



TOPIC 1: THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE U.S. POLITICAL SYSTEM

GRADE 8 CIVICS LOCAL-LEVEL CLASSROOM PERFORMANCE TASK



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INTRODUCTION TO THE MCAS GRADE 8 CIVICS ASSESSMENT

MCAS GRADE 8 CIVICS ASSESSMENT

The MCAS Grade 8 Civics assessment offers multiple, interrelated components to assess students' understanding of civics and the foundations of the Massachusetts and U.S. governments. The test provides opportunities for students to demonstrate their civic knowledge and skills through an in-depth exploration of topics from the [Massachusetts 2018 History and Social Science \(HSS\) Curriculum Framework](#), while also presenting a comprehensive indicator of student and school performance on the breadth of the standards.

The MCAS Grade 8 Civics assessment has two components: (1) a state-level performance task, and (2) an end-of-course (EOC) test. The state-level performance task aligns to one of the seven civics topics from the grade 8 standards, and the EOC test covers the breadth of the standards.

To help prepare students for the state-level performance task, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has created local-level classroom performance tasks for each civics topic. This document describes procedures for the local-level tasks. (See [Grade 8 Civics Test Design](#) for additional information about the state-level performance task and the end-of-course test.)

LOCAL-LEVEL CLASSROOM PERFORMANCE TASK OVERVIEW

The local-level classroom performance tasks are designed to model best practices for classroom assessment and complement the content and skills that appear on the state-level performance task. Similar to the state-level task, each local-level task focuses on one topic from the grade 8 standards and assesses both content and practice standards.

Local tasks should be completed **after** regular instruction has occurred for the topic being addressed. These tasks include group work and discussions about the civics topics. In addition, the tasks ask students to analyze and evaluate sources to describe and explain civics concepts. Students will also be expected to write answers to questions related to the task topic. DESE will not collect student work or scores for these classroom tasks. Teachers may use these tasks for either formative or summative purposes in the classroom.

NOTE TO TEACHERS ABOUT THE LOCAL-LEVEL TASK MATERIALS AND TIMING

The local-level task materials include a task summary and standards alignment, task directions, presentation slides, student handouts, and a scoring rubric and notes. These materials have been reviewed and edited by the MCAS grade 8 civics educator review committee. In addition, a bias and sensitivity educator review committee has also reviewed the materials. The student handouts may be printed or distributed digitally for students to complete on a computer. Teachers should read through all materials, including the scoring notes, *prior* to administering the task to students. Although the tasks incorporate group work, each student should complete their own handout(s).

The time given to complete each part of the task is an estimated time. DESE estimates that, on average, each task will take one to two 50-minute class periods. It is important for teachers to review all the materials and estimate the amount of time it will take their students to complete the local-level task and adjust the timing as needed.

Although the tasks have been developed with the input of grade 8 civics teachers, DESE recognizes that classroom work may be different depending on the classroom context. Therefore, teachers may modify tasks and adapt them to their classrooms as needed. Modifications may include, but are not limited to:

- adapting materials including sources, presentations, instructions, or student handouts for additional clarity for specific populations (such as English learners),
- changing the scoring notes by adding additional student answers,
- incorporating previous class work during discussions, or
- administering a task in more than one class session.

TOPIC 1: THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE U.S. POLITICAL SYSTEM

TASK SUMMARY

For this task, **Topic 1: The philosophical foundations of the U.S. political system**, students will analyze, discuss, and explain foundational ideas that influenced the development of the U.S. political system. The standards that will be addressed are listed below.

STANDARDS ADDRESSED

Practice Standards

- 8.PS.1. Demonstrate civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions.
- 8.PS.6. Argue or explain conclusions, using valid reasoning and evidence.
- 8.PS.7. Determine next steps and take informed action, as appropriate.

