

# Documenting Democracy: Lesson Plans on the United States Constitution

## In Commemoration of Constitution Day

On September 17, 1787, the United States Constitution was signed at Independence Hall in Philadelphia by 39 of the 55 delegates attending the Constitutional Convention. Their actions paved the way for a historic document that has defined our nation's framework and protected our democratic form of government for more than two centuries.

Two hundred and fifteen years later, on December 8, 2004, President Bush signed a law establishing September 17 as Constitution Day and requested an educational program in all federally funded institutions to commemorate this vital document. This curriculum guide gives teachers the opportunity to participate in study activities focused on the U.S. Constitution on Constitution Day in September. These lessons can also be used in collaboration with course units on government or history at any time during the course of the school year.

If you only have time for one Constitution-related activity for the September commemoration, we suggest printing out a copy of the Preamble and having your students read it aloud.

## Introducing the Constitution

After the American Revolution established the independence of the United States from Britain, a great challenge faced the leaders of this new nation. While the United States was free to set its own course, the challenge of creating a set of rules and laws that would unite a diverse set of people tested the leaders of this fragile new nation. At first, the Articles of Confederation (1781) provided the law of the land, but it quickly became clear that a project like the United States demanded a strong central government. Over the summer of 1787, delegates from 12 of the 13 states gathered in Philadelphia to fashion a government from scratch. They decided to write a new Constitution and met in secrecy for 55 days in the sweltering heat, trying to resolve many of the problems about which people in the states felt so strongly. The biggest hurdle was to find a middle ground between those who favored a federal system in which a national government would hold most of the authority (Federalists), and those who wanted individual states to have maximum power to make decisions locally (Anti-Federalists).

The Anti-Federalists felt that their loyalty was to their state, not a central government. After all, they had fought as Virginians and Pennsylvanians and they had won the war hadn't they? There was deep distrust of any government that was too centralized because there was the danger that it would become like the monarchy of King George III and not allow them to

make decisions about their own lives. However, Americans also realized that a strong central government was needed to negotiate with large foreign powers such as Spain and France, and to develop treaties and relations with Native Americans.

There were other challenges to solve. Small states wanted as much representation as the large states because they were each distinct political bodies, while the large states thought they should have more representatives because they had more people. The task at hand for the delegates was to find a system of government that would be acceptable to all groups.

Two key words are helpful in understanding how the United States arrived at a Constitution: balance and compromise. The delegates at the Constitutional Convention decided to establish one federal government with three main branches: legislative, executive, and judicial (the Congress, the Presidency, and the Supreme Court). The power of individual states would be preserved by Congress, which was split between the Senate and the House of Representatives. Each state would be allowed two senators and representatives to the House based on the size of the state's population. This later became known as the "Great Compromise." Other compromises included the decision to count African Americans as three-fifths of a person and to agree not to make any laws barring slave importation

for twenty years. Meanwhile, the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 barred slavery from this new territory.

Once the Constitution was written, it needed to be ratified by the people of at least nine of the thirteen states in order to be valid. Frenzied debate ensued over the course of nearly a year – in newspapers, political meetings, on street corners – before the Constitution was finally ratified by enough states in 1788. Worries about the protection of individual freedoms were answered by the Bill of Rights, a set of ten Constitutional amendments passed in 1791. These additions to the Constitution promised that the federal government would protect the rights of individual citizens. The founding documents had been determined, but a new process had been set in motion as Americans struggled to define the boundaries of these words. This document, setting forth the rules for a representational democracy that was the first of its kind, is the oldest constitution still in use today.



### Fun Facts:

Where in the world is the Constitution?

The original draft of the Constitution is on display at the National Archives in Washington, DC.

Where was the Constitution sent for safe storage during World War II?  
Fort Knox.

## Constitutional Components: How is the Constitution Structured?

**The Constitution has three major components:**

- **The Preamble (We the People)**
- **The Articles (I-VII)**
- **The Bill of Rights (Amendments 1-10)**

*Jump Starter: Print and distribute the full text of the Constitution at the National Archives site at [www.ourdocuments.gov](http://www.ourdocuments.gov). Students will also enjoy looking at the original version of the Constitution, photos of which are available at the same site.*

The Preamble to the Constitution starts with the phrase, "We the People of the United States," rather than saying, "We the States." What might this difference mean?

