



Lesson Author: Kelley Brown

1. Lesson Summary:

In this series of lessons, students will explore the Founding generation's view of virtue and its role in the pursuit of happiness. Students will watch segments of a [video interview with history and government teacher Kelley Brown](#) while completing lesson activities which help them understand the meaning of virtue and its connection to the pursuit of happiness as well as where virtue was present in some of the founding documents. Additionally, students will explore excerpts from John Adams' "Thoughts on Government" to understand one of the Founders views on virtue and the importance of limited government. Students will complete the lesson series by considering how some lessons from the Founders can be connected to their own lives.

2. Common Core and State Standards to be addressed

Common Core Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language of a court opinion differs from that of a newspaper).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.6

Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.

Massachusetts Curriculum Framework

Civics:

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).

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).

US History I:

Explain the main argument of the Declaration of Independence, the rationale for seeking independence, and its key ideas on equality, liberty, natural rights, and the rule of law.

3. Statement of objective and lesson outcome

By the end of the lesson students will be able to...

- identify and understand some of the key virtues deemed important by the Founders.
- understand the connection between virtues and the "pursuit of happiness".
- analyze John Adams' Thoughts on Government in order to understand how the Founders connected virtue, limited government and human happiness.
- draw connections between virtues and multiple founding documents
- connect virtue to their own lives and future happiness

4. Materials, resources and technology to be used by teacher/students

- projector and computer with sound for video
- [video interview with Kelley Brown](#)
- scissors and glue
- [lesson handouts](#)* including: virtue cards matching activity; introductory brainstorm activity; Thoughts on Government (part 1); Founding Document Excerpts from the Virginia Declaration of Rights, the Declaration of Independence, The US Constitution, the First Amendment; Thoughts on Government (part 2)

*All lesson handouts are in the same document. Scroll down to see each handout.

Lesson Sequence

5. Introduction of topic

Day 1: How is the pursuit of happiness linked to virtue?

Activity 1: [Virtue Cards](#):

Distribute virtue cards and definition cards. (optional: print on cardstock and make the virtue and definition cards different colors.)

Students should cut out the virtue cards and definition cards and match the correct definition with the correct virtue. Once the matches are correct they should glue them so the virtue is on one side and the definition is on the other.

6. Procedure for instruction

Day 1: How is the pursuit of happiness linked to virtue?

Activity 2: [Warm-Up Brainstorm](#)

Students should review the virtue cards to answer the questions in the warm-up. This activity will allow students to connect the virtues to their own lives.

Video Interview Part 1:

Watch Kelley Brown Interview 00:00–9:40 (describing virtues and Aristotle's ideas about the connections between living a virtuous life and happiness)

Activity 3: [John Adams' Thoughts on Government \(part 1\)](#)

Using Handout 2, students should read the excerpts from Thoughts on Government and summarize each section in the provided box OR cut out the summary statements and match them to the correct excerpt. In both cases, students should be looking for the key ideas of the excerpts. After reading the four excerpts, students should return to the "Final Questions" and answer them. Students should revisit their virtue cards to answer the final question.

Day 2: How is virtue part of America's founding documents?

Video Interview Part 2

Watch Kelley Brown Interview 9:40–17:00 (describing the connection between virtue and the founding documents)

Activity 4: [Founding Documents Jigsaw Activity](#)

Divide students into 4, 8 or 12 groups depending on the size of the class. Groups should be 2–3 students. Assign each group one of the four primary sources. Have them fill out the Graphic Organizer for their assigned source. Encourage them to review their virtue cards and think about what they heard in the video as they analyze the primary source and consider the questions. Once they have completed the graphic organizer in their small

group, students should be reorganized into groups of 4 (each person in the group should have one of the sources). Students should share their sources and then the group should decide which primary source they think best connects to virtue and the pursuit of happiness.

Day 3: How is limited government connected to happiness?

Video Interview Part 3

Watch Kelley Brown Interview 17:00–30:40 (describing meaning of and reasons for limited government)

Activity 5: [John Adams' Thoughts on Government \(part 2\)](#)

Distribute Handout 4 and assign students to read one or more of the five parts in the handout. Students can complete the assignment independently or students can be divided into small groups and divide up the different parts of the document. Students should read each section and highlight or underline connections to limited government. Depending on student familiarity of examples, the teacher could provide students with ideas for each section that they should be looking for.

