



Lesson 6.3 “Understanding the Preamble”

Unit 6: Establishing Government

Lesson Objectives

- Students will discuss the parts and purposes of introductions in formal writing.
- Students will read the preamble to the U.S. Constitution and be able to explain its purposes in their own words.
- Students will investigate one purpose of the preamble and illustrate examples of that purpose in a group drawing.

Lesson Competencies

- I can clearly introduce a focus for my topic and provide a concluding section that summarizes my main idea. (ELA 5)
- I can determine the central idea of a text and explain how key details and text structure/organization support the focus. (ELA 3)
- I can integrate information, distinguish relevant-irrelevant information (e.g., fact/opinion), and (visually, orally, in writing) present what was learned. (ELA 8)

Essential Questions

How has New Hampshire come to be the way it is?

Focus Questions

What are the foundational principles of our government?

Estimated Time

Two 40-minute class sessions

Materials & Equipment

Sample introduction “Should we learn New Hampshire history?” for projection
Various versions of the preamble to the Constitution for projection
Class set “The Six Purposes of the Constitution,” divided into six groups
Chart paper and materials for drawing
Class set of “The Preamble in My Own Words”
Student readings, Learn It! “[The U.S. Constitution](#),” page 1
“[Mason Explains: The Preamble](#)” video



Educator Introduction & Rationale

Although studying the documents that created our nation is challenging in elementary school, it is also essential that students begin building the foundation of their civic education in these years. Reading the preamble to the U.S. Constitution and using it to understand the purpose of our government gives students an entry point into learning about the government. A close reading of the preamble will help students grasp the big ideas of the Constitution before they are ready to assess the details. Ideally, they will return to the preamble throughout their academic education; breaking it down and connecting personally with the ideas and images in it early on will stay with them for years.

In this lesson, students complete a close reading of the preamble to the U.S. Constitution and break it down into the six purposes of government. Although this lesson can be completed without other lessons from this unit, students do need to understand what a constitution is. We recommend students look at the definition of constitution and the infographic and worksheet “Anatomy of a Constitution” from lesson 6.1: “Our Constitutions” before engaging with the activities in this lesson. Students first consider the parts and purposes of introductions in writing and connect their writing to our founding documents. After working to understand the organizing principles in the preamble, students collaborate in groups to write one purpose of the government in their own words and illustrate it. After groups present to the class, each student writes the preamble in their own words and reflects on the purposes of government.

There is a vocabulary reinforcement activity for students who need more practice with the basics of the lesson. Three extension activities are available. One engages learners who are ready to consider the dangers against which the founders were trying to protect the nation and two others use primary sources to consider the preamble in alternate ways. 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.

Learning Activity

Activation

Why introductions? Begin a discussion with students as if you were having a writing class and ask, "Why are introductions necessary in writing?" Include these reasons in the discussion:

- To hook your audience and get them interested in reading your writing
- To tell your audience about your topic
- To tell your audience your argument or claim

Remind students of the parts of an introduction using your classroom structure, which may include:

- Inverted triangle that ends with the details of the thesis
- Hook-Overview-Thesis

Review an example introduction that you have used in the past or share the "Should we learn New Hampshire history?" sample introduction. Discuss the different parts and purposes of an introduction using the sample.

Student Reading

What is a preamble? Before beginning Direct Instruction, have students read Unit 6, Learn It! "[The U.S. Constitution](#)," page 1, and then view "[Mason Explains: The Preamble](#)."

Direct Instruction & Discussion

Scaffolding the preamble. Tell students that introductions have always been part of writing and have always had the same basic purpose: to tell the reader the purposes and goals of the writing. Project the edited preamble of one sentence. Tell students this sentence is from an old document and is the organizing sentence of the document. This edited version removes the six purposes of the constitution so that students can see the broad outline of the preamble. Read together. What is this sentence introducing?

Depending upon your class, discuss the sentence by using the marked edited version with definitions and questions or by adding your own notations to the unmarked version. Make sure that students:

- have a definition of all words.
- understand the key phrase "We the people" as the people creating and giving power to the government rather than a royal government having it.
- relate the preamble to the time period; the United States was trying to find a form of government that would work for them. They were figuring it out as they went along and had actually just decided that the first government, the Articles of Confederation, had failed.
- understand that this sentence explains the purpose of the U.S. Constitution: to create and organize the government.
- understand that is called the preamble of the Constitution, which means introduction.

Adding details. Just like students have to add details in their writing, so too did the writers of the Constitution. Project the entire preamble and read together. Reassure students that it's ok if they don't understand it all—it's old! It's complicated! Ask questions to help clarify.

- How is this different from the first version of the preamble?
- How many reasons for establishing the government do they give?
- Why are some words capitalized?
- What words do students not understand?

In your discussion,

- tell students these six phrases are referred to as the six purposes of the Constitution because they say why the Founding Fathers organized the government.
- let students know that at this time, the rules of grammar were not as set in stone as they are now. This meant that people would frequently capitalize words they thought were important.
- refrain from defining words students don't understand, as this will be done in small groups.
- use the numbered version of the preamble if it helps students understand the structure of the sentence.

Guided Practice **Breaking down the preamble.** When ready, divide students into six groups. Note that some of the six purposes are more complex ideas than others. Hand out "The Six Purposes of the Preamble," noting that there are six different worksheets for the six groups. Review the worksheet and circulate among the groups to ensure understanding as they work.

