

We the People

PROJECT Citizen

Citizen Lyceum



From the Massachusetts Center for Civic Education

# MACCE Newsletter

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Previous editions of our newsletter can be found on our website at <https://www.masscivics.org/news>

## The Impact of Educational Workshops

By Roger Desrosiers, President

At our core, we provide training opportunities for teachers to learn about civics and civic engagement. Our associated network of State Civic Education organizations provide a variety of training and development workshops every year around the country. Recently, Robin Knippers, State Coordinator of New Hampshire, held a We the People institute in Concord, NH from August 8 to 10, 2022. We often speak of the empowerment for students in our programs, but underscore the impact these programs have for our educators. Robin shared with me a letter from one participating teacher of her workshop.

“Hello Robin,

There are so many ways I need to thank you and the (NH) Bar Association for offering such a life altering experience through the WTP workshop. Working towards being a good teacher has always been challenging and always will be. These past few years the challenge moved beyond what has been normal and the work became taxing, even draining. And unlike previous summers where after the first three weeks off I would be eager to return to the kids, that was not happening this year. It was scary. The possibility of retiring had a lot of pull. Under the circumstances, it seemed more like quitting rather than retiring and I was very uncomfortable with that. Immersed in these thoughts, I was not really interested in going to a summer workshop. There were some big decisions to be made. But I am a sucker for studying the US Constitution and am teaching a new class on constitutional law. My friend and colleague Amy pushed just enough to get me to sign up for WTP. As was mentioned, my life has been changed.

First, Robin, your passion, commitment and kindness are powerful medicine. And they are boundless. Your professionalism, ability to meet peoples' needs in any number of ways, to meet people where they are, to share impactful reflections and to make everyone in the room

feel valued are superpowers. Having attended many workshops in forty years in the fields of education and coaching, it is without hesitation I commend you on the most well-run and productive workshop in which I have participated. You have my personal gratitude for reminding me of my purpose and reminding me how my students should feel in my classes.

Just as important, the WTP program is a complete package of what to teach, how to teach and so importantly why we teach about the founding of our nation and how those roots cannot be ignored when deciphering who we are today, where we are going and how, if we wish to, change the course. The content is based on understanding, not memorization and leaves room for all voices to be heard. Most importantly, WTP puts the student front and center as an engaged learner and in the hearings places them in the role of “teacher.” Beyond learning the content, WTP has many additional important goals for students including experiencing the value of teamwork, being able to listen to and have productive conversations with others including those with whom you disagree and being able to explain with confidence how and why you adopted a certain conclusion. Evidence based thought.

The takeaways from the workshop and the experience of being surrounded by supportive, enthusiastic, experienced educators and leaders have not only lifted my spirits, but they have also prepared me to once again accept the challenge of educating our youth about what are arguably the most important matters at hand today. Everyday of the workshop I felt the weight of recent events that had buried my reasons for teaching, which by the way began at the age of fourteen, becoming less and less burdensome. That is not to say the brick walls have vanished. There does now, however, feel like there is a way to see beyond them or if necessary to leap over them.

Robin, your spirit and WTP will be present in some form or manner in each of my classes. Every student and our future will all the better for that.

Much gratitude,  
A Grateful Teacher”



# We the People

THE CITIZEN AND THE CONSTITUTION

## We the People 2022 High School National Finals

By Roger Desrosiers, *President of MACCE*

During the weekend of April 23rd through the 24th, I witnessed the **Massachusetts** championship team, **Easthampton High School We the People** students, who competed in the National Finals. Even though the event was virtual, the community support enabled these students to travel to Washington, DC to participate in the competition. They huddled together at a Marriott Hotel on the outskirts of DC and between their competitive hearings they visited many of the landmarks of our nation's capital and traveled through the area enjoying the beauty of the nation's capital.

But, they were totally focused on the competition. On Saturday morning they eagerly gave their presentations and responded to the follow-up questions with fervor, intensity, poise and evidence to support their arguments each and every time. Each time, in the judges' feedback, they commended them on their understanding, their passion, and their incredible grasp of the difficult concepts that they discussed. Similarly, on Sunday morning they continued their mission in the same manner. Their ability to give clear, concise and application of their knowledge to the questions from the judges was inspiring. Each and every student on each panel of students was engaged and participated extraordinarily well. The beauty of this group of students is that no one student did well because everyone did well.



It came as no surprise that on Sunday evening, this **Massachusetts** team was selected as one of the 12 teams to go forward into the third day of competition on Monday. On Monday afternoon, they once again sat down and delivered the presentation to one of the questions from the first two days and responded to the judges' questions for 10 minutes instead of 8 minutes. They continued to do well. At the Awards Ceremony on Tuesday, April 26th at 8 pm, the **Massachusetts** team learned that they had placed 11th in the nation. We are so proud of this achievement.

