



Lesson 6.1 “Our Constitutions”

Unit 6: Establishing Government

Lesson Objectives

- Students will participate in creating a class constitution and discuss connections with the U.S. Constitution.
- Students will listen to literature about writing the U.S. Constitution and answer questions about key aspects of its creation.
- Students will investigate the anatomy of the U.S. Constitution through an infographic and worksheet.
- Students will produce a timeline comparing the creation of the U.S. and N.H. Constitutions.

Lesson Competencies

- I can initiate and sustain a focused discussion. (ELA 7)
- I can interpret the narrator’s point of view and summarize key events. (ELA 2)
- I can locate relevant key ideas using text features, including visual and graphic information, to make connections within or across sources and explain how various parts of information contribute to overall meaning. (ELA 3)
- I can analyze, use, and construct timelines to explain how events are related chronologically to each other and to explain probable causes and effects of events and developments. (Moose SS)

Essential Questions

How have New Hampshire’s people shaped its government?

Focus Questions

What is a constitution?

Estimated Time

Two or three 40-minute class sessions

Materials & Equipment

Poster board or other way of recording class constitution
Class set of “What Is a Constitution? Literature Connections” worksheet
Recommended literature about writing the U.S. Constitution (see “Supporting Materials,” p. 7 of this Educator Guide)
“The Constitution of the United States” [infographic](#) for projection or distribution
Class set of “Anatomy of a Constitution” worksheet
Class set of “Our Constitutions Timeline” worksheet



Educator Introduction & Rationale

Once Americans declared their independence from Great Britain and began fighting the Revolutionary War, they had the monumental task of creating a new form of government, one that was run by the people, at the local, state, and federal levels. This new form of government needed to balance order and liberty. The people set about writing constitutions, written documents that explain the social contract the people make with the government, saying what the government can and cannot do. Constitutions limit the power of government through specifying and making public the government's powers. The U.S. Constitution was completed and ratified in 1788 and came into effect the following year, while the N.H. Constitution took effect in 1784. Development of these constitutions took years and still today can be changed when the people deem amendments necessary.

This is the first lesson in Unit 6: Establishing Government and introduces students to constitutions. Understanding the backbone of the foundational principles of the nation is essential and accessible for elementary students; these foundational principles are explored in lesson 6.2: The Ideas of Our Government. First, though, students must comprehend the power of agreeing to and writing down the organization and laws for a nation and making them public.

In this lesson, students first develop a class constitution to make connections between public rules for the classroom and rules for the state and country. How the U.S. Constitution came into being is explored through literature, then students investigate the anatomy of the U.S. Constitution. Students next create a timeline comparing the N.H. Constitution and the U.S. Constitution, then circle back around to the class constitution to discuss amending this document. Please adapt all the material in this lesson, as necessary, to meet the needs of the students in your classroom. Please note, lesson vocabulary and definitions are at the end of this document. You may wish to preview these with your students.

A reinforcement activity invites students to illustrate selected amendments to the U.S. Constitution. Two extension activities broaden students' ideas about constitutions through comparing the class constitution with a school-wide constitution and further investigating various amendments to the U.S. Constitution.

Learning Activity

Activation

Creating a constitution. Ask students what the classroom would look, sound, and feel like if there were no rules. Record their answers as brainstorming. As students progress with their ideas, transition to discuss why classroom rules are developed: to create a learning environment that benefits all students and so that everyone, students and teachers, know what is expected of them and feels safe.

What rules are necessary for such a learning environment? In a separate space, brainstorm class rules with students, ensuring that you reflect and add your own as well.

Teaching tip: If you have created class rules at the beginning of the year, take this opportunity to revisit them. What is working as a class rule? What should be changed, added, subtracted? Does anything need to be rewritten? Alternatively, instead of revising your classroom rules, consider enlarging the brainstorm to consider what rules are necessary for a school to create a more beneficial learning environment. Have students propose school rules that reflect your classroom values.

