"The Federalist Papers," a collection of 85 essays on the principles of republican government written to support the ratification of the Constitution of 1787, has been praised as an outstanding work by individuals ranging from such founding fathers as Thomas Jefferson and George Washington to contemporary scholars in history and government. Some basic constitutional concepts treated in "The Federalist" include: (1) majority rule with minority rights; (2) public order with private rights; and (3) national sovereignty with states' rights. Yet this classic work is only mentioned briefly, if at all, in high school textbooks. While it is possible that teachers may feel the central ideas of "The Federalist" are no longer applicable in contemporary classrooms or curricula or that the rhetoric is too difficult for the average student to comprehend, a credible case for the inclusion of these essays can be made. The reasons for making such a case are: (1) the essays are the keys to knowledge of constitutional government and citizenship in the United States; (2) "The Federalist Papers" reflect core values in the civic culture; and (3) these papers are directly connected to the curriculum of history, government, and civics. Strategies that could be used to introduce these materials into the curriculum are: (1) document based teaching and learning; (2) issue based teaching and learning; and (3) course-wide infusion of content. Education for constitutional democracy should not be viewed as an ideological exercise, but as an extension to each new generation of citizens of the challenge confronted by James Madison and others of the founding period. (PPB)
THE FEDERALIST IN THE CURRICULUM

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The Federalist is an American classic! Consider the accolades that leading statesmen and scholars have given this collection of 85 papers by Publius on the merits of the Constitution of 1787.¹

Shortly after publication of The Federalist, Thomas Jefferson, proclaimed it "the best commentary on the principles of government which ever was written."²

Later on, Jefferson's arch political foe, Chief Justice John Marshall, revealed a rare point of agreement with his distant cousin, when he wrote: "It [The Federalist] is a complete commentary on our Constitution, and it is appealed to by all parties in the questions to which that instrument gave birth."³

George Washington predicted that The Federalist would transcend the time and circumstances of its publication to become a generally-admired treatise on free government: "When the transient circumstances and fugitive performances which attended this Crisis shall have disappeared," said Washington, "that Work will merit the Notice of Posterity; because in it are candidly and ably discussed the principles of freedom and the topics of government, which will be always interesting to mankind so long as they shall be connected in Civil Society."⁴

Washington's prophecy has come true. From the founding
period to modern times, lawyers, judges, politicians, and scholars have used ideas in The Federalist to guide their inquiries, deliberations, and decisions about principles and issues of constitutional government. Charles Beard, for example, praised these papers of Publius as "the most instructive work on political science ever written in the United States" and reported that he reread parts or all of The Federalist every year for fifty years. At each reading, Beard was newly informed, he said, "by the discovery of ideas and suggestions which [he] had previously overlooked or had failed to grasp in their full meaning." (Of course, Beard's critics might respond with regret that he did not read some of the papers at least one more time, especially No. 10, to remedy his misunderstanding of them.)

Clinton Rossiter commented in his introduction to a recent edition of The Federalist "that it stands third only to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution itself among all the sacred writings of American political history." And during our bicentennial celebration of the U.S. Constitution, the venerable historian, Richard Morris, concluded that The Federalist "has remained profound, searching, challenging, and...everlastingly controversial."

This strong praise for The Federalist, across two centuries of American history, might lead one to expect a
secure and prominent place for it in the curricula and classrooms of our schools, as a staple of courses in history and government and as an anchor for citizenship education. But this is not so! A significant gap separates the educational realities from the elegant rhetoric about timeless truths in The Federalist.

The Status of The Federalist in the High School Curriculum

Curriculum developers and textbook publishers seem to value The Federalist much less than the political and academic luminaries who have so lavishly lauded it. This classic work is mentioned only briefly, if at all, in widely-used high school textbooks on American history, government, and civics.