What the students were able to display at these competitions is outstanding. We salute all the competing teams, their teachers, and those who help the teams in preparation as well as those who compete at the state level for all their hard work. Each year I ask students who are involved whether it is worth their time and effort to do this. I've never heard a student say "No", despite all the hard work beyond the normal classwork. Typically, students, years after their involvement in *We the People*, will remember fondly their experience, a testament to the importance of this genuine learning experience.

Congratulations to an extraordinary team from  
**Easthampton High School, 2022!**





## We the People

THE CITIZEN AND THE CONSTITUTION

### Fall 2022: **Three MACCE Workshops** featuring *We the People:* *the Citizen and the* *Constitution*

We are preparing for the academic year by supporting our network of teachers and students in their study of the Constitution and American Government through the We the People program. We will be holding three workshops in the coming months that we hope can encourage teachers and school districts who are already using WTP and those who may consider using the WTP program at any of the three levels.

#### Workshop #1:

A workshop will be held at a time and place TBD very soon. The subject of the workshop is **How to Develop the Hearing Process!** For those teachers who have used the hearing process, they will tell you that the hearing process is the galvanizing evidence that students have learned the content. What teachers observe and students acknowledge is that they feel empowered in their learning and gain incredible confidence in themselves. Therefore, we will devote a full day workshop on how teachers can develop the hearing process early in using WTP so students can gain those skills that give them the will to learn, the desire to work hard, and the outcome that you, as teachers, strive to achieve - a student motivated to work with others to strive for excellence. Ultimately, as the course comes to an end, students can take part in a school wide showcase, a regional showcase, or a statewide middle school showcase or at the high school state competition. Teachers should understand that there is no obligation that they take part at any level, but they can learn to help develop such skills and knowledge to implement the hearing process in their classroom.

If interested in any of our workshops, contact us for updates as they are made available at [roger.desrosiers@masscivics.org](mailto:roger.desrosiers@masscivics.org)



#### Workshop #2:

Another workshop will be held on November 18, 2022 at the Old South Meetinghouse in Boston. The subject of the workshop is **How Can We Preserve Our Democracy?** By using various lessons of the We the People textbook at the different levels (grade 5, 8, and high school), we can look at the different elements of democracy. First, we can look at the historical view of democracy at the time of our Founders especially through the lens of the setting of our location, the Old South Meetinghouse. What did John Adams, Samuel Adams, Paul Revere, John Hancock, and others see as important foundational aspects of democracy during the 18th century? Secondly, let's examine the case study of Ukraine today. What are the people of Ukraine fighting for? What elements of democracy are in forefront of their fight for freedom from the encroachment from Russia? Thirdly, are there any concerns in the United States today that Americans should have about their government regarding their democratic principles and values? If so, what are they? Lastly, through what we have discussed today, how can we teach these important democratic ideas to our students?

#### Workshop #3:

Our third workshop for the Fall will take place on December 8th, at Auburn High School. The topic will be **How can you use WTP in an AP Government class?** Several classes in MA, but also around the country use WTP as the foundational text for their AP American Government classes. One experienced WTP and AP Government teacher will explain how he does this and demonstrate how his curriculum manages to allow students to produce the results that are expected. In addition, discussion will follow on preparing students for the state competition.



# We the People

THE CITIZEN AND THE CONSTITUTION

## Academic Year 2022-23 WTP State Competition and State Showcase Announcements!



### We the People High School State Competition for the 2022-23 Academic year

Our annual state competition will take place on Saturday, January 28, 2023. It is our hope to return to an in person competition this year. Despite our best intentions and plans to hold our event at the Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate last year, the surge in the pandemic forced us to change our plans and compete remotely. As it turned out, it was a blessing since we would have had to postpone on account of the blizzard. Hopefully, neither issue will cause us a difficulty this year.

We encourage all high school teachers using the We the People program to consider participating in the State Competition. It is a great opportunity for your students to display the genuine learning that they receive through the We the People curriculum. It is also a great opportunity for your students to interact with many civic leaders in government, law, and academia. Please notify us of your intent to participate in the competition **by October 12, 2022.**

Teachers who are unfamiliar with or wish to see first hand how the hearing process works or even participate as a judge or if you are interested in learning more about this opportunity for your students, please contact Roger Desrosiers at [roger.desrosiers@masscivics.org](mailto:roger.desrosiers@masscivics.org)

### We the People Middle School Showcase for Academic Year 2022-23

This year we are extending an invitation to all of our Middle School teachers to consider joining us for a Showcase of their students' learning in the We the People program. We are looking to resurrect the middle school showcase next spring for students to display their learning. Students will have an opportunity to participate in mock congressional hearings to present prepared statements and give responses to questions on the Constitution and American Government.