Encourage a robust list of rules with specificity. Go beyond “Be respectful” to include what that looks like, sounds like, and feels like. Help students combine rules that aim for similar goals and consider rules that will help students see the connection to a country’s constitution, like rules for interacting with other classes or administrators or who is responsible for what in the classroom. This discussion might be part of a few class periods so that students have time to consider their ideas.

Discussing the constitution. When you have a list of rules that has gone through some revisions, have each student mark with a star or other symbol the three rules they feel are most important. Complete your discussion of which rules to include and which to exclude in a final draft, then write them on a poster board. Do not yet include a title. Have students sign their names signifying their agreement to follow the class rules.

Discuss the process of creating class rules and connect it with our country’s constitution. Possible questions to guide discussion:

- Who created these rules?
- Do we have to follow them? Why?
- Did we all agree on all of the rules? If not, does that mean that people can pick and choose which rules to follow?
- If we get a new student in our classroom, should they have to follow our classroom contract? Why?
- If after a while, we find that one of the rules isn’t working very well or that we forgot to include a rule, what should we do?
- What should happen if someone breaks the rules?
- As a class, we have class rules. What about the school? The town? The state and country?



Project the definition of “constitution” and label your class rules “Class Constitution.” Discuss with students that each of the state governments and the federal government have their own constitutions. The process by which those constitutions were developed was very similar, though much lengthier and more complex, to the process the class used to create the classroom constitution.

Direct Instruction & Discussion

Literature about writing the U.S. Constitution. In 1787, the states sent delegates to Philadelphia to help write the U.S. Constitution. John Langdon and Nicholas Gilman represented New Hampshire at the convention. This is a pivotal summer in U.S. history, and students will study its complex problems many times over their career. Using literature to help them imagine and understand the issues makes the history more approachable.

Select a book about the writing of the U.S. Constitution and distribute copies of “What Is a Constitution? Literature Connections.” Preview the questions with students before beginning the book. See “Supporting Materials,” page 7 of this Educator Guide, for recommended literature about writing the U.S. Constitution. Students should complete the questions as you read, then discuss them in groups or as a class to review.

Teaching tip: These books cover the writing of the U.S. Constitution, most of them from the end of the Revolutionary War and failure of the Articles of Confederation to the passage of the Bill of Rights. As such, they contain aspects of all lessons in Unit 6: Establishing Government. Consider whether to read the entire book and complete questions with your students now in lesson 6.1 or to pick and choose parts of the book to use with various unit 6 lessons. Alternatively, read one of these books at the end of the unit as review.

Student Reading

The U.S. Constitution. As an alternative, or as a supplement, to the Direct Instruction reading activity, direct students to read Unit 6, Learn It! “[The Path to the U.S. Constitution](#),” pages 1-7. Students may also benefit from using these pages while they complete “What is a Constitution? Literature Connections.”

Guided Practice

Anatomy of a Constitution. Distribute copies of the “Anatomy of a Constitution” worksheet and print out or project “The Constitution of the United States” [infographic](#). Students can work together to complete worksheet.

Teaching tip: The infographic “The Constitution of the United States” describes the organization of the U.S. Constitution, but it does not contain all information needed for the worksheet. Students may need guidance with completion of the worksheet as it requires background knowledge.

Independent Practice

A timeline of the constitutions. Tell students that the writing of state constitutions happened during the time the U.S. Constitution was being written because states wanted their own governments established as well. Distribute copies of the "Timeline of the Constitutions" and give students time to complete the timeline and questions.

Student Reading

The N.H. State Constitution. Before beginning Independent Practice, direct students to read Unit 6, Learn It! "[N.H. State Constitution](#)," pages 2-9.

Independent Practice & Reflection

Amending our constitution. Neither the state constitutions nor the U.S. Constitutions have remained unchanged. As the world changes and we view our country and our people differently, government needs to adapt. When this happens, we have not given up on our founding documents. Instead, representatives have said, how can we fix this? How can we make it better? Discuss with students what they think happens when we need to change our constitutions.