The best-selling high school government textbook, Magruder's American Government, is also the leader in coverage of The Federalist, which makes the preceding point about the paucity of coverage of this document. Only five pages of this textbook include mention of The Federalist, with little or no discussion of the ideas in it; and one page has a quotation from No. 47 about separation of powers as a means to limited government. In addition, the Appendix to this book includes the complete text of Madison's paper No. 10. However, the document is presented without context or explanation; there is only a one-sentence introduction, which is cryptic and somewhat misleading about the contents
of the essay.  

Other widely-used textbooks mention The Federalist in one or two paragraphs in a section of the standard chapter on the framing and ratifying of the Constitution. This lack of coverage in current textbooks is consistent with practices in the recent past. A 1959 study of high school textbooks revealed that only three civics textbooks even mentioned The Federalist. In addition, "of seventeen history and government textbooks, twelve made only minimal reference to the essays."  

Of course, abysmal ignorance is the inevitable consequence of this kind of neglect. The 1987 national assessment in history revealed that only 40% of 17-year-olds knew that The Federalist was written to support ratification of the Constitution. Furthermore, this national sample of high school students achieved a dismal average score of 54.4% on a 19-item test about principles and issues of constitutional government in the United States.  

Why is The Federalist treated so shabbily in our high school textbooks and curricula? Three reasons are offered to stimulate thought about this problem.  

First, civic educators are committed to helping students know and deal with political reality. But suppose they believe that the central ideas of The Federalist are archaic and no longer applicable to the modern political world. If these papers appear to contribute little to the
student's understanding of the current political system, then teachers will give little more than a passing historical reference to them.

Second, educators may feel obligated to attend to the goals and subjects in the school's curriculum guide. But suppose they find little connection between the contents of The Federalist and the secondary school curriculum. Well, if The Federalist does not seem to fit established curriculum patterns, then it will not be taught.

Third, educators try to offer a curriculum that fits the general level of ability of their students. But suppose they think that ideas in The Federalist are too challenging for most, if not all, members of their high school classes. If this subject is judged as too difficult for learners, then it will be avoided by teachers.

Critics and skeptics have claimed that The Federalist is too old, too arcane, and too difficult to meet the interests and needs of modern students. Is it? Can these objections to The Federalist in the curriculum be met and turned aside? Or is there really little or no justification for this venerated treatise in the curriculum of today's secondary schools?

My answer is that a credible case can be made for teaching ideas and issues of The Federalist to students of high school courses in government and history. What are the essential elements of this case?
The Case for The Federalist in the High School Curriculum

There are three reasons for including ideas and issues of The Federalist papers in the high school curriculum:

1. They are keys to knowledge of constitutional government and citizenship in the United States.
2. They reflect core values in the civic culture.
3. They are connected to the curriculum in history, government, and civics.

These three reasons are interrelated, and therefore, they are discussed concurrently in the case for The Federalist in the curriculum, which follows.

A perennial goal of education in a free society is development of knowledge on government and citizenship. In a democratic republic, the preferred form of government in The Federalist, this goal has critical importance; because without enlightened citizenship, a government of the people cannot endure. And enlightened citizenship can only be the product of enlightening scholarship in a system of education accessible to the general public. Madison promulgated this point, as evidenced by his remarks in a letter to William T. Barry, the Lieutenant governor of Kentucky:

The liberal appropriations made by the Legislature of Kentucky for a general system of Education cannot be too much applauded. A popular Government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a Prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy; or, perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance. And a people who mean to be their own Governors, must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives....
Does The Federalist, in Madison's terms, provide to "people who mean to be their own governors...the power which knowledge gives?" Yes! Publius profoundly examines the inescapable problems and issues of free government, which our students, as citizens, must understand to exercise fully their responsibilities and rights under the Constitution.