## Documenting Democracy: The United States Constitution

# Elementary School Lesson Plan

Introducing the Constitution to younger students presents a valuable opportunity to build not only knowledge of the founding documents but also their sense of civic understanding and appreciation. A basic explanation of the American Revolution is a good place to start before leading students through the framework of the Constitution and how it is relevant to their everyday lives. Following from this background instruction, you can bring the topic to life through engaging activities they can pursue both in the classroom and in their local communities.

### Goal:

To gain a basic understanding of how the Constitution was created, how it is structured, and how it applies to students' present-day lives.

### Curriculum Links:

This lesson plan would be useful for history, social studies, and civics courses, and will complement course units on American government.

### National Standards:

This lesson plan is linked to state history standards in all 50 states and the District of Columbia and is most relevant to the following thematic strands of the National Council for the Social Studies curriculum standards:

- II Time, Continuity, and Change
- V Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- VI Power, Authority, and Governance
- X Civic Ideals and Practices

### Introduction to Educator:

Provide students with a brief background on the Constitution\* if your class has not already studied it (or needs a refresher), or simply use the lesson plan ideas below as a supplement to your course units on the Constitution.

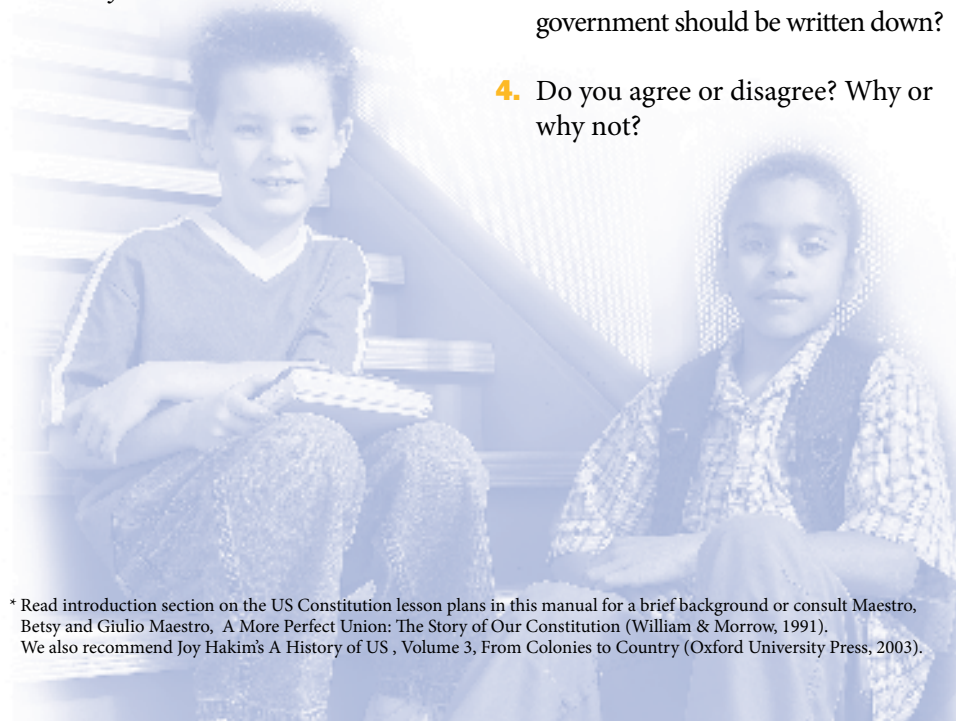
Lead your class through the thought process behind the purpose of writing a constitution. Depending upon your students' reading level, the following paragraph may be read aloud by a student in class.

*A constitution is an agreed-upon set of rules and laws that tells people how their government is set up, what their government can do, and what their government can't do. In the United States today, every state has a constitution. Some organizations have constitutions. The most famous constitution in America is the U.S. Constitution. It is the most important one, too, for all Americans.*

*In 1787, when our Constitution was written, very few countries had a constitution. Rules and laws could be created and changed by the king or other leaders. Great Britain had a constitution, but it was made up of a lot of different documents containing different rules. In the United States, leaders now known as the "Founding Fathers" believed that it was necessary to write down in one document the most important rules for governing the new nation. These rules were so important that the Founding Fathers made sure they couldn't be changed easily. Today, many countries have a written constitution.*

### Discussion Questions for Your Students:

1. What is a constitution?
2. Who were the Founding Fathers?
3. Why do you think the Founding Fathers believed that rules about government should be written down?
4. Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?



