

American Government & Politics: A Christian Worldview
“What vs. Why” Sorting Challenge (15–20 minutes)

TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS/KEY

Goal

Students will distinguish between WHAT (facts, structures, dates, processes) and WHY (purpose, principles, worldview) and practice converting shallow knowledge into meaningful understanding.

Instructions

1. Say something like this:
Most students are taught government by memorizing facts—dates, court cases, and procedures. But this reading argues that the purpose of government matters more than the details. Today we’re going to practice spotting the difference.
2. Students work individually or in pairs. Label each statement either W = WHAT (facts, details, mechanics) or Y = WHY (purpose, meaning, worldview). (Give students 5-7 minutes.)
3. Discuss Part A together as a class.
4. Tell students to move to Part B individually or in pairs. (Give students 6-8 minutes.)
5. Discuss students’ answers to Part B as a class.

Answer Key, Part A

1. Y
2. W
3. Y
4. W
5. W
6. Y
7. W
8. Y
9. Y
10. W
11. Y
12. W
13. Y
14. W
15. W

Answer Key, Part B

Sample Answers (Acceptable Variations)

Students’ answers will vary (AWV), but strong responses should move from fact → purpose.

Examples:

WHAT: “Taxes are collected to fund government programs.”

WHY: “Taxes should be evaluated based on whether they support the proper role of government.”

WHAT: “Courts sometimes reverse earlier decisions.”

WHY: “Legal decisions should be judged by whether they align with a consistent moral standard.”

WHAT: “The First Amendment protects certain freedoms.”

WHY: “Freedoms should be protected because they reflect deeper truths about human responsibility and limits on government.”

Wrap-Up

Ask students:

- Which was easier—identifying WHAT or WHY?
- Why do many schools tend to focus on WHAT?
- How does focusing on WHY change how you think about government?

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PART A: Sort each statement below; write “W” for “What” (a fact-based statement) or “Y” for “Why” (a statement that requires more thinking).

1. ____ Governments are made up of sinful human beings.
2. ____ The First Amendment protects certain freedoms.
3. ____ The purpose of studying government is to understand its true role.
4. ____ A Supreme Court case in 1937 changed how laws were interpreted.
5. ____ A law was created requiring businesses to follow certain regulations.
6. ____ The Bible provides the standard for evaluating government.
7. ____ Taxes are collected to fund government programs.
8. ____ Government exists to punish those who do evil.
9. ____ Government often becomes too powerful when unchecked.
10. ____ Laws are passed when a majority of lawmakers agree.
11. ____ Christians are ultimately citizens of heaven, not earth.
12. ____ Courts sometimes reverse earlier decisions.
13. ____ Christians should view government in light of eternity.
14. ____ Benjamin Franklin suggested prayer at the Constitutional Convention.
15. ____ The Constitution outlines the structure of government.

Discuss in pairs/groups, but don’t go to Part B before we discuss Part A as a class!

PART B: Turn the “What” into “Why.” Choose any THREE statements that you labeled “W” and rewrite them as “WHY” statements.

Example: WHAT: “The Constitution outlines the structure of government.”
 WHY: “Government structure should be evaluated based on whether it fulfills its true purpose.”

Rewrite here

1.

2.

3.