Possible responses:

- Both documents have in place systems for amending, or changing them.
- These processes involve passing changes by both legislative houses and by the people.
- The U.S. Constitution was amended almost immediately, when the Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments, was added in 1791.
- There are now a total of 27 amendments.
- The N.H. Constitution was also amended soon after it was legalized and underwent revisions in 1791–92.
- The N.H. Constitution has been changed in more than 200 places over 29 different constitutional conventions! Some of these changes are significant, while some are merely wording changes.
- Make the connection with students about revision to their own writing. Everyone needs to go back and make changes, even the U.S. government!
- Project "Changes to Our Constitutions" to give students examples of amendments and revisions. Discuss together as a class.

Now that students have had a chance to learn more about the U.S. Constitution, offer the class an opportunity to revisit the class constitution created at the beginning of the lesson. Just as the U.S. and N.H. Constitutions have been amended over the years as our country has grown and changed, are there any changes they would like to make to the class constitution?

Reinforcement

1. **Illustrating the constitutional amendments.** Distribute copies of the "Illustrating the Amendments to the Constitution" worksheet. Answer any questions students have about the meaning of them, then ask students to complete the worksheet illustrating each of the amendments. If they could add an amendment, what would they add?

Extension

1. **School-wide constitution.** Have students consider how the process and the result of creating a classroom constitution might look different if they were to create a constitution for the entire school. Each of the original 13 states had their own constitutions and the United States as a nation created a federal constitution as well. Compare this to each of the classrooms in your school having their own constitutions and then your school as a whole also having a constitution. What would this process be like? Give students the questions below and time to think them through and respond individually or as a group.
 - Why would there be a need for classrooms (states) to have their own constitutions in addition to the school (United States)?
 - Each of the classrooms in the school has unique needs and interests like each of our states. How would some of the rules look different for kindergarteners and fifth graders who have different needs and responsibilities?
 - How might the process work to create these constitutions?
 - What might be included in the school constitution that's not in the class constitutions? What about in the class constitutions but not in the school constitutions?
2. **Changing our constitutions.** Provide students with the information in "Changing Our Constitutions" worksheet. Have students choose an amendment or change to one of the constitutions to investigate further. What are the details about these changes? Why were these changes made? If using the internet, take care to curtail internet use to appropriate websites.

Supporting Materials

Literature about writing the U.S. Constitution:

- Lynne Cheney, *We the People: The Story of Our Constitution* (2008)
Beautiful illustrations accompany lyrical text about the people of the convention and the writing of the U.S. Constitution. Relevant quotes on each page connect to historical context. Focuses on big ideas, includes source notes at the end to give details.
- Jean Fritz, *Shh! We're Writing the Constitution* (1987)
A complete survey of the Constitutional Convention through ratification of the Bill of Rights. Text-heavy with engaging illustrations by New Hampshire artist Tomie dePaola. Fun tidbits of trivia throughout with historical notes and the text of the U.S. Constitution at the end. Best to use with guiding questions to help students organize information.
- Elizabeth Levy, *If You Were There When They Signed the Constitution* (1987)
A thorough look at the historical context of the writing of the U.S. Constitution. Seventy-eight pages with a lot of text, but upper-elementary language and organized around guiding questions. Possible to pick and choose topics to read. Engaging information about delegates and convention background.
- Betsy and Giulio Maestro, *A More Perfect Union: The Story of Our Constitution* (1987)
Easiest read with shortest text and most engaging illustrations. Upper elementary language with accessible summary of historical context and big ideas of the convention. Additional information and interesting facts included at the end.

iCivics, "Anatomy of the Constitution," www.icivics.org/teachers/lesson-plans/anatomy-constitution

N.H. Constitution, www.nh.gov/glance/constitution.htm

U.S. Constitution, www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution

Standards

“Moose on the Loose” Content:

