Civil discourse is our most basic form of civic engagement. In a democracy, it is our best tool for collectively answering a society’s most fundamental question: “What shall we do?” While most of us have no doubt participated in political discussions, engaging in civil discourse that is productive (i.e., dialogue that fosters democratic goals) can be substantially more difficult. For example, when both sides of an argument view their beliefs as part of their identity, debating the merits of those beliefs without calling into question the merits of the individuals who hold them can be challenging. Ideally, a careful discussant might find common ground, previously obscured by the trappings of tribalism, or, at the very least, foster a mutual understanding of and respect for the values that inform beliefs they do not share. On the other hand, an unskilled discussant, perhaps one only interested in personal attacks or "winning arguments," will likely only further entrench each party in the views of their political tribe.

Engaging in productive civil discourse is a skill that needs to be explicitly taught, modeled, and practiced in the same way that students are taught and given opportunities to practice skills like finding the length of the hypotenuse or filling in a Punnett square. Unfortunately, civic education often takes a backseat to so-called core subjects like math, science, and English. We propose a novel civic education intervention designed to provide students with 1) a better understanding of the values that shape their own beliefs and the beliefs of others, 2) opportunities to practice overcoming the biases that are born out of our pre-existing beliefs, 3) an understanding of what makes civil discourse productive and examples of model civil discourse, and 4) opportunities to practice the skills that underpin productive civil discourse. Our proposed intervention is an AI-powered educational game that adapts instruction to a student’s specific values. This value-adaptive instruction is critical because it uniquely allows students to more effectively practice skills like political perspective taking, identifying personal biases, and engaging in discussions that foster democratic goals.