

The Constitution & Constitution Day: A Beginner's Guide



Teacher's Guide

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**Produced
by
Colman Communications Corp.**

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The Constitution & Constitution Day: A Beginners' Guide

Grades K-4

Viewing Time: 14:07

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Intended Audience and Uses

The Constitution & Constitution Day: A Beginner's Guide has been produced for students in grades K-4. Its primary purposes are to help youngsters appreciate the significance of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights and to understand the



basics of these historic documents. It also builds awareness of Constitution Day and Constitution Week and the roles they play in contemporary America. The program is divided into five parts: (1) rules and laws, (2) a brief explanation of the

Constitution -- including its preamble, (3) the three parts of our government established by the Constitution, (4) the Bill of Rights and (5) an overview of Constitution Day.

Program Synopsis

Jeffrey and Lilly are playing Me-Ge-Yo when a dispute occurs. Mr. Beanbody, the children's precocious talking dog, suggests that the two consult the game rules. He then tells the two why rules are so important -- in schools, homes, communities and

elsewhere, where they may be called "ordinances" or "laws." Moreover, he continues, people don't always agree about what laws should do or say, so there has to be a "main law" to settle those disputes. In our country, our main law is called the Constitution. Then, by using a special computer program, Mr. Beanbody transports the children (and himself) to Philadelphia during the oppressively hot summer of 1787. There, the three find themselves at Independence Hall, where the framers debate about the number of representatives in the new congress.



Seeing that Jeffrey is confused about the term "congress," Mr. Beanbody takes the children back to the present where he begins a short explanation of the Constitution, starting with its preamble. He goes through each phrase and sentence of the preamble, telling what each

means. He then takes Jeffrey and Lilly back to 1787, to James Madison's apartment in Philadelphia, where the "Father of the Constitution" carefully studies the governments of various countries, including ancient Rome and Greece. Mr. Beanbody then explains that the Constitution established our form of government, which has three branches -- executive, legislative and judicial. He then discusses the Bill of Rights. Afterwards, he once again takes himself and the children back to the present, where he gives an overview of Constitution Day and Constitution Week.

VIEWER OBJECTIVES

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

1. Tell what the Constitution is and tell at least five freedoms enumerated in the Bill of Rights.

2. Give a brief historical overview of the Constitutional Convention.
3. Describe how Americans celebrate Constitution Day and Constitution Week and explain how the holidays were established.

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 *The Constitution & Constitution Day: A Beginner's Guide* to your class. If you wish to use the video as a way to give general information about the Constitution and the holiday, you may find it useful to show the entire program in one sitting, then follow up with appropriate questions (see the **Discussion Questions** blackline master) and/or activities suggested in this guide. Alternately, program segments may be used to cover various topics -- (1) rules and laws, (2) the Constitution -- including its preamble, (3) the three parts of our government established by the Constitution, (4) the Bill of Rights and (5) an overview of Constitution Day.



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Introduce the Program

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

Ask the class if anyone has rules he or she must obey in their household, such as rules governing the amount of computer or television time. Discuss the rules and ask why rules are necessary. Does anyone know what rules



in our community are called? What about rules in our states and in our country? Do those rules have different names? What happens when rules differ? For instance, when a rule in one classroom is different from a rule in another classroom, such as rules about whether a person is allowed to throw away trash during class time or only after class ends?

Pre-Viewing Activities

Pass out *Constitutional Terms*. Be certain to stress that "congress" is the same as "legislative branch," and that congress has two parts -- the Senate and House of Representatives. Either do this exercise with your class (primary level) or have students do it as individual seat work (elementary level) and then go over the answers after they have completed it.

Post-Viewing Activities

Discuss the program using the *Discussion Questions* blackline master if you prefer. Hand out *Mr. Beanbody's Puzzle*. Either do this activity with you class or have your students complete the exercise as a seat activity. Hand out *Why the Constitutional Convention Was Held*. Have your



students read the information if they are able, then answer the questions. Discuss their answers. Do you have a Constitutional lawyer in your community? If so, invite that person to give a presentation to your class on the everyday importance of

this crucially important historical document. Finally, have your students conduct an Internet search the major issues that occurred during the Constitutional Convention and then put on either a mock debate or a play that highlights those issues.

