

Celebrating the US Constitution
We the Future Lesson Plan Contest
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Focus group: Middle School

Objective: Students to develop an understanding and appreciation of the importance of the U.S. Constitution.

Materials:

- toothpicks
- timer
- Prepared list of students in teams of 3
- Prepared list of students in teams of 4
- Prepared list of students in pairs of 2
- Song “Non-stop” Lin-Manuel Miranda- Hamilton The Musical
- Website- National Constitution Center Interactive Constitution
- Video- Schoolhouse Rock – Preamble
- 3-2-1- Bridge Handout
- Color, Symbol, Image Handout
- Crayons or markers
- Party Hat, horns, balloons, (optional)
- Cake, cookies or peppermints (optional)

Time: 2- 45 minute sessions or 1-90 minute session

Hook

Play copyright free patriotic music as students enter classroom

Have the following statement on display:

Necessity is the mother of invention.
A need or problem encourages creative efforts
to meet the need or solve the problem.

Place one toothpick at each student’s seat

Application Problem

T: I am issuing a challenge to you... balance the toothpick that has been placed at your seat so that it stands without falling. No other materials may be used.

Provide students with one toothpick. No other material may be used.

T: Ask them to make it stand on its own.

Set a timer for 1 minute.

S: Student responses will include: "That's impossible." "It keeps falling."

Lead with the following questions for discussion.

T: What do you know? What do you see or know that makes you say that?

T: The one toothpick you are attempting to balance is like the document that set up the nation's first central government. It was called The Articles of Confederation. This government had limited powers and it was too weak to keep order. The Articles of Confederation gave most power to states. The national government could not take care of the government's needs such as taxes, forming an army, or signing treaties.

Point to the statement already written displayed:

T: Necessity is the mother of invention. A need or problem encourages creative efforts to meet the need or solve the problem. What if you could work with two other students to balance your toothpick?

Allow students time to partner in groups of 3. (This can be planned in advance). Provide tape or other helpful materials if necessary. If you have an uneven number of students, provide additional toothpicks so students will be successful. Set a timer for 3 minutes.

Concept Development

T: In 1787, the states called a meeting to improve the Articles of Confederation. This meeting was called the Constitutional Convention. The delegates wrote a new constitution. This document describes how the new government would work. It also sets up rules and laws. The United States Constitution creates a strong central government. The Constitution has different parts called articles. It divides the government into three parts, or branches. Your team's balanced toothpicks are similar to the three branches of government. Each branch has its own powers and responsibilities. To keep any one branch from becoming too powerful, the Constitution includes a system of checks and balances. Under this system, each branch limits, or checks, the powers of the others.

Display the National Constitution Center Interactive Constitution

<https://constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution#>

Click "Explore It"

Display articles and amendments.

Highlight Preamble, Article I, Article II, and Article III

T: Have you heard the phrase “We the People?” It comes from the Preamble to the US Constitution. The Preamble is the opening statement to the United States Constitution. The preamble explains the reasons why the Framers of the Constitution made our government. The founding fathers replaced the Articles of Confederation. The Preamble along with the rest of the Constitution was written over a period of about 6 weeks. The Preamble helped explain why the Constitution was written. There’s even a song for the Preamble made in the 1970s, It is still popular today.

View the video *Schoolhouse Rock – Preamble*
<https://vimeo.com/29159978>

T: For the topic of Preamble, you are going to complete a 3-2-1 Bridge. Because the framers of the Constitution worked in a team, you will also work in a team of four to complete this activity.

Create teams of 4. Students would write down 3 thoughts, 2 questions, and 1 analogy about the Preamble. Set a timer for 10 minutes

Teacher info to help support students as they complete 3-2-1 Bridge

The Preamble can be broken down into many important phrases. All of these phrases are very important for understanding the purpose of the United States Constitution.

We the people: This phrase means all the citizens of the United States of America. Even though the Constitution was written up by some of the most well-educated men of the new country, the rights given under the document were given to all American citizens.

In order to form a more perfect union: The previous government was based on the Articles of Confederation, which were very limited. When the Framers wrote this, they felt that they were making new government that would be a better way to govern the country.

Establish justice: The reasons why there was Revolution against England were still important to the American citizens, so they wanted to make sure that they would have justice under the Constitution.

Insure domestic tranquility: One of the main reasons why the Constitutional Convention was held was because of Shays’ Rebellion. This was an uprising of farmers in Massachusetts against the state for having to repay war debts. Citizens were worried with the keeping peace within the country’s borders.

Provide for the common defense: There was still a change of being attacked by other countries. No individual state had the power to defend itself against attacks. Because of this, the Framers knew that it was important for the states to defend the nation together.

Promote the general welfare: This phrase meant that the well-being of the citizens would be taken care of as well as possible by the Federal government.

Secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity: The point of this phrase in the Preamble, and the constitution as a whole was to help protect the country's hard-earned rights for liberty, unjust laws, and freedom from a tyrannical government.

Ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America: This last phrase of the Preamble is a powerful statement saying that the people made this document, and the people give the country its power.

T: Now let's view more details about the three branches by virtually visiting the Constitution Center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. While you viewing, complete this notetaking guide.

Distribute handout.