Consider the basic paradox of constitutional democracy in modern times: how to have majority rule with protection of the rights of individuals, all individuals, including those who are members of unpopular minority groups. We accept and teach this conception of democracy to our students. We readily recognize that both majority rule and minority rights are values at the core of our civic culture and our high school curriculum. Taken to its extreme, however, majority rule would destroy the rights and liberty of individuals in the minority, as Madison sagely warned in The Federalist Nos. 10 and 51. Conversely, unlimited rights and freedoms for individuals or minority groups would preclude majority rule, and civil society too.\textsuperscript{14}

Majority rule and minority rights--these contrapuntal values that define a constitutional democracy; they are inevitably in conflict. But if free government is to endure, then the rival claims of majorities and minorities must somehow be limited and accommodated. In several numbers of The Federalist, Madison frames the problem and tells us how
to deal with it—knowledge our students need in preparation for responsible citizenship in our constitutional democracy.

Majority rule with minority rights, however, is only one of several perennial predicaments of our constitutional democracy treated in The Federalist. Consider the overriding importance and enduring relevance of three other examples.

Public order with private rights—this paradox poses the problem of finding a workable balance between power and liberty in a government that is both strong and limited, with enough power to act effectively for the common good and sufficient limits to guard the liberty of individuals from abuses of public power. Ideas on public order and private rights permeate The Federalist; however, Nos. 10, 23, 37, 44, and 47-51 provide especially useful commentaries for teachers and students on how to construct a limited government that is also sufficiently powerful.

National sovereignty with states' rights—this problem is the challenge of finding a workable division of authority and duties in a large federal republic that includes a sovereign and energetic national government and several state-level republics that also exercise significant powers. Ideas on federalism, republicanism, and states' rights are treated throughout The Federalist; but teachers and students should concentrate on Nos. 9, 10, 14, and 39.

National security with personal liberty—this problem involves simultaneous provision of common defense for the
society and protection of liberty for persons threatened by overbearing defenders of the commonweal. The best papers in The Federalist on this subject are Nos. 23, 24, and 41, especially No. 41.

Each of these unavoidable and paradoxical problems of our constitutional democracy challenges us—as teachers, students, and citizens—to conjoin opposing values to create a workable synthesis. Each problem requires a search for acceptable limits on contending forces. Under what conditions, and at what point, should the law limit the majority to protect the rights of individuals in the minority? And conversely, when and why should minority rights be limited by law to preserve the will of the majority? Responses to these generic questions will vary with issues and their circumstances. But the civic values and principles in the problems, such as majority rule and minority rights—these are the constant characteristics of a constitutional democracy. If either one of the opposing civic values is sacrificed to the other, then the constitutional democracy is lost. Our students need to learn this, and we can use The Federalist to help them do it.

By turning to The Federalist, teachers and students can find insightful and provocative responses to the paradoxical problems of constitutional democracy: majority rule with minority rights, public order with private rights, national sovereignty with states' rights, and national security with
personal liberty. Teachers and students, for example, can examine Madison's model for a "well-constructed Union" that he hoped would effectively conjoin liberty and order, majority rule with minority rights, and national and state governments in a federal system. These responses are not correct in every detail; for example, Publius' prediction in No. 78 about the federal judiciary's weak position relative to the other branches of government does not fit our current constitutional system. Furthermore, many ideas in The Federalist are debatable today, as they were during the founding period. However, these ideas remain valuable, because they are indisputably applicable to the ongoing concerns of citizenship in our democratic republic.

Examination of perennial constitutional problems posed in The Federalist, and the historical and current issues associated with them, requires knowledge of first principles of constitutional government in the United States, such as popular sovereignty, federalism, republicanism, separation of powers, checks and balances, limited government, rule of law, personal liberty, private rights, common good, and so forth. These ideas of The Federalist are familiar to civic educators, because they are emphasized in statements of educational goals and in syllabi for courses in history and government. They are embedded in the curricula of our schools.

