



## American Heritage Discussion Series: Learners with Littles

### Study Guide for Session IV: Keeping Our Republic

**Overall Essential Question**—How can we maintain our constitutional republic?

**Excerpts about civic virtue from revolutionary era state constitutions—Essential Question:** What is the significance of emphasizing civic virtue at the creation of a new form of self-government?

- The state constitution excerpts identify the blessings of liberty as the product of upholding a variety of virtues. Why?

**Excerpt of a letter between Alexis de Tocqueville and Francisque de Corcelle, September 17, 1853 and Modern Interpretation of Habits of the Hearts and Minds of Men (and Women) —Essential Question:** According to Tocqueville, how is democracy maintained?

- Tocqueville, the author of *Democracy in America* writes to his peer 20 years after the publication of his work, saying that democratic societies are not created by laws, but by sentiments, beliefs, ideas, and habits of the hearts and minds of men. Do you agree with him? Why or why not?
- In your opinion, how important are laws in maintaining democratic government compared to beliefs, ideas, and habits of the hearts and minds of men (and women)?
- What are the habits of the hearts and minds of men Tocqueville observed among Americans in 1831 that he believed fostered democracy?
- How can we foster these habits of the heart and mind today both collectively and personally?

**Summary of Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone*—Essential Question:** Why is social capital important for maintaining a constitutional republic?

- What is social capital? How does it relate to maintaining a constitutional republic?
- What are the benefits and draw backs of bonding communities? What are the benefits of bridging communities? Why are both important?
- Why has social capital declined in recent decades? Why is this concerning?
- How can we increase social capital today? How does this help keep our republic?

**Excerpt on contempt in American society from Arthur Brooks' *Love Your Enemies*—Essential Question:** How can we improve our public discourse across our differences? Why is this important?

- Why is widespread contempt dangerous?
- What are the five rules the author proposes? How might these rules help to dispel contempt?
- How can improving our public discourse help keep our republic?