

Comparative Government Through Revolutions

Course Syllabus

Instructor: Christy Buss

Email: christy@mothlearning.com

Class Time: Monday, 2PM EST

Grade Level: High School

Course Length: 32 weeks

Course Description

Comparative Government Through Revolutions is a year-long high school social studies course that examines how governments rise, fall, and reform through the lens of political revolution. Rather than surveying governments as static systems, this course studies moments of rupture—when people reject an existing political order and attempt to build something new. Students will analyze several major revolutions in depth, asking the same core questions of each case:

- What was wrong with the government people revolted against?
- Why did revolution occur when it did?
- Who participated in the revolution, and whose interests did it serve?
- What type of government replaced the old regime?
- Did the revolution ultimately succeed in solving the problems it set out to address?

The course includes concepts such as legitimacy, political participation, state capacity, ideology, institutional design, and regime stability. However, instead of organizing the course around modern nation-states, we organize it around revolutions themselves, allowing students to trace how revolutionary origins shape political outcomes for decades or even centuries.

Readings combine political theory, historical analysis, and narrative accounts written close to the events themselves. Students will engage with scholars such as Jack Goldstone, C. L. R. James, and William Doyle, alongside eyewitness accounts like John Reed's *Ten Days That Shook the World*. Emphasis is placed on discussion, comparative thinking, and historical reasoning rather than rote memorization.

This course may be used as a full social studies credit and provides strong preparation for advanced coursework in history, political science, law, and international relations.

This class is a wonderful option for students looking for a government credit.

Course Objectives

By the end of Comparative Government Through Revolutions, students will be able to:

- Understand why revolutions occur by examining the political, economic, and social problems that lead people to challenge their governments.
- Compare major revolutions across world history and identify patterns in how governments rise, fall, and are rebuilt.
- Evaluate the success or failure of revolutionary movements by asking whether new regimes solved the problems that sparked the revolution.
- Apply key political concepts such as legitimacy, participation, ideology, and state power to real historical events.
- Read and discuss serious historical and political texts with confidence, developing skills that prepare them for advanced high school and college-level coursework.
- Think critically about government and political change, making connections between past revolutions and modern political systems.

Course Structure

- **Length:** 32 weeks
- **Meeting Format:** Weekly seminar-style class
- **Project Weeks:**
 - **Week 16 – Midyear Project**
 - **Week 32 – Final Project**

The course proceeds **one revolution at a time**, spending multiple weeks on each case to allow for deep analysis and comparison.

Core Texts

The following works anchor the course and provide the shared analytical foundation:

- **Revolutions: A Very Short Introduction** by Jack A. Goldstone
- **A People's History of the American Revolution** by Ray Raphael
- **The French Revolution: A Very Short Introduction** by William Doyle
- **The Black Jacobins** by C. L. R. James (David Scott edition)
- **Ten Days That Shook the World** by John Reed

Additional primary sources and short readings may be provided throughout the year and Instructor reserves the right to change the course texts prior to class.

Assignments & Expectations (High Input / Low Output)

- **Reading** the weekly assignments
- **Weekly Discussion Question:**
Each week, students will respond to **one short discussion question** on the class page after class. These responses are meant to support reflection, not to function as formal essays.
- **Projects:**
One end-of-semester project per semester. Projects are open-ended and may take the form of analytical writing, comparative presentations, or creative synthesis, depending on

student interest. The projects may be as light or intensive as the families feel necessary.

Proposed Topics Covered

- The English Civil War (1642–1651)
- The American Revolution (1775–1783)
- The French Revolution (1789–1799)
- The Haitian Revolution (1791–1804)
- The Latin American Wars of Independence
- The Russian Revolution (1917)
- The Chinese Revolution (1927–1949)
- The Iranian Revolution (1979)
- The Cuban Revolution (1959)
- The Arab Spring (2011–)

Skills Developed

Students will:

- Analyze political systems comparatively
- Understand how revolutions shape long-term governance
- Read and interpret serious historical and political texts
- Participate thoughtfully in discussion
- Synthesize ideas across time, place, and ideology