
Holiday Facts & Fun:
Constitution Day



Teacher's Guide
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Produced
by
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HOLIDAY FACTS & FUN: CONSTITUTION DAY

Grades 4-6

Viewing Time: 14:31

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Intended Audience and Uses

Holiday Facts & Fun: Constitution Day has been produced for students in grades 4-6. Its primary purposes are to help youngsters appreciate our country's most basic law and to understand why and how Constitution Day is celebrated. It also can deepen student understanding of 18th century U.S. history. This video helps students achieve McREL Level II



(Grades K-4) History Standard 1, Benchmark 5 (“Understands ...cultural heritage through... celebrations”); History Standard 4, Level I, Benchmark 7 (“Understands the reasons that Americans celebrate certain national holidays”); Level II, Benchmark 8 (“Understands the historical events...commemorated by major national holidays...”); and Level II, Benchmark 5 (“Knows how various American holidays reflect the shared values, principles and beliefs of Americans...”).

Program Synopsis

A group of students at Cherry Hill School meets to organize a student council. The group's advisor, Miss Kelly, mentions that the first order of business will be to write a constitution for the new organization. When a student asks what a constitution is, the teacher defines it as "a document that contains the most important rules for an organization" and delineates the three parts of constitutions -- preamble, articles and amendments. A brief history of



constitutions follows, ending with a review of the Articles of Confederation: why it was adopted, the problems associated with it and its eventual replacement -- the U.S. Constitution. A discussion of the Constitutional Convention of 1787 names some of the major participants (Washington, Madison and Hamilton), discusses several key issues the framers confronted, and eventual ratification in 1788. Next comes a discussion of the Bill of Rights and the establishment of our form of government, with its three branches -- executive, legislative and judicial. The second half of the program shows how Constitution Day is celebrated across the country, first in "Constitution Town," Louisville, OH; next in Nevada City, CA, where reportedly the largest holiday celebration in the western United States is held; and finally, at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia.

VIEWER OBJECTIVES

After viewing this video and participating in the suggested activities, viewers should be able to do the following:

1. Tell what a constitution is and name its three parts.
2. Briefly review the history of constitutions and Constitution Day.
3. Explain what the Bill of Rights is and name at least five rights contained in the bill.
4. Name the three branches of our government and tell the function of each.
5. Name at least three ways Constitution Day is celebrated.

The producers encourage you to make adaptations and changes to the following lesson plan whenever you feel it will enhance your students' learning experiences. Only by tailoring the material to your unique classroom situation will you be able to maximize the educational experience afforded by these materials.



SUGGESTED LESSON PLAN

Viewing Strategies

Various strategies may be employed when showing *Constitution Day* to your class. If you wish to use the video as a way to give general information about this holiday, you may find it useful to show the entire program in one screening, then follow up with appropriate questions (see the *Suggested Discussion Questions* blackline master) and/or activities suggested in this guide. Alternately, for lessons on the Constitution, only the first part of the program may be viewed.

Introduce the Program

The producers encourage you to prescreen the program to familiarize yourself with its content.

Ask the class if anyone knows what a constitution is. Elicit several answers. Tell the class they will see a video about constitutions in a few minutes.



Pre-Viewing Activities

If you are showing the program prior to Constitution Day, ask the class if anyone knows about the holiday. If so, what? Are there any other holidays that honor a document? What about the Declaration of Independence? Is it a holiday that honors a document or a specific event? Tell everyone they will now see why our country's constitution has its own holiday.

Post-Viewing Activities

Discuss the program, using the *Suggested Discussion Questions* if you prefer. Then hand out *The Second Amendment* and have your students complete the exercise. Afterwards, discuss what the students have written. Have your students write a class constitution. Be certain to have a preamble and article section. A week or so after the constitution has been written, ask the class if there needs to be any amendments. If so, add an amendment section. Divide the class into ten groups. Have each group research one the bills in the Bill of Rights and give an oral presentation or written report on the bill.



Description of Blackline Masters

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS – Gives questions that may be asked after each segment is viewed.

THE SECOND AMENDMENT – Reviews the controversy regarding this particular constitutional right.

ANSWER KEY

Video Quiz: 1. A document that contains the most important rules for an organization 2. c. 3. False 4. Articles of Confederation 5. b. 6. freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, right to a trial by jury 7. executive, judicial, legislative 8. b. 9. Louisville 10. False

The producers acknowledge the cooperation of the following organizations: The National Constitution Center; National Park Service, Independence Hall Historic Park; Library of Congress; National Archives; Louisville, OH Constitution Committee; Nevada City, CA Chamber of Commerce; Northbrook, IL School District 27



TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

NARRATOR: It's an important day at Cherry Hill School.

A group of students there has decided that they'd like to establish a student council.

They've asked a social studies teacher, Miss Kelly, to be their advisor.

And she's accepted!

MISS KELLY: All right, everyone. So, the first thing we need to do is write our council's constitution.