View Segment 1 of Constitution Center Video Beginning- 2:52 STOP VIDEO

<https://constitutioncenter.org/learn/hall-pass/separation-of-powers>

After pausing video, review answers to the notetaking guide

T: Now will continue viewing the video. As you are listening and watching, make note of things that you find interesting, important, or insightful.

View Segment 2 of Constitution Center Video) Beginning- 2:52 STOP VIDEO

<https://constitutioncenter.org/learn/hall-pass/separation-of-powers>

Stop at 11:03.

T: This provided an overview of the three branches of government, separation of powers and checks and balances. From the 8 minutes of viewing, choose 3 of the items that most stand out for you on the US Constitution. You will collaborate with a partner to complete a visual thinking routine called Colour, Symbol, Image. It is an exercise for selecting the essence of ideas non-verbally. For one of these, you and your partner will choose a colour that you feel best represents or captures the essence of the US Constitution, Separation of Powers or Checks and Balances. For another one, choose a symbol that you feel best represents or captures the essence of the US Constitution, Separation of Powers or Checks and Balances. For the other one, choose an image that you feel best represents or captures the essence of US Constitution, Separation of Powers or Checks and Balances.

Allow students 15 minutes.

T: Now you will do a Pairs Pair.

Have partners pair with a different pair and share your colour and then share the item from the video that it represents.

T: Tell why you choose that colour as a representation of that idea. Repeat the sharing process until every member of the group has shared his or her Colour, Symbol, and Image.

Set timer for 10 minutes

T: Thank your partner for working with you. Thank the pair for sharing their thinking. This concludes our focus on the US Constitution. This document only works if you do. Your job is to vote and be aware of what's happening in our government and political landscape at the local, state and national level.

OPTIONAL

T: We will close out our time by celebrating this wonderfully crafted document.

Distribute Party Hat, horns, balloons, (optional)
cake, cookies or peppermints (optional)

OPTIONAL: Specials Integration

T: Throughout the day you will experience the Constitution in your specials classes

Physical Education

Constitutional Work-Out

1- Dissenters: 3 delegates dissented and did not sign the Constitution. Run 3 laps around the field or set of cones

Benjamin Franklin was the oldest delegate at the Constitutional Convention at 81 years old. Jonathon Dayton was the youngest delegate at age 26.

2 - Senior Benjamin: Have 2 teams of 5 students toss 81 beanbags overhead and between the legs to get to the bucket first without dropping them.

Junior Jumping Delegate: Do 26 consecutive jump ropes.

3 - 1788 : Add the four numbers of the year the US Constitution was ratified and do curl ups, jumping jacks, or push-ups)

4 - The Bill of Rights are the first 10 amendments to the Constitution. In teams of 5 make 10 baskets in the shortest amount of time.

Art

See Think Wonder using artwork reflecting the Constitution Convention

Background Info for Art Teacher-

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/lessonplans/christy/>

Washington as Statesman at the Constitutional Convention by Junius Brutus Stearns (1856)

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/convention/stearns/>

Signing of the Constitution by Louis S. Glanzman (1987)

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/convention/glanzman/>

Students should answer all three questions as they view and examine the artwork.

What do you see?

What do you think about that?

What does it make you wonder?

Music

In teams, utilizing Articles I, II or III of the Constitution, students will compose a rap or a song to the tune of Yankee Doodle, Mary Had a Little Lamb to teach younger students.

Diving Deeper (Optional or Extra Credit)

1. Read some essays from The Federalist Papers- supporting the Constitution
2. Read the Bill of Rights. Create a foldable book of the first 10 amendments to the US Constitution.
3. Read aloud play The Constitution of the United States: Early America (Building Fluency Through Reader's Theater) by Kathleen Bradley

Competitions. These contests based on the US Constitution are held annually.

4. **Constituting America We the Future** <https://constitutingamerica.org/enter/>
Utilizing multi-media outreach to reach, educate and inform America's adults and students about the importance of the U.S. Constitution and the foundation it sets forth regarding our freedoms and rights.
Entries due September 17th
5. **Constitution Day Photo Contest**
<https://billofrightsinstitute.org/constitutionday/student-photo-essay-contest/>
Take 5-7 photos in a "photo essay" that answers this question: How are you making a mark to bring history and citizenship alive? Caption the essay with 1-2 sentences to help us understand the message of your photo essay.
Entries due September 17th
6. **Constitution Day Poster Contest for students**
<https://www.constitutionfacts.com/constitution-poster-design-contest/>
Design a poster showing how they benefit from the freedoms embodied in the U.S. Constitution.
Entries due October 1st
7. **VFW's Patriot's Pen youth essay contest**
<https://vfworg-cdn.azureedge.net/-/media/VFWSite/Files/Community/Youth-and-Education/Patriots-Pen-Entry-Form-Fillable.pdf?v=1&d=20180904T165705Z&la=en>
The essay contest encourages young minds to examine America's history, along with their own experiences in modern American society, by drafting a 300- to 400-word essay, expressing their views based on a patriotic theme chosen by the VFW Commander-in-Chief.
Entries due October 31st
8. **We the Students Essay Contest**
<https://billofrightsinstitute.org/engage/students-programs-events/scholarship/we-the-students-rules-and-regulations/>
Entries due February 14, 2019