



American Government

Teacher's Guide

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Unit 2: The Constitutional Framework

Unit 2 presents the U.S. Constitution. Lesson 4 examines the historical context for the American independence movement and its founding documents, including the Declaration of Independence and the Articles of Confederation. Lesson 5 follows the historical events and compromises involved in the creation of the Constitution. Lesson 6 explores the basic concepts of the Constitution, including self-government, inherent rights, separation of powers, and checks and balances. Lesson 7 explains the structure of the Constitution, including its Preamble, its articles, and the Bill of Rights and the amendment process.

Lesson 4—Introduction to the U.S. Constitution

Goal: To understand the historical context for the American Independence movement and its founding documents

WORDS TO KNOW

Articles of Confederation	Constitution	delegates
colonists	Continental Congress	president
colony	Declaration of Independence	principles

Lesson 5—The Constitutional Convention of 1787

Goal: To learn the historical context behind the Constitutional Convention and the major compromises involved in drafting the Constitution

WORDS TO KNOW

compromise	Executive Compromise	Senate
Congress	Great Compromise	Three-Fifths Compromise
Constitutional Convention	House of Representatives	Virginia Plan
Electoral College	New Jersey Plan	
electors	regulate	

Lesson 6—The Philosophy and Principles of the Constitution

Goal: To understand the basic concepts of the United States' most important document of government

WORDS TO KNOW

checks and balances	inherent rights	self-government
executive branch	judicial branch	
federalism	legislative branch	

Lesson 7—The Structure of the Constitution

Goal: To become familiar with the Preamble, articles, and amendments that make up the U.S. Constitution

WORDS TO KNOW

amendments	guarantee	ratify
article	preamble	
Bill of Rights	prohibited	

Notes on Application Activity in Student Text

Activity	Skills Applied	Product
In Your Own Words	evaluating information, thinking critically, preparing a written presentation	amendments written in their own words

Additional Activity Suggestions

- Lesson 7 of Unit 2 introduces students to Amendments 15, 19, 24, and 26—all amendments that expanded voting rights to various groups of people. Have each student or group of students choose one of these amendments and research the people and events that led to its ratification. For example, students researching Amendment 19 would gather information on key people and events in the women's suffrage movement. Students could present their information in oral and/or visual presentations.

- Have students copy the Preamble of the Constitution, skipping a line after each line of their writing. Then, have them write the meaning of each line of the Preamble (in a different-colored pen or pencil), using their own words. They should refer to a dictionary as needed. Encourage them to memorize and recite the Preamble.
- Work with students to reproduce part of the Declaration of Independence. You may first want to gather library books with pictures of the original document to show learners. Then have them copy the opening paragraph and first short section onto a piece of paper. Encourage them to use “elegant” writing in black ink. Using a slightly damp, used tea bag, they can pat the paper to give it a parchment effect. Then they can use a lighted incense stick to sear the edges and make the paper look old. Finally, they can mount their paper on cardboard.
- Most students will know little about the original 13 colonies and their governments before the Declaration of Independence. Have each student pick a colony to research. Ask them to find out when the colony was founded, who provided financial backing for the colony, and what type of government the colony had before the American Revolution. As part of their research, encourage students to visit Colonial Williamsburg’s Internet site (<http://www.history.org/>).
- Have each student write a “bill of rights” for his or her classroom or household. Explain that the purpose of each bill of rights should be to protect the basic freedoms of each member in a student’s class or family. Students should use the U.S. Bill of Rights as an example, but should rewrite each amendment based on their own classrooms or households.
- Have students pick one of the following events: the Boston Massacre, the signing of the Declaration of Independence, or the Constitutional Convention. Divide students into pairs; have each pair role-play coanchors who are reporting the news “live” on national television.



Fascinating Facts

- Students may be interested to know that the names of all those who signed the Declaration of Independence were kept secret by the colonists for almost a year. This was done because the British government considered those who signed the document to be guilty of treason against England. A \$2,500 reward was offered by the British government to anyone who could provide the names of the signers. When you consider that \$150 per year was a livable wage at the time, a reward of \$2,500 would be more like \$250,000 today!