At this point, the case for teaching The Federalist
to high school students has been made. In summary, the contents can assist students to comprehend and analyze our contemporary constitutional government. Central ideas of the document are compatible with the civic culture of the United States and standard high school courses in United States history and government. There is no need to create special courses or units of study on The Federalist, unless one has a special desire or need to do so, because the contents of these papers are congruent with the core curriculum of schools, the common learning experiences required of all students as part of their general education for citizenship.

But critical questions remain. Can the contents of this classic work be taught successfully to high school students? My answer: certainly ideas in this work can be learned by a significant minority of able students, if not by all of them. Responsible educators should not deprive anyone of knowledge and skills merely because they cannot be mastered by everyone.

Will it be a formidable challenge to teach The Federalist to willing and able high school students? Of course, the materials are difficult, and teaching and learning them will require sustained effort and intelligence. But these obstacles to civic enlightenment are not insurmountable. They certainly can be overcome by creative and resourceful teachers with commitment to maintaining the civic tradition of The Federalist.
Strategies for Teaching The Federalist

What strategies might be used to teach ideas in The Federalist to high school students willing and able to learn them? Consider these three generic strategies: (1) document-based teaching and learning, (2) issues-based teaching and learning, and (3) course-wide infusion of content. These three categories are not presented as definitive; they do not just list the pedagogical possibilities. But they are likely to be useful guides to the teaching and learning of ideas in The Federalist; and they may stimulate additional thoughts about how to present these valuable but difficult materials to high school students.

Document-based Teaching and Learning. Most high school students will need careful guidance in their initial confrontations with original text in The Federalist. It is not advisable to require them, at first, to read the complete texts of selected papers. Rather, these essays should be abbreviated, annotated, and otherwise edited to aid the comprehension and interpretation of main ideas by high school students. Furthermore, each excerpt from a Federalist paper should be introduced with a carefully-worded statement about the main ideas covered in the document. Finally, questions should be posed at the end of the document that require students to identify main ideas in it and demonstrate that they comprehend them.

Selected papers from The Federalist should be examined
in context in order to maximize the student's understanding of them and to minimize specious interpretations. Knowledge of the founding period is a prerequisite to one's study of any portion of The Federalist.

James Madison apparently agreed with this point. He wrote about the necessity of interpreting documents in their historical context. He insisted that a literal rendering of the text, without adequate knowledge of the context in which it was written and used, inevitably would be inaccurate. The truth-seeking reader, according to Madison, must always go beyond the document to the time and place of its origin to accurately interpret and assess it. Consider his words on this subject: "If the meaning of the text be sought in the changeable meaning of the words composing it, it is evident that the shape and attributes of the Government [the object of discussion in the text] must partake of the changes to which the words and phrases of all living languages are constantly subject. What a metamorphosis [in meaning] would be produced...."\(^{16}\)

So, a cardinal rule in using primary documents in The Federalist, or any other source, is never to work with them as discrete reading assignments, apart from some meaningful context. One type of context, already noted, is the period in which the document originated. Another kind of context, one that might be used in a high school government or civics course, is a conceptual framework that subsumes main ideas...
of the document. For example, a detailed treatment of the interrelated concepts of separation of powers and checks and balances in government could provide an appropriate context for the study of paper No. 47 of *The Federalist*. However, do not disregard the level of historical knowledge that students bring to the investigation of the document, because this type of conceptual context cannot be adequate to their needs unless they have some minimal level of knowledge about the time of origin of the document.

Given standard constraints of time, and the need to study other materials, only a few papers in *The Federalist* can be included in the curriculum. At a minimum, I would advise use of Nos. 1, 10, and 51. Number 1 is valuable because it introduces the work; and Nos. 10 and 51 embody Madison's most important statements about how to structure a popular government that can both protect private rights and provide public order and security. Additional papers recommended for the high school curriculum, if time permits, are Nos. 14, 15, 23, 39, 41, 47, 48, 70, and 78. These papers are chosen because they treat principles and concepts of government embedded in standard high school courses of study.