NARRATOR: Some of the students were somewhat puzzled.

MISS KELLY: Ali?

ALI: I've *heard* of a constitution, but I'm not really sure what it is.

MISS KELLY: Well. A constitution is a document that contains the most important rules for an organization.

In fact, *many* organizations, and many countries such as the United States, have a constitution.

Constitutions usually explain *who has created the organization* (or nation), as well as *why it's been established*. Those things are usually found in the first part, called the "preamble."

The next part, called the "articles" section, is made of "articles" (or rules) that tell who the leaders will be, such as a president and vice president and give details on how will be made, perhaps by a majority vote.

Constitutions often have many more such rules or "articles."

The third part of a constitution is the "amendment" section. It contains additional rules (or laws) approved at a later time.

NARRATOR: Constitutions have been around for much of recorded history.

Almost 3,000 years ago, a Greek city-state, Sparta, had a constitution called "The Great Rhetra." It set out rules for Sparta's citizens and provided for free schools.

A group of colonists who came to America in 1620 wrote a *kind* of constitution known as the "Mayflower Compact."

It proposed basic rules for the citizens of Plimouth Colony, located in what's now the state of Massachusetts.

The people of Plimouth Colony were citizens of England.

In fact, for some 150 years, most Americans lived under the laws of their English rulers.

But the Revolutionary War ushered in a new era. For even as the war raged on, the Americans wrote a new "highest law of the land" for themselves.

Called the Articles of Confederation, it was approved in 1781.

The Articles did establish a national government, but it had very little power.

For Americans were afraid that a strong central government would wind up like England's, with a powerful king and other royalty -- which they intensely disliked.

Instead, they said the states, not a national government, would have most of the powers, such as taxing its citizens.

But soon, difficulties arose under the Articles.

For instance, when Maryland and Virginia had a dispute about which state could claim the Potomac River as part of its territory, there was no strong national government that could resolve the argument.

Moreover, each state had its own money, making it very difficult for people in different states to conduct business.

And there were many other problems.

A group of highly-regarded Americans met in Philadelphia, PA during the summer of 1787 to discuss these difficulties.

The meeting was called "The Constitutional Convention."

Although many in attendance said they were meeting to revise the Articles, others, such as lawyer and banker Alexander Hamilton, statesman James Madison, and Revolutionary War hero George Washington, felt that a new law should replace the Articles of Confederation.

Madison, known as "the father of the Constitution," studied governments in other times and other places, and then when writing the new U.S. Constitution, chose the best parts of them.

Nevertheless, the people in attendance, known as the "framers of the Constitution," faced many difficulties.

One was even Philadelphia's weather. It was brutally hot during the summer of 1787, but the windows of Independence Hall, where the framers met, were closed to keep all discussions secret.

As a result, it was sweltering inside.

The framers also faced many complex questions.

For instance, should the more populous states, those with large cities, have more representatives in congress than the rural states, those with smaller populations?

Should slavery be allowed?

After more than four months of debate and compromise, the framers hammered out the final version of the Constitution.

It was ratified on June 21, 1788.

And in 1791, the Bill of Rights, the Constitution's first ten amendments (or additions) was approved.

The Bill guaranteed certain basic rights to all U.S. citizens, such as freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom to gather in groups of our own choice, freedom of the press, the right to a speedy trial by jury and more.

The Constitution also established our form of government, one with three branches.

A legislative branch composed of the Senate and House of Representatives would make our laws, an executive branch would make certain that those laws were obeyed, and a judicial branch would decide exactly what laws meant when there was a question about them -- and would determine who has or has not broken a law.

The United States Constitution was something completely new in the history of the world.

For it was the first document to grant such wide, sweeping powers to everyday people.

And its ideas inspired persons in other lands to fight for their freedoms.

Because our Constitution is one of the greatest documents ever written, it's celebrated on September 17th each year, with a holiday called "Constitution Day and Citizenship Day," or, more commonly, just "Constitution Day."

For the citizens of Louisville, Ohio, the holiday ushers in a big, festive event.

This small northeast Ohio community calls itself "Constitution Town" because a woman who lived there more than a half century ago, Olga T. Weber, was one of the first Americans to actively encourage the establishment of the holiday.

Among the many Constitution Day activities in Louisville's celebration are a pet parade and pet trick contest, concerts, American-themed items for sale, as well as patriotic word search games, snack foods, and craft activities, such as bird feeders made from acorn squash.

There are carnival rides, too, whose bright lights illuminate the fading day.

Half way across the country, in Nevada City, California, thousands of people jam that town's main street for what's reportedly the largest Constitution Day celebration in the western United States.

The festivities feature a big parade with costumed participants.

In addition to the parade, there are two other colorful in the Nevada City celebration.

The first is a re-enactment of the Constitution's signing. As each "framer" signs, participants and guests listen as an announcer tells his name and gives a brief biography.