\* Read introduction section on the US Constitution lesson plans in this manual for a brief background or consult Maestro, Betsy and Giulio Maestro, *A More Perfect Union: The Story of Our Constitution* (William & Morrow, 1991). We also recommend Joy Hakim's *A History of US*, Volume 3, *From Colonies to Country* (Oxford University Press, 2003).

## Activity #1: Power Words – The Constitution Quest

**Supplies needed:** Note cards, pens/pencils and paper, small containers, bags, or ribbon to hold clues for the quest (plastic eggs from an egg-hunt would be a good option or rolled-up paper tied with colorful ribbon).

Start this activity by defining the terms below (or age appropriate terms pertaining to the Constitution) with the larger class or group. Provide each student with written definitions after the discussion and have them study the terms so they are familiar with the definitions. Break up the students into groups of four. In an open school or

outdoor space, hide the terms below, without definitions, in containers or tied with ribbon. Tell students ahead of time how many clues have been hidden. Send students on a scavenger hunt to find the terms, and reconvene with the larger group when they have all been discovered.

Have the students define the terms from memory in their groups and present them out loud. Tally up the numbers of correct definitions. Present the group with the most correct answers with a small prize or treat.

**Constitution**

**President**

**Constitutional Convention**

**U.S. Congress**

**Delegate**

**Citizen**

**Senator**

**Articles of Confederation**

**Representative**

**Bill of Rights**

**Taxation**

**Separation of Powers**

**Founding Fathers**

**Supreme Court**

**Federal Government**

**Checks and Balances**

**Amendment**

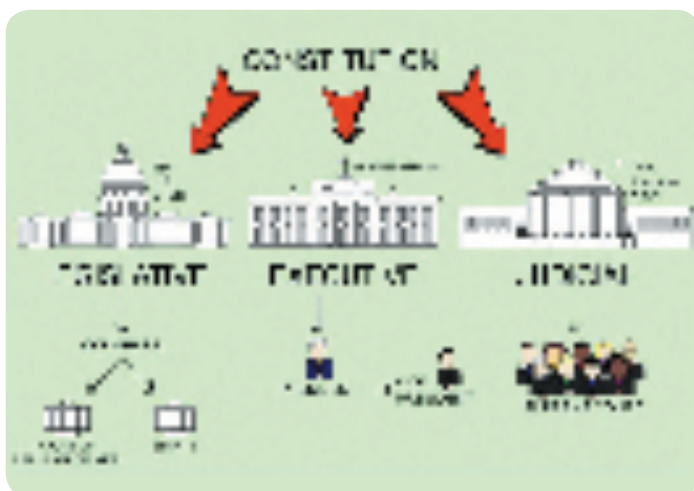
### Did You Know?

Did you know that Thomas Jefferson and John Adams did NOT sign the Constitution?



## Activity #2: The Roles and Responsibilities of Government

One of the most important aspects of the U.S. Constitution is that it established the role of the federal government, breaking down its responsibilities into three distinct branches. Provide students with the helpful chart below and lead a discussion of the three branches of government and the roles of each. Create three columns on the blackboard or computer with each of the three branches, and list the rights and responsibilities of each one.



(Citation: This graphic is borrowed from the excellent and informative Ben's Guide to U.S. Government for Kids, available at <http://bensguide.gpo.gov>)

### Discussion Questions:

1. Based on the chart below what are the three branches of government established by the Constitution? Why do you think the authors of the Constitution created these branches? Why doesn't the President just run everything?
2. Do you think our country needs a constitution? What if the United States had no rules at all? What would happen if the rules changed frequently?
3. Discuss how the Constitution set up centralized rules, called the federal government, so that some rules will be the same from state to state. For example, as you travel from one state to another, the currency is the same, there are post offices that carry letters and packages across states, and there are armed forces that represent the entire nation. Why is this important? What would the United States be like, for example, if each state had its own form of currency?
4. **Bonus questions:** If you were going to work for one of these three branches of government, which would it be?