Teachers might decide that some of their students are able to work with the complete and unedited versions of these papers. This is always best, if students can do it. If not, look for high-quality learning materials on these
documents, which have been prepared for high school students; or create your own materials, tailored to the special needs of your students.

Issues-based Teaching and Learning. Selected papers of The Federalist are not only useful sources about principles of constitutional government in the United States, but they also serve to illuminate the perennial issues, the classic controversies of our political system, such as how to conjoin majority rule with minority rights. These basic issues can be the objects of lively classroom activities: roundtable discussions, forums, and debates that involve deliberation, discourse, and decisions on alternative positions of the Federalists and their Anti-Federalist foes about ratification of the Constitution of 1787.

Issues-based teaching of The Federalist requires examination by students of select papers of the Anti-Federalists. For example, Madison's position on federalism and republicanism, in Nos 10, 14, and 39 of The Federalist, can be countered with select Anti-Federalist writings on the same concepts: Letter IV of Agrippa, Letters I and XVII of the Federal Farmer, and Essay I of Brutus. Students might be asked to assess the contending positions during a roundtable discussion and then to choose one side or the other for a classroom debates about some controversial proposition in the documents.

Amendments proposed by Anti-Federalists during the
state ratifying conventions of 1787-1788 can be stimulating foci for classroom debates today. For example, students might be asked to debate this amendment proposed by the New York ratifying convention: "That the Senators and Representatives and all Executive and Judicial Officers of the United States shall be bound by Oath or Affirmation not to infringe or violate the Constitutions or Rights of the respective States." A classroom debate on this proposition would require students to draw upon the conflicting positions about federalism and republicanism in The Federalist and writings of the Anti-Federalists.

Here is another example of a possible topic for classroom debate, which comes from the list of amendments proposed by Anti-Federalists at the Pennsylvania ratifying convention: "That the power of organizing, arming and disciplining the militia remain with the individual states, and that Congress shall not have authority to call or march any of the militia out of their own state, without the consent of such state, and for such length of time only as such state shall agree." The spirit of this proposal has emerged in our time; recall the emphatic complaints and threats of resistance from Governor Dukakis about the possibility of sending members of the Massachusetts state militia on a training mission to Central America.

Many of the Anti-Federalist ideas for amending the Constitution of 1787 have modern counterparts. For example,
current proposals for one six-year presidential term of office can be traced to the Anti-Federalists; so can calls for introducing to the national level of government the recall of elected officials and the referendum on legislation, which are employed in several state governments.

Issues-based teaching about *The Federalist* is not only stimulating, interesting, and enlightening, but it also informs students about the fundamental importance of the Anti-Federalist side of the argument. Herbert Storing, the late expert on the Anti-Federalists, provides justification for teaching both sides to the great debate on the Constitution of 1787: "If...the foundation of the American polity was laid by the Federalists," said Storing, "the Anti-Federalist reservations echo through American history; and it is in the dialogue, not merely in the Federalist victory, that the country's principles are to be discovered."¹⁹

**Course-wide Infusion of Content.** In teaching ideas of *The Federalist* and the Anti-Federalists, we should begin, of course, with the origins of the United States. Lessons about these political foes should be parts of instructional units on ratification of the Constitution in American government and history courses. James Madison would agree. He advised that the 'key' to the "legitimate meaning" of the Constitution would be found "not in the opinions or
intention of the body which planned and proposed the Constitution, but in the sense attached to it by the people in their respective State Conventions, where it received all the authority which it possesses."^20

However, teachers should not restrict their treatments of The Federalist and the Anti-Federalist writings to the founding period. There are other entry points in the curriculum for these materials and the ideas in them. For example, excerpts from these classic documents are applicable to the several parts of the high school government course that focus on principles of constitutional democracy, such as the standard lessons on separation of powers, checks and balances, federalism, the presidency, the Congress, the federal judiciary, and the civil rights and liberties of individuals.

