



Lesson 6.8 “The N.H. Constitution”

Unit 6: Establishing Government

Lesson Objectives

- Students will examine the preamble to the N.H. Constitution to draw conclusions about the dangers of government that concerned delegates
- Students will connect the first ten articles of the N.H. Constitution with the concerns citizens of N.H. had about their government
- Students will write a persuasive speech convincing others of the importance of the N.H. Constitution

Lesson Competencies

- I can analyze primary and secondary sources and draw appropriate conclusions. (Moose SS)
- I can analyze and explain changes in society and how they impact people in the past and present. (Moose SS)
- I can locate and integrate relevant and credible information from multiple reference sources into my text (e.g., factual evidence, varying perspectives, conflicting information). (ELA 5)

Essential Questions

How have New Hampshire’s people shaped its government?

Focus Questions

What is a constitution?

Estimated Time

One 45-minute class session

Materials & Equipment

Unit 6: Learn It! “[N.H. State Constitution](#)” pages 1-13
Class set of “What’s the Danger”
NH Constitution Preamble for projection
Map: “[Map of New Hampshire – 1799](#)”
“Proclamation of Rebellion, 1782” for projection
Class set of “Excerpt of Proclamation of Rebellion, 1782”
Class set of “Persuading the West”
Transcript: [N.H. Constitution Bill of Rights](#) or “[The New Hampshire Comicstitution](#)”



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 New Hampshire state constitution of 1776, meant as a war-time measure, was replaced in 1784 with a new constitution that enumerated people's rights while establishing a three-branch system of government that balanced the executive, legislative, and judicial functions of the state. The new state constitution included some unique provisions that emphasized the importance of town governance and openly acknowledged the people's right to rebel if rulers failed to live up to their responsibilities in the social contract.

Opposition to the 1776 state constitution was particularly high in the Connecticut River Valley. People residing in these western towns concluded that they had more in common with the people who lived on the other side of the river—in Vermont—than with those who lived in the seacoast region, which dominated state government at this time. In July 1777, Vermont declared its independence from New York and soon after, 38 towns in western New Hampshire voted to join Vermont. Alarmed by the potential loss of the western towns and concerned with people's general dissatisfaction with the 1776 state constitution, New Hampshire's political leaders decided to take unprecedented action. They called for a constitutional convention—the first one ever called anywhere in the world—to write a new constitution for the state. Each town sent delegates to Exeter in 1778 so that the work could begin. In 1783, the proposed New Hampshire state constitution finally earned the required two-thirds majority for ratification, backed by the most prominent political figures in the state.

This is the second lesson for middle school students in Unit 6: Establishing Government. The lesson begins with an activation for students to examine the four main ideas of the state constitution's preamble and the dangers the delegates were trying to avoid by writing a constitution. Then, students will learn about the Western Rebellion and use the first 38 articles of the state constitution's bill of rights to write a persuasive speech about the importance of a constitution and how it protects citizen's rights. Finally, an extension activity with primary sources is suggest for students who are interested in learning more about the perspectives that led to this rebellion.

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 the document. You may wish to preview these with your students.

Before the Learning Activity

Student reading and comprehension questions

N.H. State Constitution. Direct students to Unit 6, Learn It! "[N.H. State Constitution](#)" pages 1-13. (**Note:** If you wish to split up this reading, pages 1-6 cover the events leading to the writing of the state constitution, pages 7-10 discuss the content of the state constitution, and pages 11-13 describe the protections the state constitution places on citizen's rights)

Students should be able to answer:

1. Why did N.H. write a constitution?
2. What is a constitutional convention?
3. What are the four ideas of the preamble of the New Hampshire Constitution?
4. What are the two main parts of the state constitution?
5. How does the New Hampshire Constitution protect the rights of its citizens?

Learning Activity

Activation

What's the danger? Display the preamble text from the New Hampshire Constitution and distribute "What's the Danger?". Have students work independently or together to use their knowledge from the readings and the events of the Revolutionary War to fill out their ideas.

Share ideas as a class and ask students to identify some of the challenges New Hampshire delegates faced when writing the state constitution based upon evidence in the reading and the statements in the Preamble.

Possible responses include:

- People were worried the government would not protect their rights
- Citizens were worried that if the government was too powerful, a king or dictator could take over and the people would not have the ability to stop them
- New Hampshire had just taken part in a war to ensure they could participate in their government – they didn't want to create a new government that would be exactly the same
- What rights would people need to give up in exchange for protection?
- How would the government be structured? Who could vote and when?

Direct Instruction

A New Hampshire rebellion. Project, or distribute copies of, "Map of New Hampshire, 1799". Explain that this map shows the mountains, waterways, towns, cities and borders as they were known in the 18th century.

Allow a few minutes for students to examine the map and share their own observations about it. Challenge them to find their own town. It's possible its name was different in 1799!

As a whole group, locate the seacoast and the city of Portsmouth. Explain that in the very early days of New Hampshire being a state, the government was centered in these locations. Portsmouth had been the colonial capital. After 1776, government activity moved to the town of Exeter. Why do students think the government was located near the coast?

Note with students that the capital was located as close to the coast as possible because that was the area where English colonists lived first. Easy access to shipping made the coast a center of early industry and government. This was true of all colonial capitals.