### Post-Discussion Activity:

Break students up into groups of four or five, and then distribute the following challenge to each group. Have them present their answers at the end of class. After all of the presentations have been delivered, ask the students to discuss highlights from each presentation.



**Quick! The country has just passed a new law:** every school must form its own constitution and submit it to the state government **by the end of the week.**

Luckily, **your group has some knowledge**, so your principal has called upon you to help with this task.

Working together with your group, **write up ten rules** that will be included in your **school constitution.**

Be sure to remember the most important thing the framers of the U.S. Constitution realized during the Constitution Convention: **it's important to compromise!**

## Activity #3: Three C's: Constitution, Cooperation, Compromise (A Life Skill Lesson)

Teaching the Constitution presents many opportunities for life skill lessons for elementary students, such as explaining the value and meaning of “compromise.” Explain to students that the Constitution was the product of great debate in which all states had to give up some of what they wanted for the sake of the whole – the common good. There were two major plans presented by the delegates, though together they finally agreed on a third.

### Virginia Plan:

This plan was favored by bigger states. It focused on building one strong federal government. Representation was based on the size of a state's population.

### New Jersey Plan:

This plan gave each state equal representation regardless of population.

### The Connecticut Plan:

Known later as the “Great Compromise” this plan established the Senate, in which each state would have two senators, and the House, where representation would be based on population.

### Discussion Questions:

1. In 1787, Virginia was one of the biggest states with many residents. Why do you think it wanted representation to be based on population size?
2. If you had been a delegate at the Constitutional Convention, which plan would you have chosen? Why?
3. What are some situations in your own life in which you have had to compromise? What was the benefit for you? For others?
4. **Bonus questions:** Which Founding Father proposed the “Great Compromise”? Where did he live? What is his state's motto?

## Activity #4: “We the People” Art Project



Introduce students to the Preamble to the Constitution. Distribute a copy of the Preamble or write it on the board and lead a discussion of the phrase “We the people of the United States,” and a basic definition of democracy. Explain that in 1787, when the Constitution was written, primarily white men were included in the idea of “We the people.” Today, that notion has changed to include women and people of all races and ethnicities. Following this discussion, ask students to create a painting or drawing which represents their vision of who “We the people of the United States” are, and what the phrase means to them. You can also have students write poems to explore this topic, with the guideline that their poems must start with the words, “We the People.” Have students explain their creations to the larger class or group and display them on your class bulletin boards or in the hallway.

## Activity #5: Oral History Project

*(Local history application)*

In class, explain to students the roles and responsibilities of the President. Then, ask them to interview an older family member, friend, or member of their community about the Presidents they remember or admire. Ask this person the following questions, and write down the answers to share with the larger class in short presentations.

1. Which President do you think has been most important in U.S. history? Why?
2. During which era of American history did this President live? What were the most important issues this President faced?
3. What are the three qualities you think are most important for Presidents to have? What are their most important roles and responsibilities?

## Activity #6: The Constitution at Work

*(Local history application)*

Find a lawyer, public advocate, or other civic official in your community who uses the Constitution in some way for their job. Invite them to come to your school to discuss

with students how the Constitution relates to the job they perform, and to everyday life.



### Fun Fact:

Benjamin Franklin was the oldest member of the Constitutional Convention at the age of 81. Jonathan Dayton of New Jersey was the youngest at a mere 26 years old.



## Documenting Democracy: The United States Constitution

# Middle School Lesson Plan

Middle school students in many states are expected to understand the structure of the U.S. Constitution and the process of ratification. Encouraging them to see the Constitution as a document relevant to their own lives is an excellent way to keep them interested as they develop their vocabulary and sophistication in understanding the more advanced concepts the Constitution introduces. The following activities are offered as suggestions for enlivening course units on the discussion and inspiring young people to not only see the relevance of the founding documents, but to want to learn more!

### Goal:

To build an understanding of the Constitution, how it is structured, and how it can be applied practically.

### Curriculum Links:

This lesson plan would be useful for history, social studies, and civics courses, and will complement course units on American government.