High school teachers of United States history can refer to The Federalist in their treatments of issues about states' rights and federalism that led directly to the Civil War. Furthermore, the Civil War Amendments to the Constitution, especially the 14th Amendment, can be examined fruitfully from the perspective of The Federalist. The same point can be made about the applicability of ideas in The Federalist to studies of constitutional changes from the Progressive era to our own time. Issues in landmark cases of the Supreme Court can also be studied in relationship to ideas in The Federalist, since the Justices often referred
to these ideas as they formed opinions in these cases.

World history teachers might explore with students the European roots of ideas in The Federalist. They might also teach about connections of the Enlightenment in Europe to the theory and practice of politics in 18th-century America. Finally, teachers and students of world history might explore the world-wide influence of American ideas on constitutional democracy, especially original ideas of The Federalist about ordered liberty and free government.

Conclusion

If Madison were here today, he probably would be pleased with this final recommendation about a global perspective on The Federalist. His faith in the American concept of free government was so strong that he dreamed of a time when it might spread throughout the world. He wrote: "The free system of government we have established is so congenial with reason, with common sense, and with a universal feeling, that it must produce...a desire of imitation.... Our Country, if it does justice to itself, will be the workshop of liberty to the...World...."21

But "Our Country" cannot "be the workshop of liberty" that Madison desired unless each new generation in this country develops a reasoned commitment to the principles of free government in our most fundamental public documents, foremost of which are the Declaration of Independence, the
Constitution, and *The Federalist*. This reasoned commitment, of course, will be the consequence of effective civic education; it can happen no other way.

An essential element of this effective civic education for reasoned commitment to free government (constitutional democracy) is recognition of imperfections in its operations at particular places and times and deliberation about how to improve it. This, too, Madison would approve. Near the end of his life, he wrote: "No government of human device and human administration can be perfect. ...that which is the least imperfect is therefore the best government;...the abuses of all other governments have led to the preference of republican governments as the best of all governments, because the least imperfect."22

Thus, education for constitutional democracy is not an ideological exercise, not a means to blind faith in dogma. Rather, it is an extension to each new generation of citizens of the challenge confronted by Madison and others during the founding period—the challenge of coping with the enduring issues of constitutional democracy, of improving the system incrementally through responses to these issues, and of passing on the tradition of free government (and the issues inherent in it) to the next generation. Ideas in *The Federalist* can contribute to this kind of education on the principles of free government.

If you accept this view of education for free
government, then you will take on the challenge of teaching The Federalist in your classrooms and communities. And if you do this, take pleasure in the certainty that James Madison would applaud your efforts. "What spectacle can be more edifying or more seasonable," he wrote, "than that of Liberty & Learning, each leaning on the other for their mutual & surest support?"23

Notes


introductory-level college government textbooks provide more coverage of The Federalist than high school textbooks do, but they, too, seem rather limited in their treatments of this classic; see Danny M. Adkison and Lisa McNair Palmer, "American Government Textbooks and The Federalist Papers," The Political Science Teacher 1 (Winter 1988): 1, 15-17.


14. The Federalist Nos. 10 and 51 discuss the danger of majoritarian tyranny and how to deal with it; in addition, see Madison's letter to Thomas Jefferson, 17 October 1788, in Marvin Meyers, editor, The Mind of the Founder, 156-160.

15. Several books about The Federalist are listed here that might be helpful to teachers interested in the paradoxes and perennial issues of constitutional democracy: Martin Diamond, The Founding of the Democratic Republic (Itasca, IL: F.E. Peacock Publishers, Inc. 1981); Gottfried Dietze, The Federalist: A Classic on Federalism and Free Government


18. A complete list of constitutional amendments proposed by the Anti-Federalists at the Pennsylvania ratifying convention appears in a primary document, "The Address and Reasons of Dissent of the Minority of the Convention of Pennsylvania to Their Constituents," in Herbert Storing, editor, *The Anti-Federalist* (Chicago: The University of


22. Ibid., 115.