- ✓ Students will understand that after the revolution, the United States of America established a federal government; colonies established state governments. They will understand that the New Hampshire State Constitution established the basic structure of government for the state and created laws to protect the people and interests of the state. (3-5.T3.2)

“Moose on the Loose” Skills:

- ✓ Gathering, Interpreting, and Using Evidence (3-5.S1.1)
- ✓ Effective Historical Thinking (3-5.S3.1)
- ✓ Understanding and Participating in Government (3-5.S6.1, 3-5.S6.2)

New Hampshire Social Studies Frameworks:

- ✓ Civics and Governments: The Nature and Purpose of Government (SS:CV:4:1.1)
- ✓ Civics and Governments: Structure and Function of United States and New Hampshire Government (SS:CV:4:2.1)
- ✓ Civics and Governments: Rights and Responsibilities (SS:CV:4:4.1)

NCSS Themes:

- ✓ Theme 2: Time, Continuity, and Change
- ✓ Theme 6: Power, Authority, and Governance

C3 Frameworks:

- ✓ Construction Compelling Questions (D1.1.3-5)
- ✓ Civic and Political Institutions (D2.Civ.3.3-5, D2.Civ.4.3-5, D2.Civ.5.3-5)
- ✓ Participation and Deliberation (D2.Civ.7.3-5, D2.Civ.8.3-5, D2.Civ.9.3-5)
- ✓ Processes, Rules, and Laws (D2.Civ.11.3-5, D2.Civ.12.3-5)
- ✓ Change, Continuity, and Context (D2.His.1.3-5, D2.His.3.3-5)
- ✓ Perspectives (D2.His.4.3-5)

Common Core ELA Grade 3:

- ✓ Key Ideas and Details in Reading Literature (RL.3.1, RL.3.3)
- ✓ Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity in Informational Text (RI.3.10)
- ✓ Phonics and Word Recognition in Foundational Skills (RF.3.3)
- ✓ Comprehension and Collaboration in Speaking and Listening (SL.3.1)
- ✓ Knowledge of Language (L.3.3)
- ✓ Vocabulary Acquisition and Use (L.3.4, L.3.4a, L.3.4b)

Common Core ELA Grade 4:

- ✓ Key Ideas and Details in Reading Literature (RL.4.1, RL.4.3)
- ✓ Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity in Informational Text (RI.4.10)
- ✓ Phonics and Word Recognition in Foundational Skills (RF.4.3)
- ✓ Comprehension and Collaboration in Speaking and Listening (SL.4.1)
- ✓ Vocabulary Acquisition and Use (L.4.4, L.4.4a, L.4.4b, L.4.6)

Common Core ELA Grade 5:

- ✓ Key Ideas and Details in Reading Literature (RL.5.1, RL.5.3)
- ✓ Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity in Informational Text (RI.5.10)
- ✓ Phonics and Word Recognition in Foundational Skills (RF.5.3)
- ✓ Comprehension and Collaboration in Speaking and Listening (SL.5.1)
- ✓ Vocabulary Acquisition and Use (L.5.4, L.5.4a, L.5.4b)

Lesson Vocabulary

amend	(verb) To revise or change
article	(noun) A part or piece of something
bill of rights	(noun) A document that contains a list of freedoms to protect; in the U.S. Constitution, the Bill of Rights is the first 10 amendments
branch of government	(noun) A section of government with its own purpose; the U.S. government has three sections of the government with different responsibilities that support each other to create, examine, and enforce laws
constitution	(noun) A document laying out the rules for how a government will work
executive	(adjective) Describing the person or branch of government who puts plans and laws into effect
federal	(adjective) The central government of a group of states; the U.S. federal government is in Washington, D.C.
government	(noun) A group of people that have the power to make and carry out laws for a community
judicial	(adjective) Describing the people or branch of government that decides if laws are fair
legislative	(adjective) Describing the people or branch of government that makes laws
preamble	(noun) Introduction
representative democracy	(noun) When a group of people select someone to communicate their views and make laws for them
ratify	(verb) To make legal by signing or giving permission