### National Standards:

This lesson plan is linked to state history standards in all 50 states and the District of Columbia and is most relevant to the following thematic strands of the National Council for the Social Studies curriculum standards:

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### Introduction to Educator:

The lesson plan suggestions below are geared toward students who have some knowledge of the Constitution and its role in U.S. history. These activities can be used as an introduction to course units on the Constitution or can be used to supplement lesson plans you have

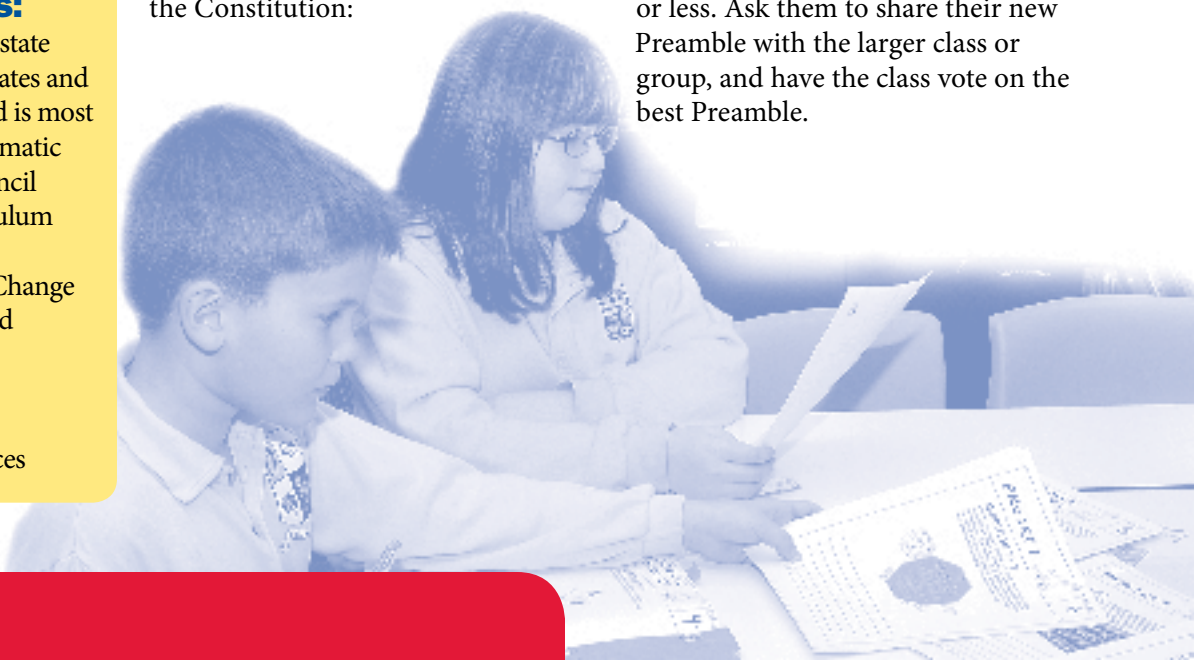
already created. By completing the first three activities, students will gain insights into the three main components of the Constitution: the Preamble, the Articles, and the Bill of Rights. Students requiring additional background information can consult the Resources section at the conclusion of these lesson plans.

## Activity #1: The Building Blocks for Government

The Preamble to the Constitution is perhaps one of the most often heard and quoted passages in American history. Studying the Constitution allows students to reflect on what the passage actually means and what it indicates about the document to follow. For this activity, distribute a copy of the Preamble to students. An interesting note to start with is the definition of “preamble.” Translated from Latin, the term means “to walk before.” Lead a class discussion asking students what the following terms mean and why they are relevant to the Constitution:

**perfect union**  
**justice**  
**insure domestic tranquility**  
**common defense**  
**general welfare**  
**secure the blessings of liberty**

Then, break students up into groups. Tell them that their task is to rewrite the Preamble, being sure to keep their new Preamble to one sentence or less. Ask them to share their new Preamble with the larger class or group, and have the class vote on the best Preamble.



## Activity #2: Artistic Articles!

Students should understand that the Constitution includes seven articles that established different aspects of the government and the ratification of the Constitution itself. Break the class or group into seven smaller groups and ask each group to research and interpret one of the seven articles. Then, their task is to help the rest of the class build their knowledge through a creative performance describing the main contributions of their article. These can be poems, songs, cartoons, or PowerPoint presentations, but

the focus should be on giving the rest of the class a clear understanding of their article in a creative and entertaining way. Students should also provide a written explanation of the article to be read aloud. After a brief review, quiz students on the seven articles. (An alternative to this activity would be to have students create bulleted lists of the key elements of each article and then choose one article to focus on in creative presentations.)