This is a unique opportunity for Middle School students to display what they learn. The We the People curriculum is a great way for students to engage in genuine learning through carefully crafted content presented in a non-partisan manner.

If you, or any teacher you know, is interested in learning more about the Middle School We the People program and the Showcase, please contact Roger Desrosiers at [roger.desrosiers@masscivics.org](mailto:roger.desrosiers@masscivics.org)

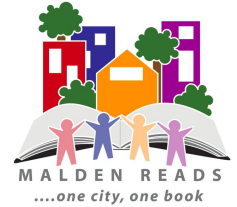
As noted on the previous page, one of our workshops this Fall will emphasize **How to develop the hearing process!** Despite our intent to offer the state wide showcase once again, we recognize that many teachers may simply want the opportunity to work on developing the skills and the content with their students before committing to a state showcase. As a result, we have sent to our middle school teachers various options that may allow for a slow transition whereby they and their districts can become more familiar with this process. We will be more than willing to work with teachers and school districts to provide guidance and opportunity for an enhanced civics assessment for their students. Please contact us for more information.





## We the People

THE CITIZEN AND THE CONSTITUTION



### Malden Pilot Project for 4th graders

The Salemwood Elementary School 4th grade ELL class of twenty one students from six different countries learned about rules and laws and democracy with the assistance of Malden Reads and the Massachusetts Center for Civic Education.

This pilot program introduced a model project for these Grade 4 students based upon five lessons in the *We the People* text, *the Citizen and Democracy*. This was combined with the Malden Reads involvement with activities from community representatives who shared their experiences of coming to the U.S. and their adjustments to life in America. This allowed the students to learn important issues about government and included activities relevant to their school and community of Malden in which they live.

This project relied on the teacher expertise of two Malden teachers, Alan Rodriguez and Violet Walsh who worked with these ELL students. Students from Afghanistan, Brazil, China, Haiti, Venezuela, and Vietnam learned about each other, their similarities and differences. Through various instructional approaches, the students learned the values of rules at home, school and the community and then, about the need for laws through their city, state and nation. They, then, learned about different types of governments - rule by one, rule by the few and rule by all distinguishing between good and bad types of governments. They learned about democracy and its benefits and its costs. Finally, they studied the importance of balancing rights with responsibilities.

For each of these important lessons, there were visits by community representatives who supported the importance of why rules, laws, and democratic values and principles are important to

them through a myriad of activities that the students were introduced to. The students met people who lived in Malden who came from China, Vietnam, Syria, Venezuela. Each told their story or shared their work or allowed the students to see their art through yoga or paintings, etc. The students were provided age-appropriate books such as "She persisted: Claudette Colvin" written by Malden born author Lesa Cline-Ransome in which themes related to empathy, overcoming discrimination, and using one's voice to advocate for flights were reinforced. The integration of community with learning about the importance of terms like majority, voting, elections, and more through these interactions solidified their learning.

The overall theme of civic participation with concepts from the materials provides a great introduction to civic education. The opportunity to have persons outside their school yet within their community provide support and identification was important in their realization of why they should learn about their new government. Malden Reads and the Massachusetts Center for Civic Education have made a major commitment to these goals and know that through the efforts of the teachers in developing and presenting these lessons the students will realize how significant this is and it will be the foundation for greater understanding going forward.

Thanks to the Malden Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Ligia Noriega-Murphy, for her recognition of the importance of civic learning. To Victoria Mulkern, the Director of Literacy and Title I, for her influence and great interest in pursuing this pilot program. To others: the social worker, ELL director, Principal Van Huynh; to the teachers, Alan Rodriguez and Violet Walsh who were engaged and extraordinary. To Linda Zalk, Education Director for Malden Reads, for her passionate community involvement. To Roger Desrosiers, President of the Massachusetts Center for Civic Education for his time and effort to this project. And, finally to the Mayor Gary Christenson of Malden who supported this program by attending the final day and presenting the students and teachers with certificates for their successful conclusion of this vital project!

As the teacher, Alan Rodriguez, stated at the end of the pilot program, "If this pilot can work with ELL students, it definitely can work with all students in the 4th grade."

Thanks to everyone involved, especially the students!



