



Lesson 18.13 “What Does the U.S. Constitution Really Say?”

Unit 18: Civics and Government Today

Lesson Objectives

- Students will describe the purpose of government systems.
- Students will identify specific items listed in the U.S. Constitution.
- Students will demonstrate an understanding of major provisions of the United States Constitution.

Lesson Competencies

- I can identify, explain, and analyze the core civic practices and foundational principles that guide governments and communities. (Moose)
- I can analyze primary and secondary sources and draw appropriate conclusions. (Moose)
- I can compare or integrate relevant information from multiple sources and resolve conflicting information on the same topics/subjects when developing my understanding of a text. (ELA 3)

Essential Questions

How has New Hampshire been shaped by many voices?

Focus Questions

What is a constitution?
What are the foundational principles of our government?
What are the protected rights of the people?

Estimated Time

One 45-minute class session

Materials & Equipment

Unit 18: Civics and Government Today, [Learn It! “Federalism and the Federal Government,” pages 4, 6-7](#)
Class set of “Goals of the U.S. Constitution”
Class set of “What Does the Constitution Really Say?”
Class set of the U.S. Constitution



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. Development of this document took years and still today can be changed when the people deem amendments necessary.

Each state developed their own constitution after the American Revolution and established their own state governments. Then, all 13 states needed to agree on a national government system that would run the entire country. The national government would need to provide defense for all citizens of the country, settle disputes between the states, encourage trade and business between the states, encourage trade and business internationally, and ensure that all citizens retained certain unalienable rights.

This is the second lesson for middle school students in Unit 18: Civics and Government Today. In this lesson, students review the purpose of our Constitution and take a closer look at different sections of this founding document's text. Through this exercise, students will identify which parts of the government are laid out in the Constitution and identify and discuss common misconceptions that people have about our Constitution.

An extension activity is suggested for students ready to analyze the Bill of Rights in order to make connections to commonly referenced but unlisted rights. Lesson vocabulary and definitions are at the end of the document. You may wish to preview these with your students. Please adapt all the material in this lesson, as necessary, to meet the needs of the students in your classroom.

Before the Learning Activity

Student Reading and Comprehension Questions

Our constitution. Direct students to read Unit 18, Learn It! "Federalism and the Federal Government," pages 4, and 6-7. Students should be able to answer the following questions after reading:

1. What are the two main purposes of the U.S. Constitution?
2. What kind of rights are protected by the U.S. Constitution?
3. How is the U.S. Constitution a "social contract"?

Learning Activity

Activation

What is the purpose of a constitution? First, ask the students what is the purpose of a constitution? Why would a country create their own constitution?

Possible responses:

- Establish laws for a country.
- Put limits on government power.
- Lay out exactly what a government can or cannot do.
- Guarantee citizen rights.

Once the students have shared their answers, project or write the preamble to the U.S. Constitution for students.

Preamble: *"We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."*

Ask the students to discuss with a partner what they think a preamble is and what they think the purpose of this statement holds. Ensure that students understand that the preamble is an introduction to the purpose of our Constitution.

Guided Practice

The goals of the U.S. Constitution. Organize students into pairs or small groups and explain that they will work with their partners to break down each goal of the U.S. Constitution listed in the preamble. Leave the preamble projected/written on the board or screen.

Explain to the students that they are to work with their partners/groups to identify the six goals listed in the preamble, and to explain in their own words what each goal is. Distribute "Goals of the U.S. Constitution" and complete the first goal together. Support students as they continue through the remaining goals.

Once most of the students have completed the activity, review the answers as a whole group.



Independent Practice

Is it in the Constitution? Have students remain with their partners/groups. Explain to them that there are many things listed in the Constitution, such as the structure of our government, certain taxes, and some government positions. However, there are also many things that are NOT in the U.S. Constitution that are often misattributed to this founding document.

Distribute "What Does the Constitution Really Say?" and a copy of the U.S. Constitution to all students. Review the instructions and encourage students to decide within their group how they will search for the items. Will they assign each group member an article and certain amendments? Will they work through each section together? Review answers as a whole group.

Extension

Unlisted rights. Students have likely heard the phrase "right to privacy" or the first of the Miranda rights spoken to people under arrest: "you have the right to remain silent." While these rights are not specifically delineated in the Bill of Rights, there is Constitutional basis for them. Challenge students to take a close look at the Bill of Rights to find the amendments that support the concept of "right to privacy" and the Miranda rights.



Standards

New Hampshire Social Studies Frameworks:

- ✓ Civics and Governments: The Nature and Purpose of Government (SS:CV:8:1:1)
- ✓ Civics and Governments: Structure and Function of United States and New Hampshire Government (SS:CV:8:2:1, SS:CV:8:2:2, SS:CV:8:2:3)

NCSS Themes:

- ✓ Theme 2: Time, Continuity, and Change
- ✓ Theme 3: People, Places, and Environments
- ✓ Theme 6: Power, Authority, and Governance
- ✓ Theme 10: Civics Ideals and Practices

C3 Frameworks:

- ✓ Civic and Political Institutions (D2.Civ.3.6-8, D2.Civ.5.6-8, D2.Civ.6.6-8)
- ✓ Processes, Rules, and Laws (D2.Civ.14.6-8)

Common Core ELA:

- ✓ Key Ideas and Details (RH.6-8.1, RH.6-8.2, RH.6-8.3)
- ✓ Craft and Structure (RH.6-8.4)
- ✓ Integration of Knowledge (RH.6-8.9)

Lesson Vocabulary

amendment	(noun) A change or addition to the U.S. Constitution
Bill of Rights	(noun) The first ten amendments added to the U.S. Constitution; ratified in 1791
common good	(noun) A phrase in the preamble of the Constitution; what is best for the community
constitution	(noun) A written set of guiding principles for governments to follow
foundational principle	(noun) An idea on which something stands; one foundational principle of the United States is the rule of law
government	(noun) A group of people that have the power to make and carry out laws for a community
limited government	(noun) When the power of the people who rule a community is controlled so that no person or group gets too much power
preamble	(noun) A preliminary or preparatory statement; an introduction
representative democracy	(noun) When a group of people select someone to communicate their views and make laws for them
rule of law	(noun) The idea that everyone in a community agrees to a set of written rules and then everyone follows the same rules
social contract	(noun) An agreement between people and their government to give up some rights in exchange for security and law and order