

# Summer Civics Boot Camp for the Whole Family

I recently encouraged readers to [make summer great again](#) by getting the kids outdoors more and giving them lots of free time, along with trips to various attractions and historical sites close to home.

But after reading Wilfred McClay's online [essay](#) "Civic Education, Rightly Understood," it's imperative to add one more item to this "make summer great" list: restoring history and civics to our children's lives through everyday activities.

McClay links our ignorance about history and civics to the current dire circumstances that have brought us to "the lonely precipice at which we find ourselves." He goes through the abysmal scores of students on history and civics examinations, and even connects these students' failure to learn about their country to the mental depression and spiritual malaise affecting so many of our young people today. By neglecting to teach students about America's great achievements as well as its mistakes, McClay explains, we have left our children with a bleak vision of the future and a broken memory of the past.

A half an hour a day with Professor McClay, a historian who gave us a wise and balanced account of American history in the textbook [Land of Hope](#), is a good goal for the summer. But for the younger crew, or for those who wince at the thought of opening a textbook in July, there are other options for instructing them about our history and government.

*Watch videos.* Dozens of possibilities giving insights into our past are just a click away, including "The Alamo," "Glory," and "Johnny Tremain." The mini-series "John Adams" gives viewers insight into several early American figures, including

the intrepid Abigail Adams. "[Mr. Smith Goes to Washington](#)," "12 Angry Men," and "Lincoln" are just a few films that include some lessons in the workings of government. As for the elementary school crew, try "Liberty Kids" available on YouTube.

*Read the Declaration of Independence.* The Fourth of July is just around the corner. Along with backyard barbeques and fireworks, reading this document is another great way to celebrate America and liberty.

*Attend a city or town council meeting.* Here's an excellent way to witness government in action firsthand. Take the older children to see what local government is doing and how it works. Given the low esteem in which we hold so many politicians, you may be surprised to find men and women serving at this level who are devoted to improving their communities and the lives of their fellow citizens.

*Consider volunteering for a political candidate or party.* Candidates for office and the party that backs them can always use a helping hand. Whether it's distributing flyers, preparing mail-outs, or making phone calls, you'll find yourself appreciated while at the same time learning more about politics. This is an especially good way for teens to learn more about the system.

*Study to become a citizen.* Legal immigrants to the United States wishing to become citizens must take a naturalization test. To do so, they study and learn about our country. By the time they have prepared and passed the test, many of them probably know more about the basics of our Constitution, laws, and government than do some native-born Americans. Pretend you too wish to become a legal citizen by visiting this [site](#), "Preparing for the Naturalization Test," and you'll find a barebones guide containing everything you need to know.

*Make supertime a classroom.* The evening meal is a great time

to hash over the day's headlines and tie the news into a discussion of rights, freedoms, and government. Should some of our courts release arrestees without bail or charges? Should the government keep spending money by the truckload? What gives the president—and I don't just mean Joe Biden specifically—the ability to issue executive orders? These and other questions should make the older kids sit up and think.

*Look to family, friends, and neighbors as your touchstones for reality.* Many of us who take our news from the internet or mainstream media place too much reliance on that information—or even misinformation—and feel crushed by all that seems to be wrong in our country. There is much that is wrong. But we also have the solace of the sister who brings us laughter, the upbeat friend, and the neighbor who waves to us while mowing his lawn. That's the normal part of our lives. In these people we find a great lesson in civics, a word rooted in the Latin *civis* (citizen), which also gives us the word civility.

Whatever our political views, let's make this summer a time of learning some history and civics and of teaching the same to our children.

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