**The Michael Trofi Summer Institute - Project Citizen Research Program (PCRP), Cohort 3,**  
 July 31 - August 5, 2022  
 University of Massachusetts, Boston

by **Roger Desrosiers**, *MACCE President*

The last year of the three year USDOE federal grant for PCRP fortunately allowed us to have an in person institute this year. Twenty participants, four mentors and three coordinators spent five and half days at the University of Massachusetts Boston campus learning, listening, doing, and immersing themselves in the study of Project Citizen, a civic engagement program that the Center for Civic Education began in 1993. It has been used in all the U.S. states and territories and many countries around the world.

This research program grant is studying its effectiveness through the Georgetown University under the auspices of the renown researcher, Diana Owen, who graced our Institute for a large part of the time. Teachers took and, this Fall, their students will take a pre test before they engage in Project Citizen and later in May or June after completing their portfolio and their hearing, the teachers and students will complete the post test. The results will be analyzed by the research team at Georgetown University. To see the results of the first year of the PCRP Cohort 1, go to [Civic Paper](#).

On opening night, we honored Mike Trofi, our celebrated leader for Cohorts 1 and 2, as well as the James Madison Legacy Project and so many Project Citizen and We the People workshops and institutes over 20 years in Rhode Island, New England and the Northeast Region of the U.S. As many of you may recollect from our last newsletter, he met an untimely death last February. We recognized his achievements and his selfless leadership in civic education by naming our institute for him. We miss Mike immensely!

Following the opening dinner, we had a short powerpoint presentation on the historical and philosophical foundations of government. Although our focus is on civic engagement, teachers were able to



review the basic ideas, principles and values upon which our government is founded. Each of these are central to how we teach our students going forward and why we focus our attention of civic participation through this lens. In addition, an introduction to SEL within the context of civic education was also given.

On Monday, the participants were introduced to the important idea of public policy, the central idea to the projects that students will focus on. Larry Gerston, professor emeritus in Political Science at San Jose State University and author of Public Policymaking in a Democratic Society, A Guide to Civic Engagement spoke in the Senate Chamber at the Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate. He gave the teachers many hints and tools for them as they facilitate the process for students as they select problems and issues that they wish to undertake as civics projects.

On Tuesday, the teachers had the opportunity to hear from Frank Baker, a nationally and internationally renowned medial literacy specialist. In this age where the influence of social media and many other media sources has demonstrably shown how easy it is to cause false stories, lies, erroneous conclusions to form people's opinions, Frank, who spoke in the Senate Chamber... (continue on the next page)





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*(continued from page 5)*

of the Kennedy Institute, was able to give practical information about how to detect these trends. He also informed throughout his presentation many resources that teachers can use in the classroom to help students identify the ruses used to influence them.

Throughout the time at the institute, the teachers were involved in lesson demonstrations, identifying the problem, developing a public policy, studying alternative solutions, evaluating and determining a class policy, strategizing their action plan. They created their own digital portfolio and on the final day participated in the hearing process (as their students will do).

One area that is essential throughout the process from beginning to the end is frequent opportunities for teachers (and eventually their students) to reflect on what they are doing. Reflection is an often forgotten, yet important step in better appreciating what you are doing. Reflective questions are posed and written down in a journal or notebook to indicate what they feel, what they've learned, what they understand or not understand, what was a positive or a negative from the experience of this class or meeting. Finally, on the last day, the teachers can now appreciate the whole process.

So much more could be stated! A lot more was done than is stated here! We want to thank the University of Massachusetts at Boston for hosting our institute. The dormitory rooms were great, the food and staff were fantastic, the facility was remarkable; plenty of room for our group and great cooperation. We want to thank the Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate and especially Sarah Yezzi and other staff members for the opportunity to have the luxury to enjoy the Senate Chamber. Everyone marveled at the opportunity to sit the august Chamber

but also to see the halls and many exhibits there. We appreciated that Donna Phillips, the Vice President and Chief of Programs at the Center for Civic Education was able to spend several days with us. We wish to thank Ed O'Connell from Revolutionary Spaces for the Old State House and the Old South Meetinghouse in Boston for the tour he conducted for our participants on one of our evenings. You can see a picture of our group at the Old State House below.

Our group consisted of 20 participants from Washington, DC, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Maine. Our mentors are from Maryland, Connecticut, Rhode Island and Massachusetts. Our coordinators are from Massachusetts and our director is Marcie Taylor Thoma from Maryland.

The group will continue to meet. They met via Zoom on Constitution Day, September 17, 2022 as they spent much of the morning reviewing Larry Gerston's book and also discussed the progress made with the new academic year. More meetings will come. Another in person meeting is scheduled for May 5, 2022.

