

Pursuit of Happiness and Common Good

Lesson Plan

In the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson wrote that all people have certain unalienable rights . . . Life, Liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The constitutions of most democracies spell out the specific rights, freedoms and protections that people need in order to be free to ‘pursue happiness’. The things that make each of us happy vary widely. That’s why some democracies place great restrictions on how much a government can interfere in an individual’s life. However, democratic societies choose to give up some freedom and money in order to gain benefits. For example, we obey speed limits and stop lights because that makes driving safer. We pay taxes to get schools and highways, etc. It’s important for students to understand that these two values, Pursuit of Happiness and Common Good, require careful balance in a democratic society.

Key Concepts: The meaning of Pursuit of Happiness and Common Good, and why societies make certain compromises to achieve a balance of both.

Materials: One printout of the Pursuit of Happiness and Common Good coloring sheet for each student, and crayons or markers.

Procedure:

1. Write each vocabulary word on the board. Ask students to help define each word and write a simple definition after each word. Ask students to copy each word onto a sheet of paper and then copy the definitions. This list will be added to in future lessons.

Vocabulary

Citizen - someone who is a legal member of a group or country

Community - a group of people living in the same area

Government - people with the power to make rules and force others to obey those rules

Pursuit - to look for or go after

Right - freedom or privilege to do something

Taxes - money paid by people to the government in exchange for services

2. Project the animated cartoon called Pursuit of Happiness and Common Good. Discuss each frame after it has played. Ask students to react to the cartoon when completed. Why didn’t the frog and beaver want the flamingoes to bathe in the river? What solution did the flamingoes have to serve the common good of their community?

3. Pass out the Pursuit of Happiness and Common Good coloring sheet and ask students to draw a picture of how they do things for the Common Good in their lives.

Assessment:

A review of each student’s drawing will help you assess whether each student has grasped the concepts of Pursuit of Happiness and Common Good.