Content Standards

- 8.T1.1. Explain why the Founders of the United States considered the government of ancient Athens to be the beginning of democracy and explain how the democratic political concepts developed in ancient Greece influenced modern democracy (e.g., civic participation, voting rights, trial by jury, legislative bodies, constitution writing, rule of law).
- 8.T1.2. Describe the government of the Roman Republic and the aspects of republican principles that are evident in modern democratic governments (e.g., separation of powers, rule of law, representative government, and the notion of civic duty/common good).
- 8.T1.3. Explain the influence of Enlightenment thinkers on the American Revolution and framework of the American government (e.g., John Locke, Charles de Montesquieu).
- 8.T1.4. Explain how British ideas about and practices of government (e.g., the Magna Carta, the concept of *habeas corpus*, the Mayflower Compact, self-government, town meetings, the importance of education and literacy, the House of Burgesses, colonial legislatures, the Albany Plan of Union) influenced American colonists and the political institutions that developed in colonial America.
- 8.T1.5. Analyze the evidence for arguments that the principles of government of the United States were influenced by the governments of Native Peoples (e.g., the Iroquois Confederacy).

TIME

There are three components to this Local-Level Classroom Performance Task.

1. an activator discussion to be completed as a whole class (10 min)
2. small-group work (30 min)
3. a short whole-class discussion (5 min)

Teachers may vary the time for each component as needed.

MATERIALS

- Task directions and scoring notes (for educators only)
- Slides with activator image and student directions (for educators only)
- Handout 1 (one for each student)
- Handout 2 (one for each student)

LOCAL TASK DIRECTIONS

1. At the beginning of class, provide students with the following directions for the class period, which teachers may modify as needed:

“You will complete two activities about the foundations of the U.S. political system. First, we will complete an activator activity where we will read a quotation from Thomas Jefferson. You will then use Handout 1 to write down some ideas that influenced the Founders of the U.S. government. We will then discuss these ideas as a whole class. Next, you will be broken into small groups and given Handout 2. On Handout 2, you will examine sources about foundational ideas and discuss where these foundational ideas came from. You will then answer the questions on Handout 2. Finally, each group will share their ideas with the whole class.”

2. Activator (10 min)

- Distribute Handout 1 to each student.
- Project the Activator Image to the class.
- Read aloud the prompt for the Activator Image on Handout 1:

“Thomas Jefferson wrote that the Declaration of Independence was ‘an expression of the American mind’ that brought together ideas about government developed by many different people, societies, and governments.”

- Tell students to complete Handout 1. Then, ask a few students to share their answers with the whole class and discuss.

3. Small group work (30 min)

- After the Activator discussion, assign groups of 3 or 4 students, varying the abilities of students in each group. You may assign roles to students, such as reading the questions aloud in their group, providing an initial answer to a question on the Handout, keeping track of time (timekeeper), sharing out the group’s answers with the whole class, or other roles that are used in the class for group work. Have students move into their groups. Students may also work independently as needed.
- Distribute Handout 2 to each student.
- Tell students to read and discuss each source and complete both parts of Handout 2 as a group. Each student should complete their own handout, but the group should discuss their answers.
- Teachers can answer questions that arise from the discussions but should not provide the answers to questions on the handout.

4. Whole-class discussion (5 min)

- After the groups have completed their Handout 2, ask the students in each group to summarize their answers and share out with the whole class. Discussion questions may include (you may modify these as needed):
 - How do these influences affect the U.S. government today?
 - What other ideas influenced the development of the U.S. political system?

5. Scoring

- The Scoring Notes may be used during the whole-class discussions (to facilitate and evaluate the discussions) and may also be used to evaluate individual student work after the task is complete.
- Teachers may collect the completed handouts and grade student responses based on the Scoring Notes.
- Teachers may choose to go over any parts of the task that students did not understand (either during the group discussion and/or after the handouts are graded).

Massachusetts Civics Local-Level Classroom Performance Task
Topic 1: The Philosophical Foundations of the U.S. Political System

Activator Image