7. Lesson closure

Video Interview Part 4

Watch Kelley Brown Interview 30:40–45:00 (describing lessons to apply to today from James Madison and Robert Yates)

Exit Ticket: Ask students to pick one lesson they would take from the stories shared about James Madison and Robert Yates that they could apply in their own lives. This can be done as a brainstorm, turn and talk or a written exit ticket.

8. Assessment of student understanding

All of the handouts can be used as either formative or summative assessments depending on how they are administered. If assessing students ability to read and understand a primary source, you might choose one of the several activities to be an individual assignment that students complete on their own. If seeking an additional assessment, the teacher could ask students to write a short essay developing a claim and providing supporting evidence from Thoughts on Government for the following question: *How and why did the Framers connect the ideas of virtue and limited government with the "pursuit of happiness"?*

Handouts are linked above and are also below.

Day 1: Vocabulary: How is the “pursuit of happiness” linked to virtue?

Directions: Cut out the following Civic Dispositions and match them to the correct definitions.

justice

perseverance

temperance

frugality

humility

patience

pride

courage

generosity

honesty

industry

prudence

Directions: Cut out the following definitions and match them to the correct virtues.

willingness to share and give to others when they need it

careful and reasoned judgment that allows someone to avoid unnecessary danger or risks

hard-working and diligent

being truthful and sincere

a feeling of satisfaction from one's own achievements

to give or take from a person the right amount owed

the strength to face danger, fear and difficulty

to be in control of one's passions and emotions

the careful management of material resources, especially money

the ability to tolerate a delay and frustration without getting angry

when a person does not believe they are better than others and is not arrogant

the ability to work hard through challenges and delays without giving up

Day 1: Warm-up: How is the “pursuit of happiness” linked to virtue?

Handout 1: Introductory Brainstorming Activity

Directions: Use your virtue cards to help you answer the following questions on your own or with a partner.

1. When Aristotle talked about *happiness*, he understood it to mean that a person could look back on the decisions he/she made in life with satisfaction, pride and contentment. Look over the 12 virtue cards. **If you were to pick five virtues to practice for the rest of your life that you think would help you lead a contented and happy life, which five would you choose? Be ready to explain why.**

List the five virtues here:

2. Look over the 12 virtues on your cards. **Are there any virtues here that you try to practice in your daily life? If so, which ones? Why do you try to practice them?**

List the virtues you practice here and explain why.

3. While Aristotle and the Framers believed that living a virtuous life was the key to happiness, they also knew it was not always easy to make virtuous decisions. Look at your 12 virtue cards. **Are there any virtues that you find difficult to follow? Why are they sometimes difficult to follow?**

List the virtues you find difficult here and explain why.

4. Ancient thinkers, like Aristotle, and Framers, like John Adams, believed that young people needed to not only learn about virtue but practice and experience making virtuous decisions. They believed this virtue education would help young people see that virtuous actions lead to a feeling of satisfaction, pride and contentment. Look at your 12 virtue cards. **Think of an example of a time when you practiced one of these virtues and it made you feel good about yourself and proud of your actions. Why do you think making a virtuous decision made you feel good?**

Explain the situation here.

Day 1: How is the “pursuit of happiness” linked to virtue?

Handout 2: Primary Source Analysis: Thoughts on Government (part 1)

Directions: Watch the first part of the interview with Kelley Brown (**video: 0:00-9:40**). Read the selections from John Adams’ *Thoughts on Government* and either summarize the sections or match them with the correct summary according to your teacher’s directions. After completing the summaries, answer the final question.

Primary Source: *Thoughts on Government*, April 1776 (excerpt), John Adams

Context: John Adams was asked by two Continental Congress delegates from North Carolina, John Penn and William Hooper, to give his advice on the design of a constitution for the colony of North Carolina. According to the Massachusetts Historical Society, he wrote four or five versions of his thoughts which eventually took the form of a printed pamphlet that was distributed widely. In March and April of 1776, the American colonies were at war with Britain and contemplating declaring independence, therefore new constitutions would be necessary for each state and the United States.

