behavior.
4. If we treat our classroom as a special place, then it is a special place. Keep it special, people.
5. Thank you in advance for all of the above.

## Unit Overviews

### **Unit One: Foundations and Principles**

An introduction to United States Government and Politics. Here, we'll use ideas of political systems, theories, and governments to look back at the foundations of American democracy, fundamentals of constitutionalism, and to understand the principles on which democracies stand.

### **Unit Two: Democracy in Action—The People**

Citizens' rights and responsibilities, "civic" responsibility, different kinds of political action, and how public opinion can become political power.

### **Unit Three: Institutions of Government: Legislative Branch**

Here we examine legislative power through the structure and function of this branch of government. Federal, state, and local legislative bodies are all important in different ways. By the end of this unit, you will be able to compare and contrast how they are similar and different.

### **Unit Four: Institutions of Government: Executive Branch**

More than the Presidency, the Executive branch also has a structure and function at national, state, and local levels. Understanding the power of the Executive, and the limits placed on it, is the focus of this unit.

### **Unit Five: Institutions of Government: Judicial Branch**

Judicial power is the focus here as we study the functions and structure of the courts and legal system. We will look at significant court cases that affect our daily lives and how these cases are built, argued, and influence future decisions.

### **Unit Six: Civil Liberties & Bill of Rights**

Many of the founders felt the Constitution was incomplete and only agreed to ratify (approve by vote) it if it included some additional rules protecting the rights, freedoms, and responsibilities of individual citizens against the power of the government. Why did they feel so strongly about this? And what did they include?

Government is relevant to everything you do, where you do it, and how you do it.

This will be an interesting semester, and I hope you will feel empowered to go out and make a positive impact as a result of having been in the class.

If you ever have any questions for me, I do check email. I may set up a Remind system and be available by text once that's working, as well. Until then, a few closing thoughts to ponder:

"Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time."

-Winston Churchill

"The effect of a representative democracy is to refine and enlarge the public views, by passing them through the medium of a chosen body of citizens, whose wisdom may best discern the true interest of the nation."

-James Madison

"Government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from this Earth."

-Abraham Lincoln