## Activity #3: Do You Know Your Rights?

The Bill of Rights can be one of the most exciting aspects of studying the Constitution for young people because the concept of “rights” and rules are so applicable to their everyday lives. Drawing from current events and debates in the news is an ideal way of showing students the validity, and even urgency, of studying the Constitution. Remind students through an introductory lecture or refresher that one of the biggest objections to ratifying the Constitution from some delegates was that it did not include a Bill of Rights. The Bill of Rights was passed as the first ten Amendments to the Constitution in 1791.

For this activity, distribute a copy of the Bill of Rights to students and lead them through these first ten Constitutional Amendments. Then, have students conduct individual research on the Bill of Rights and create a PowerPoint presentation or scrapbook with two slides or pages devoted to each Amendment. The first should have a brief synopsis of the Amendment and the second should be a modern-day or historical application of the Amendment. Encourage students to scan or search for newspaper articles on the Internet or at home that relate to a Constitutional Amendment or Bill of Rights related issue. Have students share the most interesting current or historical case drawn from one of the Amendments with the larger class or group.

## Activity #4: Oral History Project

*(Local history application)*

Have students interview an older family member or community member about the Supreme Court. Have students ask this person which Supreme Court case, either within their lifetime or throughout U.S. history, is the one they think is the most important or memorable. Then, have students explore the case and find additional background on the era and political context in which it took place.

Ask each student to share the following information in a presentation of 3 minutes: who they interviewed, the court case they examined, the historical context in which it took place, and the Constitutional issue at stake. Make a list of all of the cases and have students vote on which case they think is most important after hearing these reports.

“

Keeping the past alive helps our young people understand where we come from and how we must move forward.

”

- Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert  
Speaker Hastert received a Save Our History Leadership award from **The History Channel** in May 2005.

## Activity #5: Save the Constitution!

Another crucial concept that the Constitution can help us teach is the value of compromise. After explaining the

“Great Compromise” to students, distribute the following challenge to students.



**Help! The Constitution is in trouble.** The Constitutional Convention has gone on for several hot summer months and still no final document has been produced. Conflicts between the larger and smaller states continue as both sides feel their interests will be sacrificed by the Constitutional plans on the table.

**Your help is greatly needed:** your father or brother is a delegate from Delaware, and he has decided to vote against the “Great Compromise” which would leave the Constitution just short of an agreement. While everyone in **your family thinks you are shy and oblivious** to the debate, you have actually been following very closely and have some of the best insights into why the “Great Compromise” is the best path for the Convention to follow. Write an impassioned letter to your father or brother making the argument for why the **“Great Compromise”** is the best plan and why an agreement on the Constitutional draft is necessary.

## Activity #6: Bringing the Constitution to the Community

*(Local history application)*

After gathering this knowledge of the Constitution, ask students to share what they have learned with the younger students at their school. Assign each student an identity, either as a founding father, Constitutional delegate, an Article of the Constitution, a Supreme Court Justice, or one of the ten amendments in the Bill of Rights.

Then, have students dress in clothing or create a t-shirt relevant to their identity. Organize for the students to perform for younger students at the school (or for older members of a community center, hospital, or adult living environment). Each student should describe their identity and one fun fact related to the Constitution.



### Did you know?

Did you know that of the 55 delegates to the Constitutional Convention, 24 were lawyers or had studied law?

## Documenting Democracy: The United States Constitution

# High School Lesson Plan

At the high school level, many students will be familiar with the structure of the Constitution and the process of ratification. Studying the Constitution presents many excellent opportunities for students to pursue rigorous debate, build critical thinking skills, and get students excited about civic participation as they approach voting age. These activities should help provide an informative and entertaining way for students to accumulate knowledge of the Constitution while finding their own answers to the common question, “Why should I care?”

### Goal:

To build an advancing knowledge base of how the Constitution was created, how it was structured, and how it applies to student’s present-day lives.

### Curriculum Links:

This lesson plan would be useful for history, social studies, and civics courses, and will complement course units on American government.

### National Standards:

This lesson plan is linked to state history standards in all 50 states and the District of Columbia and is most relevant to the following thematic strands of the National Council for the Social Studies curriculum standards:

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### Introduction to Educator:

Many states have implemented assessment tests on the Constitution and structure of government, in addition to the course expectations that schools have for their high school history and civics students.

