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Age: 12

Grade: 7th

Constituting America

It is the year 1787. The setting is Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. You can smell the scent of dust and old boots around you. You hear the sound of people enunciating and boots thumping on the wooden floor. You look up. There are people all around, dressed incredibly neat, and are gathered around a paper to sign it. You are at the ever-so famed and momentous Constitutional Convention.

People like George Washington, James Maddison, Ben Franklin, and other members of the Constitutional Convention wanted to create a country “conceived in liberty” and one that would thrive amongst other nations of the time, whose monarchies and unfairness would lead to revolt. They wanted to create a country in which the people would have the power. The citizens would be able to vote for their representatives, thus having representation in government. They aimed to give citizens several rights that would recognize the United States as a republic. They did all of this by writing and signing the Constitution.

Many of these rights are represented in the First Amendment of the Constitution. An amendment is a change to the Constitution, in order for the US to further prosper as a democracy.

The First Amendment outlines several rights that Congress may not constrain. These rights are the freedom of speech, religion, press, assembly, and the right to petition the government. Freedom of speech allows citizens to be able to voice their opinions without government involvement. Freedom of religion permits citizens to practice any religion they regard as true. Freedom of press authorizes the rights of citizens to publish printed or electronic material, as they choose. Freedom of assembly allows people to gather in groups to express their opinions. The right to petition permits citizens to request things and express their opinions to the government freely.

These rights enable citizens to influence the laws of the US. When citizens are provided freedom of speech, press, assembly, and the right to petition, their voices are being heard. Citizens can voice their interests and opinions, which affects what laws are made by the government. One example comes from the 1900s. In this time period, women suffrage was starting to gain momentum. Leaders such as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton were leading American women in protesting and persuading the government to pass an amendment that would bestow the right to vote for women. They organized protests, speeches, and rallies in order to persuade the US government. This was legal, according to the First Amendment of the Constitution, which allowed the US women to do so. Eventually, the US government ultimately

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ratified the 19th amendment of the Constitution. This allowed women to vote in political elections.

I remember, just a couple years ago, reading about the Civil Rights Movement. The people who were protesting, boycotting, and performing sit-ins were granted rights by the Constitution. They were allowed to express their opinions because of the First Amendment. That way, they were able to express their beliefs and opinions about segregation and discrimination, which led to the passing of several amendments.

Several nations in the past have had their stability falter as a result of not permitting some of the rights the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution permits. One example of these nations is the former Soviet Union. Between 1922 and 1990, the Soviet Union unleashed a petrifying scare into the world; Communism. At first, it seemed vastly legitimate. People would be provided with adequate housing and needs, though the government would own the entirety of the land. But in spite of this, citizen's needs weren't taken care of. There were hardly any freedoms provided for the people. People would be immensely punished for speaking out against the government. This continued for quite some time, over sixty years. Eventually, the Soviet government realized how much damage this was doing to their economy and their public image. Thus, they started giving citizens their deserved rights. In 1990, the Soviet Union collapsed into several nations, paving the way for reforms.

Nonetheless, the US shall never collapse and falter. It shall hold strong, as a republic for the people. It will protect the rights of the citizens and not confine them, as other countries have done in the past. Because, in the words of George Washington, "The power under the Constitution will always be with the people."