And then, there's a colorful charity race with some 3,000 toy ducks that float down a river that winds through the town.

Additional activities include a Civil War re-enactment, music and the festival's friendly mascot, Whitewater Willy!

But undoubtedly, the most impressive of all Constitution Day celebrations are held at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia, PA, located near Independence Hall, where the legendary document was signed.

Not long ago, an especially exciting event was held on the Constitution's 225th anniversary.

There was a huge birthday party for it, featuring -- among other things -- a cake with the storied document's likeness drawn on top, with icing.

Actors dressed as famous presidents, such as George Washington, Abraham Lincoln and Teddy Roosevelt gave speeches and then answered student questions afterwards.

There was a wide array of activities throughout the day, also, including folding a giant American flag, honoring the winner of a national essay contest, learning how to vote, placing one's own signature on a replica of the Constitution, seeing how documents were printed in bygone days, taking part in presentations on constitutional questions, enjoying art projects and just being silly -- with statues of the framers.

Undoubtedly for many, however, the day's most meaningful event was a "naturalization ceremony" during which people from other lands were sworn in as new American citizens.

Naturalization ceremonies take place across the country on Constitution Day.

Back at Cherry Hill School a few months later, the student council decided on its first project -- sponsoring a Constitution Day assembly program.

Miss Kelly said it was a great idea because, after all, our constitution is one of history's most important documents.

It was written by far-sighted individuals long ago.

It created our national government, which consists of three branches legislative, executive and judicial.

And its first 10 amendments -- the Bill of Rights -- guarantee our most basic freedoms.

In short, we celebrate Constitution Day every September 17th as a way to remember how lucky we are to live in a country of in the United States of America!



Web Resources

The National Constitution Center

<http://constitutioncenter.org/>

The web's most comprehensive site for information and educational resources on the U.S. Constitution

The Charters of Freedom

<http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution.html>

The government's official site on the Constitution

The Cornell University Law School Legal Institute

<http://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/>

Detailed annotations on the legal aspects of the Constitution

Discussion Questions – Constitution Day

For Segment One

1. What is a constitution? (a document that contains the most important rules for an organization)
2. What are the three parts of a constitution? (preamble, articles, amendments)
3. What was the name of the constitution in Sparta? (The Great Rhetra)
4. What did the Mayflower Compact do? (It set out rules for the citizens of Plymouth Colony.)
5. What was America's first "highest law of the land" called? (The Articles of Confederation)
6. Why didn't the Articles of Confederation grant many powers to the national government? (Americans were afraid that a strong central government would wind up like England's.)
7. What were two major problems with the Articles? (Each state had its own money, couldn't settle interstate disputes.)
8. Name three leaders of the Constitutional Convention. (Washington, Hamilton, Monroe)
9. Who is known as "the father of the Constitution?" (James Monroe)
10. Name three difficulties the framers faced. (hot weather, complex questions of slavery and state representation in congress)
11. When was the Constitution ratified? (June 21, 1788)
12. What are the first ten amendments to the Constitution called? (Bill of Rights)
13. In what year was the Bill of Rights approved? (1791)
14. Name five freedoms guaranteed by the Bill of Rights (freedom of religion, the press, gather in groups of our own choice, speech, right to trial by jury)
15. What are the three branches of the federal government? (executive, judicial, legislative)
16. Why was the Constitution so important in world history? (the first document to grant such wide, sweeping powers to everyday people; inspired people in other lands to fight for their freedoms)

For Segment Two

1. When is Constitution Day celebrated? (September 17th)
2. What community calls itself "Constitution Town?" (Louisville, Ohio)
3. Why does Louisville call itself that? (because a woman who lived there was one of the first Americans to actively encourage the holiday)
4. How does Nevada City, CA celebrate Constitution Day? (It has a parade, a re-enactment of the Constitution's signing, charity race with 3,000 toy ducks, Civil War re-enactment, music and "Whitewater Willy.")
5. Where is the National Constitution Center located? (Philadelphia, PA)
6. Name five ways Constitution Day is celebrated there. (birthday party, actors give speeches, folding giant flag, learning how to vote, signing replica of the Constitution, art projects, etc.)

Name _____

The Second Amendment

The second amendment of the United States Constitution states that U.S. citizens have the right to keep and bear arms. When the Bill of Rights was approved, in 1791, there were a number of reasons why Americans thought the right to own guns was important. It could --

- enable citizens to organize a militia system
- help in law enforcement
- help prevent the formation of a tyrannical government
- help repel an invasion
- help in self-defense

The second amendment has become controversial. Some people feel it is still extremely important in helping Americans preserve their liberties and gives all citizens the right to use whatever they can for self defense. Others believe that today's society is very different from that of the 18th century, when the United States was mostly an agricultural country. What do you think? Using the five reasons to own guns, write why the second amendment is necessary today **and** why it is outdated. Use the space below and the back of this paper if you need more room.