## Activity #1: Charting Constitutional History

For this two-part activity, students will create a Constitutional “storyboard” as a way of organizing and reviewing their knowledge of the Constitution. One of the best ways to study and review the complexity of the Constitution is for students to create a visual representation of the chronology of events and their historical relevance. Constructing a Constitutional “storyboard” is one way for students to trace the narrative of the Constitution and ratification process. Explain to students that filmmakers and writers often use “storyboards” when they are writing film scripts. These can be either charts or drawings that represent the chronological structure of a story. Students may want to research storyboards online or using the Internet in order to get a sense of the variety of how they can be constructed. Then, have students construct their own storyboards. These can be text-based or include drawings but they must include the following events and terms (including those you or your students want to add) and explain their Constitutional relevance:

These lesson plans are not intended as preparation for these tests, but rather to supplement course units and provide fresh ideas for how to invigorate the study of the Constitution in your classroom.

**Declaration of Independence**

**Delegates**

**“Connecticut Compromise”**

**Separation of Powers**

**Anti-Federalists**

**Articles of Confederation**

**New Jersey Plan**

**Three Branches of Government (list and define)**

**“Three-fifths” Clause**

**Ratification**

**Constitutional Convention**

**Virginia Plan**

**Sovereignty**

**Federalists**

**Bill of Rights (List all 10)**

## Activity #2: From Storyboard to Story Book

A great way to assess whether students have absorbed information about the Constitution is to test their ability to explain what they have learned to others. Have students use the storyboards they created for Activity #1 to write and illustrate a Constitutional story designed for 5th graders. These stories can be a series of drawings, written in text form, or presented as cartoons. The goal of these stories is to challenge high school students to translate

their knowledge of the Constitution in a new way. They should imagine that they will be reading these books, so they can frame their stories in their own language as long as they include relevant information about the Constitution and the process of ratification. Have students share these presentations with younger students at your school or in your community. Or, have the class invite younger students to your classroom for a Constitution story time.

## Activity #3: A Conversation from History: Federalism vs. Anti-Federalism

The debate between the Federalists and Anti-Federalists was one of the most fiercely contested arguments during the ratification process. By understanding this debate, students will gain invaluable insights into debates about the structure of government that continue today. For this assignment, have students research the Federalist/Anti-Federalist split, asking them to locate the arguments made by James Madison,

Patrick Henry, John Jay, or other leading intellectuals of the era. Then, ask them to pretend that they are on a conference call with one person from each side of the debate. Ask them to write a 1-2 page transcript of what they think they would hear, and the final conclusion based on their knowledge of history. These can be written in contemporary language as long as they capture the essence of this debate.

## Activity #4: How Can Three-Fifths Add Up to One?

Though many heralded the “Great Compromise” as a masterwork political solution, others saw it as a severe moral compromise with regards to slavery. George Mason of Virginia condemned slavery, calling every slave master a “petty tyrant.” The Constitution never mentions the word slavery, but a “three-fifths” clause was included as a way of spelling out how slaves would be counted in terms of assessing state population. Have students research the “three-fifths” compromise. They should be sure they understand both sides of this debate, and how some of the delegates

justified the existence of slavery. Then, break the class up into groups with one group representing each state that participated in the Constitutional Convention. Each group should decide, based on their state, whether or not they will support the “three-fifths clause.” They should prepare a short presentation making their arguments for or against the clause. They can choose to vote in a different way than their state did in actuality, but they need to provide a historical explanation and describe how their decision would affect the process of Constitutional approval.

## Activity #5: Mission: Save the Constitution

Distribute this challenge to your class or group:



Help! The Constitution is in jeopardy and you may be the **only person to save it!** A mysterious thief named **Silence Dowrong** has **stolen the Constitution** from the National Archives and has threatened to destroy it within 24 hours. Silence claims that Americans no longer value the Constitution and deserve to have it taken away unless they can **justify its existence** and make an argument for why it is still relevant. **You, and other bright young Americans** who represent the future of the nation, have been called upon to present him with a list of reasons why that is not true. **The nation's future is on your shoulders** — the President has called you personally and asked for your help. This situation is critical. Your job is to write a letter to Silence describing **why the Constitution is important** and why **the United States still needs it.** Silence is also a wordsmith and likes creative writing and argumentation, so be sure to bring your sharpest writing to bear as you struggle to save our nation's founding words. **Good luck!!**

**Bonus:** Silence Dowrong is the arch-nemesis of a real person in history who used a similar alias. Who is this person?



### Fun Fact:

After the Constitutional Convention, an onlooker named Mrs. Powell approached Benjamin Franklin and asked what kind of government had been formed. Franklin replied, "A republic, madam, if you can keep it."