Drawing the preamble. As groups finish their worksheets, tell each group they will need to collaborate and make one drawing or collage on the large chart paper to explain their purpose to the class. Give them time to work. When complete, their chart paper should have:

1. Their purpose in formal words
2. Their purpose in their own words
3. Images to explain examples of their purpose

Teaching tip: This is a good spot to pause if you will divide the lesson between two teaching periods.

Independent Practice & Reflection

The preamble in your own words. When all groups have finished, distribute the "Preamble in My Own Words" worksheet to the class for notetaking. Have the groups present in the order of the purposes in the preamble.

Allow time for students to complete the back of the worksheet, in groups, pairs, or alone. Discuss as best for your class.

Reinforcement

1. **Vocabulary of the preamble.** Have students collect all the words the various groups defined on their "Purposes of the Preamble" worksheets and write them on a classroom list for all to read. Add illustrations for added dimensions of learning.

Extension

1. **Comparing preambles.** The N.H. Constitution also has a preamble, found in Part I, Article 1. Use the worksheet "Comparing Preambles" to compare the preambles of the N.H. Constitution and the U.S. Constitution.
2. **What's the danger?** The Founding Fathers included purposes in the U.S. Constitution because they were trying to ensure a strong nation. But there were specific dangers they were trying to prevent. Use the worksheet "What's the Danger?" to help students think through why the framers included each idea.
3. **Reviewing the preamble with primary sources.** For advanced elementary students, the National Archives offers an excellent activity where students analyze primary sources and match them to various aspects of the preamble.
www.archives.gov/legislative/resources/education/preamble-review-activity

Supporting Materials

The Preamble to the Constitution of the United States, www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript

N.H. Constitution, Part I: Bill of Rights, www.nh.gov/glance/bill-of-rights.htm

Sources helpful to the development of the lesson:

- A collection of sources and activities for grades K–5 that especially help place the preamble in historical context as well as connect to primary sources.
<https://edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plans/preamble-constitution-how-do-you-make-more-perfect-union>
- Excellent, concise handout of the preamble in easy words.
<https://iblog.dearbornschools.org/tawile/wp-content/uploads/sites/259/2014/09/Preamble-Classroom-Preamble.pdf>

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.S1.2)
- ✓ Communicating and Critiquing Conclusions (3-5.S2.1)
- ✓ Understanding and Participating in Government (3-5.S6.1)

New Hampshire Social Studies Frameworks:

- ✓ Civics and Governments: The Nature and Purpose of Government (SS:CV:4:1.1)
- ✓ World History: Political Foundations and Developments (SS:WH:4:1.1)

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.3.3-5, D2.Civ.5.3-5)
- ✓ Participation and Deliberation (D2.Civ.8.3-5)
- ✓ Causation and Argumentation (D2.His.17.3-5)
- ✓ Developing Claims and Using Evidence (D3.4.3-5)

Common Core ELA Grade 3:

- ✓ Key Ideas and Details in Informational Text (RI.3.1, RI.3.2)
- ✓ Integration of Knowledge and Ideas in Informational Text (RI.3.7)
- ✓ Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity in Informational Text (RI.3.10)
- ✓ Phonics and Word Recognition in Foundational Skills (RF.3.3)
- ✓ Research to Build and Present Knowledge (W.3.8)
- ✓ Comprehension and Collaboration in Speaking and Listening (SL.3.1, SL.3.1d, SL.3.2)
- ✓ Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas (SL.3.5)

Common Core ELA Grade 4:

- ✓ Key Ideas and Details in Informational Text (RI.4.1, RI.4.2, RI.4.3)
- ✓ Integration of Knowledge and Ideas in Informational Text (RI.4.7)
- ✓ Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity in Informational Text (RI.4.10)
- ✓ Phonics and Word Recognition in Foundational Skills (RF.4.3)
- ✓ Research to Build and Present Knowledge (W.4.8, W.4.9, W.4.9b)
- ✓ Comprehension and Collaboration in Speaking and Listening (SL.4.1, SL.4.1d, SL.4.2)
- ✓ Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas (SL.4.5)
- ✓ Vocabulary Acquisition and Use (L.4.4, L.4.4c)

Common Core ELA Grade 5:

- ✓ Key Ideas and Details in Informational Text (RI.5.1, RI.5.2)
- ✓ Integration of Knowledge and Ideas in Informational Text (RI.5.7)
- ✓ Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity in Informational Text (RI.5.10)
- ✓ Phonics and Word Recognition in Foundational Skills (RF.5.3)
- ✓ Research to Build and Present Knowledge (W.5.8, W.5.9, W.5.9b)
- ✓ Comprehension and Collaboration in Speaking and Listening (SL.5.1, SL.5.1d, SL.5.2)
- ✓ Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas (SL.5.5)
- ✓ Vocabulary Acquisition and Use (L.5.4, L.5.4c)

Lesson Vocabulary, including words specific to the preamble

common defense	(noun) A phrase in the preamble of the Constitution; protection for the community
constitution	(noun) A document laying out the rules for how a government will work
domestic	(adjective) In our country or at home
insure	(verb) To protect
liberty	(noun) The freedom to exercise your rights in a community
more perfect union	(noun) A phrase in the preamble of the Constitution; a joining of the states in the best way possible
ordain	(verb) To declare
posterity	(noun) Future generations
preamble	(noun) Introduction
promote	(verb) To help
tranquility	(adj) Peacefulness
welfare	(noun) Safety and happiness