Guide students to observe that the seacoast region, while heavily populated, was a very small section of New Hampshire. Circle what is considered to be the seacoast area, encompassing the New Hampshire seacoast until as far west as Kingston or Epping and as far north as Dover. Draw students' attention to the New Hampshire towns that border the Connecticut River.

Tell students that in 1777, the area we know as Vermont was still part of the state of New York. But in July 1777, Vermont declared itself independent of New York. Over the next five years, 38 New Hampshire towns along the Connecticut River tried many times to join this new independent area. Mark these towns included in the group that tried to leave the state on the map:

- Claremont
- Charlestown
- Hanover
- Lime (Lyme)
- Bath
- Morristown (Franconia)
- Westmoreland
- Walpole
- Plainfield
- Marlow

This was not good news to the state government back in Exeter. In fact, in 1782 the towns were declared to be in rebellion against the New Hampshire government. Remind students that at this point, the new United States was at war with Britain and trying to gain their independence. It was not a good time to have unrest within the state.

Tell students that, ultimately, the towns stayed part of New Hampshire because they were able to voice their concerns about how the state was governed. Their concerns led to some significant compromises that changed the state constitution in 1783.

Independent Practice

Persuading the western towns. Project "Proclamation of Rebellion, 1782" and distribute "Excerpt from the Proclamation of Rebellion, 1782". Read over as a class and ask students to point out what this rebellion was about. Then, project "Concerns of the Western Towns" and discuss some of the big concerns for this group of citizens. Ask students what other concerns New Hampshire citizens might have had based on the "What's the Danger?" activation.

Tell students they will be using the text of the NH Constitution to illustrate to New Hampshire citizens why a constitution is important and how the NH Constitution specifically protects their rights and addresses their concerns. Then, distribute the brainstorming worksheet and give students time to identify the key points they want to make in their speech.

Students could either [review a transcript of the N.H. Constitution](#) or use "[The New Hampshire Comicstitution](#)" by Marek Bennett for a more reader-friendly version of the first ten articles. Other useful information they can use as evidence can also be found on pages 9, 11, and 12 of the Learn It! "[N.H. State Constitution](#)" reading.

Depending on the time you can allot to this activity, you could have students create an outline of their speech, write the speech in its entirety, and/or have students give their speech in front of their classmates. Suggested length for a speech is 3-5 minutes.

Extension

Primary source texts. Use the primary sources quoted in the "Investigate a Rebellion" activity in [Lesson 6.4](#), pages 7-12, to further investigate the viewpoint of the western towns that led to this rebellion.



Supporting Materials

New Hampshire Historical Society Resources

1. "Map of New Hampshire, 1799"
2. "Proclamation of Rebellion, 1782"

Other Resources

- N.H. Constitution, <http://www.nh.gov/glance/constitution.htm>
- Marek Bennett's Comicstitution: <https://moose.nhhistory.org/Moose/media/Default/Documents%20and%20PDFs/Unit-6-docs/Bennett-NH-Comicstitution.pdf>
- Project Zero *Thinking Routines: Tug of War* pz.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/Tug%20of%20War_0.pdf
 - Project Zero's Thinking Routine Toolbox is an excellent resource for all teachers. We highly recommend looking through all the thinking routines available at pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines.
- D. Miles, S. Miles, and A. Pinilla, *The Interactive Constitution* (Bushel and Peck, 2019.)
- R. Stuart Wallace, "New Hampshire History in Brief," New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources, www.nh.gov/nhdhr/markers/brief.html
- For more on the western towns' rebellion including a complete list of towns that seceded, see *The Rebellion in Western New Hampshire and the Proposed Union with Vermont, 1776-1784* by Jere Daniell at www.flowofhistory.org/the-rebellion-in-westernnew-hampshire-and-the-lt-proposed-union-with-vermont-1776-1784/

Standards

New Hampshire Social Studies Frameworks:

- ✓ Civics and Governments: Structure and Function of United States and New Hampshire Government (SS:CV:8:2.1, SS:CV:8:2.2)

NCSS Themes:

- ✓ Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- ✓ Theme 6: Power, Authority, and Governance
- ✓ Theme 10: Civic Ideals and Practices

C3 Frameworks:

- ✓ Civic and Political Institutions (D2.Civ.3.6-8, D2.Civ.4.6-8, D2.Civ.5.6-8)
- ✓ Human-Environment Interaction: Place, Regions, and Culture (D2.Geo.6.6-8)
- ✓ Change, Continuity, and Context (D2.His.3.6-8)
- ✓ Causation and Argumentation (D2.His.16.6-8)

Common Core ELA:

- ✓ Key Ideas and Details (RH.6-8.1, RH.6-8.2)
- ✓ Craft and Structure (RH.6-8.4)
- ✓ Production and Distribution of Writing (WHST.6-8.4)
- ✓ Research to Build and Present Knowledge (WHST.6-8.9)
- ✓ Comprehension and Collaboration (SL.8.1)
- ✓ Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas (SL.8.4)

Lesson Vocabulary

article	(noun) A part or piece of something
bill of rights	(noun) A document that contains a list of freedoms to protect; in the N.H. Constitution, the original bill of rights is the first 38 articles
citizen	(noun) A member by law of a nation or group
constitution	(noun) A document laying out the rules for how a government will work
government	(noun) A group of people that have the power to make and carry out laws for a community
preamble	(noun) Introduction
ratify	(verb) To make legal by signing or giving permission