My dear Sir,

If I was equal to the task of forming a plan for the government of a colony, I should be flattered with your request, and very happy to comply with it; because as the divine science of politics is the science of social happiness, and the blessings of society depend entirely on the constitutions of government, which are generally institutions that last for many generations, there can be no employment more agreeable to a benevolent mind, than a research after the best.

Write or paste summary here

...We ought to consider, what is the **end** of government, before we determine which is the best form. Upon this point all speculative politicians will agree that the happiness of society is the **end** of government, as all Divines and moral Philosophers will agree that the happiness of the individual is the **end** of man. From this principle it will follow, that the form of government, which communicates ease, comfort, security, or in one word happiness to the greatest number of persons, and in the greatest degree, is the best.

Write or paste summary here

All sober enquiries after truth, ancient and modern, Pagan and Christian, have declared that the happiness of man, as well as his dignity consists in **virtue**. Confucius, Zoroaster, Socrates, Mahomet, not to mention authorities really sacred, have agreed in this.

Write or paste summary here

If there is a form of government then, whose principle and foundation is virtue, will not every sober man acknowledge it better calculated to promote the general happiness than any other form?

Write or paste summary here

Final Questions: (answer after reading Adams' words on the next page)

How do Adams' ideas about happiness connect to Aristotle's theories about the connection between happiness and virtue?

(virtue cards) Which virtues do you think would have been most important as Americans were fighting in the American Revolutionary War? Which virtues would be most important for citizens to have when they created a new republic? Why? (pick at least 3)

Day 1: How is the “pursuit of happiness” linked to virtue?

Matching Summaries for Handout 2 (Optional)

Directions: Cut out the summaries of the first part of Thoughts on Government and match them to the correct boxes on Handout 2.

All those who have searched for the truth on these matters have declared that the happiness of man is reached through living a virtuous life.

If I am a suitable person to recommend a government, I would be happy to give my advice. The study of governments is really the study of human happiness. That happiness depends on the constitutions of government that are built to last. There is no study more enjoyable to a man that would like to see the best for society.

We should start with the purpose of government before choosing what it should look like. All those that study politics would agree that the goal of government is the happiness of society because all agree that happiness is the goal of man. Therefore, the government which facilitates happiness to the greatest number of people is the best form of government.

If there is a form of government that is based on virtue wouldn't everyone agree that it is the best form of government to produce happiness?

Day 2: How is virtue part of America's founding documents?

Handout 3: Primary Source Analysis: Virtue in the Founding Documents

Directions: Watch the interview with Kelley Brown (**video: 9:40-16:59**). Take out your virtue cards. Read your assigned primary source and highlight or underline any key words or phrases that connect to the virtues. Use your virtue cards to help you identify the key words and phrases. Be creative. Complete the graphic organizer.

Primary Source #1: Virginia Declaration of Rights (1776)

Section 15: That no free government, or the blessings of liberty, can be preserved to any people but by a firm adherence to justice, moderation, temperance, frugality, and virtue and by frequent recurrence to fundamental principles.

Section 16: That religion, or the duty which we owe to our Creator, and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence; and therefore all men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion, according to the dictates of conscience; and that it is the mutual duty of all to practice Christian forbearance, love, and charity toward each other.

Primary Source #2: Declaration of Independence (1776)

(excerpted) We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

Primary Source #3: Preamble: United States Constitution (1787)

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

Primary Source #4: Amendment I of the U. S. Constitution (1791)

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

Day 2: How is virtue part of America's founding documents?

Handout 3 Graphic Organizer: Virtue in the Founding Documents

Directions: Use the video clip, virtue cards and your primary source to answer the following questions. Be creative in your connections. Be ready to share.

What is the title of your assigned primary source?	
What words or phrases did you find that connect to virtue? (be creative)	
Which virtue cards do you think are connected to your primary source? (be creative)	
How does your primary source connect to virtue in government and the pursuit of happiness? (be creative)	

Day 3: How is limited government connected to happiness?