## Activity #6: A World of Constitutions

While we are most familiar with the U.S. Constitution, many other democratic nations have constitutions. Break your class up into groups of two or three. Assign each group a national constitution to investigate at the library or using the Internet ([www.constitution.org](http://www.constitution.org) provides links to many national constitutions). Ask students to respond to the following questions and prepare a short oral presentation to share with the larger class or group.

1. How is the Constitution structured?
2. Which, if any, rights are protected by this Constitution?
3. What are the major similarities and differences between this Constitution and that of the United States?
4. If you could add one item from this Constitution to the U.S. Constitution, what would it be?

## Activity #7: Judging the Judges

The Supreme Court was established by the Constitution and first met in 1790. As the nation's highest court, the Justices appointed to serve on the Court are faced with the enormous task of interpreting and applying the Constitution three hundred years after it was written. With a lifelong tenure, each Justice chosen and confirmed must be carefully selected. The process of confirmation is often heated, and

is closely watched in contemporary society. Ask students to research the process through which a Supreme Court Justice is nominated and confirmed. Then, ask them to imagine that they are participating in the Senate confirmation hearings and to write a list of the top ten questions they would ask the nominee, and why. They can present their answers to the larger class or group.

## Activity #8: Constitutional Amendment: Community-based Project

For this activity, students will work with an older member of the community in order to propose a new Constitutional amendment. Ask them to locate a grandparent, community member, or older friend who they can work with. (Organizing this event with a social service organization or adult learning home in your community would be a great way to spread your students' knowledge of the Constitution with others.) They should tell their partner that their goal is to write a new Constitutional amendment that they will work together

to brainstorm and write. They can start by thinking about the aspects of the Constitution they think might need to be changed, or an issue that needs to be addressed in our society. After writing this amendment, they should share them with the larger class or group. Accompanying their presentations, students should write a diary entry about this process including who they worked with and how and why they came to consensus on their chosen amendment.



### Fun Fact:

Though we might think of the Founding Fathers as strange men in hose and pointy boots, they were actually quite human. The Constitutional Convention took place during the sweltering summer of 1787. With no air conditioning, flies swarmed and mosquitoes chomped right through their lovely silk stockings. Furthermore, Benjamin Franklin was one of the few Founding Fathers who was into taking baths! (Baths were considered unsanitary in the 18th century.)

# Resources

## Books

Appleby, Joyce. *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans* (Harvard University Press, 2001).

Berlin, Ira. *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Harvard University Press, 2004).

Ellis, Joseph. *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation* (Knopf, 2002).

Hakim, Joy. "From Colonies to Country, 1735-1791," from *A History of US* (Oxford University Press, 2003).

Maestro, Betsy and Giulio Maestro. *A More Perfect Union: The Story of Our Constitution* (William & Morrow, 1991).

Patterson, Thomas E. *We the People, A Concise Introduction to American Politics* (McGraw-Hill, 2003).

Sobel, Sly. *The U.S. Constitution and You*. (Barron's Educational Series, 2001).

Wood, Gordon. *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

## Websites

**HISTORY site on The U.S. Constitution**  
[www.history.com/topics/constitution](http://www.history.com/topics/constitution)

**Houghton Mifflin Harcourt's Education Place**  
<http://www.eduplace.com>

**1 For All: Building Awareness of the First Amendment**  
<http://1forall.us/>

**Constitution Day Resources from the Library of Congress**  
<http://thomas.loc.gov/teachers/constitution.html>

**The National Archives: Charters of Freedom**  
 This informative online exhibit highlights the founding document and includes helpful links and contextual background.  
<http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/charters.html>

**The National Constitution Center**  
 An excellent resource which includes activities, primary sources, and background information on the nation's founding documents.  
<http://constitutioncenter.org/>