Handout 4: Primary Source Analysis: Thoughts on Government (part 2)

Directions: Watch the interview with Kelley Brown (**video: 16:59-30:40**). Read your assigned selections below from John Adams' *Thoughts on Government*. As you read the excerpts, underline or highlight ideas that demonstrate limited government. Then, complete the Questions for Thoughts on Government.

Thoughts on Government, April 1776 (excerpt), John Adams

Context: John Adams was asked by two Continental Congress delegates from North Carolina, John Penn and William Hooper, to give his advice on the design of a constitution for the colony of North Carolina. According to the Massachusetts Historical Society, he wrote four or five versions of his thoughts which eventually took the form of a printed pamphlet that was distributed widely. In March and April of 1776, the American colonies were at war with Britain and contemplating declaring independence, therefore new constitutions would be necessary for each state and the United States.

(1) Adams argues that a republic should have multiple branches of government.

...The wretched condition of this country, however, for ten or fifteen years past, has frequently reminded me [and] will convince any candid mind, that there is no good government but what is **Republican**. That the only valuable part of the British constitution is so; because the very definition of a **Republic**, is "*an Empire of Laws, and not of men.*" That, as a Republic is the best of governments, so that particular arrangement of the powers of society, or in other words that form of government, which is best contrived to secure an impartial and exact execution of the laws, is the best of Republics.

...As good government is an empire of laws, how shall your laws be made? In a large society, inhabiting an extensive country, it is impossible that the whole should assemble, to make laws: The first necessary step then, is, to depute power from the many, to a few of the most wise and good. But by what rules shall you choose your Representatives? ...

The principal difficulty lies, and the greatest care should be employed in constituting this Representative Assembly. It should be in miniature, an exact portrait of the people at large. It should think, feel, reason, and act like them... Great care should be taken to effect this, and to prevent unfair, partial, and corrupt elections.

"A representation of the people in one assembly being obtained, a question arises whether all the powers of government, legislative, executive, and judicial, shall be left in this body? I think a people cannot be long free, nor ever happy, whose government is in one Assembly. My reasons for this opinion are as follow."

(2) Adams lists six reasons as to why separate branches of government are necessary:

“1. A single Assembly is liable to all the vices, follies and frailties of an individual. Subject to fits of humor, starts of passion, flights of enthusiasm, partialities of prejudice, and consequently productive of hasty results and absurd judgments: And all these errors ought to be corrected and defects supplied by some controlling power.

2. A single Assembly is apt to be **avaricious**, and in time will not scruple to exempt itself from [burdens] which it will lay, without compunction, on its constituents.

3. A single Assembly is apt to grow **ambitious**, and after a time will not hesitate to vote itself perpetual...

4. A Representative Assembly, altho' extremely well qualified, and absolutely necessary as a branch of the legislature, is unfit to exercise the executive power, for want of two essential properties, secrecy and **dispatch**.

5. A Representative Assembly is still less qualified for the judicial power; because it is too numerous, too slow, and too little skilled in the laws.

6. Because a single Assembly, possessed of all the powers of government, would make **arbitrary** laws for their own interest, execute all laws arbitrarily for their own interest, and adjudge all controversies in their own favor.”

(3) Adams discusses the importance of division of power, checks, and structure for appointment and elections.

These two [houses of the legislature] thus constituted, and made integral parts of the legislature, let them unite, and by joint ballot choose a Governor, who,... should have a free and independent exercise of his judgment, and be made also an integral part of the legislature...If he is annually elective, as he ought to be, he will always have so much reverence and affection for the People, ...elections, especially of Representatives, and Councillors, should be **annual**, there not being in the whole circle of the sciences, a maxim more infallible than this, “Where annual elections end, there slavery begins.”

These great men, in this respect, should be, once a year

“Like bubbles on the sea of matter borne,

They rise, they break, and to that sea return.”

This will teach them the great political virtues of **humility**, **patience**, and **moderation**, without which every man in power becomes a ravenous beast of prey.

...

A **rotation** of all offices, as well as of Representatives and Councillors, has many advocates, ... and if the society has a sufficient number of suitable characters to supply the great number of vacancies which would be made by such a rotation, I can see no objection to it. These persons may be allowed to serve for three years, and then excluded three years, or for any longer or shorter term.

(4) Adams discusses the need for an independent judiciary and militia

Judges, Justices and all other officers, civil and military, should be nominated and appointed by the Governor, with the advice and consent of Council, unless you choose to have a government more popular...

The dignity and stability of government in all its branches, the morals of the people and every blessing of society, depends so much upon an upright and skillful administration of justice, that the judicial power ought to be distinct from both the legislative and executive, and independent upon both, that so it may be a check upon both, as both should be checks upon that.

The Judges therefore should always be men of learning and experience in the laws, of exemplary morals, great patience, calmness, coolness and attention. Their minds should not be distracted with jarring interests; they should not be dependent upon any man or body of men. To these ends they should hold estates for life in their offices, or in other words their commissions should be during good behavior, and their salaries ascertained and established by law. ...

A Militia Law requiring all men, or with very few exceptions, besides cases of conscience, to be provided with arms and ammunition, to be trained at certain seasons, and requiring counties, towns, or other small districts to be provided with public stocks of ammunition and entrenching utensils, and with some settled plans for transporting provisions after the militia, when marched to defend their country against sudden invasions, and requiring certain districts to be provided with field-pieces, companies of matrosses and perhaps some regiments of light horse, is always a wise institution, and in the present circumstances of our country indispensable.

(5) Adams discusses the need for education, the possibility of sumptuary laws, virtues and the unique moment in history they were apart of.

Laws for the liberal education of youth, especially of the lower class of people, are so extremely wise and useful, that to a humane and generous mind, no expense for this purpose would be thought extravagant.

The very mention of sumptuary laws will excite a smile. Whether our countrymen have wisdom and virtue enough to submit to them I know not. But the happiness of the people might be greatly promoted by them, and a revenue saved sufficient to carry on this war forever. Frugality is a great revenue, besides curing us of vanities, levities and fopperies which are real antidotes to all great, manly and warlike virtues.

A Constitution, founded on these principles, introduces knowledge among the People, and inspires them with a conscious dignity, becoming Freemen. A general

emulation takes place, which causes good humor, sociability, good manners, and good morals to be general. That elevation of sentiment, inspired by such a government, makes the common people brave and enterprising. That ambition which is inspired by it makes them **sober**, **industrious** and **frugal**. You will find among them some elegance, perhaps, but more solidity; a little pleasure, but a great deal of business—some **politeness**, but more **civility**. If you compare such a country with the regions of domination, whether Monarchical or Aristocratical, you will fancy yourself in Arcadia or Elisium

If the Colonies should assume governments separately, they should be left entirely to their own choice of the forms, and if a Continental Constitution should be formed, it should be a Congress, containing a fair and adequate Representation of the Colonies, and its authority should sacredly be confined to ... war, trade, disputes between Colony and Colony, the Post-Office, and the unappropriated lands of the Crown, as they used to be called.

These Colonies, under such forms of government, and in such a union, would be unconquerable by all the Monarchies of Europe.

You and I, my dear Friend, have been sent into life, at a time when the greatest law-givers of antiquity would have wished to have lived. How few of the human race have ever enjoyed an opportunity of making an election of government more than of air, soil, or climate, for themselves or their children. When! Before the present epocha, had three millions of people full power and a fair opportunity to form and establish the wisest and happiest government that human wisdom can contrive? I hope you will avail yourself and your country of that extensive learning and indefatigable industry which you possess, to assist her in the formations of the happiest governments, and the best character of a great People. For myself, I must beg you to keep my name out of sight, for this feeble attempt, if it should be known to be mine, would oblige me to apply to myself those lines of the immortal John Milton, in one of his sonnets,

“I did but teach the age to quit their cloggs
By the plain rules of ancient Liberty,
When lo! a barbarous noise surrounded me,
Of owls and cuckoos, asses, apes and dogs.”

Final Questions for Thoughts on Government

List out FIVE different examples of limited government that John Adams referenced above— one from each section.

According to Adams, why is limited government so important to successful governments?

The founders worried that people would become corrupted by power and therefore limited government was necessary. Look at your virtue cards. Which of the virtues do you think would be most helpful in preventing corruption? Why?