Description of Blackline Masters

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS – A list of inquiries into the concepts presented in the program.

CONSTITUTIONAL TERMS – A vocabulary exercise that gives students an opportunity to learn various words that will be used in the program.

MR. BEANBODY'S PUZZLE – A review of key terms used in the program.

WHY THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION WAS HELD -- Gives students information on the Articles of Confederation and the reasons for its failure.

ANSWER KEY

Video Quiz: 1. c. 2. Philadelphia, PA 3. False 4. b.
5. laws 6. True 7. c. 8. Bill of Rights 9. False 10. b.

Constitutional Terms: (1) first 10 amendments of the Bill of Rights (2) officially create (3) first part of the Constitution that tells why it was written and who wrote it (4) law or rule (5) gathering during which Constitution was written (6) legislative branch; Senate and House of Representatives (7) branch of government that decides exactly what the laws mean and who has or hasn't broken a law (8) president and vice president who make sure all the laws are obeyed (9) person who wrote the Constitution

Mr. Beanbody's Puzzle: Down: 1. Framers 2. Madison
3. Congress Across: 1. PA 2. Legislative 3. Washington

TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

JEFFREY: Yes! I have eight thousand attack points, and you have only five thousand defense points! So I am the winner!

LILLY: Not so fast, Jeffrey, because my card is a Universe Master! And that beats a Cosmic King!

JEFFREY: Uh uh! Universe Masters don't beat Cosmic Kings!

MR. BEANBODY: Let's look at the rules, shall we? This should settle things.

Now, let's see here. Ah, yes! Here it is: the Universe Master defeats all cards, except the Universe Terminator.

LILLY: Told you so!

JEFFREY: Oh, darn!

MR. BEANBODY: It's always best to check the rules when you can't agree on how exactly a game should be played.

As a general principle, rules are very helpful whenever people have different ideas about how something should be done.

Like in our homes: family rules tell us how much television time -- if any -- is allowed.

And in our schools, rules tell us how many books we can borrow from the learning center.

In our communities, traffic rules tell drivers when to stop and go, thus preventing auto accidents.

Community rules are often are called "ordinances."

Rules in our states, such as those that tell us how fast cars can go on highways, are called "laws."

The rules for our country are also called "laws." We have fifty states in our country, each with many different kinds of people.

And they don't always see eye to eye on what their laws should be.

For instance, they may differ in their views about how much smoke should be allowed from a factory's smoke stack.

Because people in different states and different communities don't always agree about what their laws should be, it's a good idea to have a "main law" to settle disagreements when there's a dispute about what a law should, or does, say.

In the United States our "main law" is called the Constitution.

As it happens, I've been working on a computer program that can take us back more than 200 years, when the United States was a very young country, and didn't have its Constitution, its "main law!"

JEFFREY: Gee, Mr. Beanbody! Where the heck are we?

LILLY: And exactly what year is it, anyway?

MR. BEANBODY: If my program has worked correctly -- and it certainly looks like it did -- I'd say we're in the city of brotherly love -- Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. And it's 1787.

JEFFREY: Whew! It sure is hot, Mr. Beanbody!

MR. BEANBODY: It's obviously summer, Jeffrey. Do you see that building over there?

It's called Independence Hall and something quite important, the Constitutional Convention, is taking place inside.

Let's take a look, shall we?

Oh, my! It looks like the debate inside the hall is as hot as the weather outside!

LILLY: What's the debate about, Mr. Beanbody?

FRAMER ONE: There should be one representative for every state.

FRAMER TWO: Ridiculous! There should be at least five representatives.

MR. BEANBODY: It appears to be about how many people there should be in the congress.

JEFFREY: Congress? What's that?

MR. BEANBODY: Hmm! I think we may be getting ahead of ourselves here.

So let's start at the beginning, shall we?

The first part of the Constitution, called the "preamble," tells why the Constitution was written who wrote it.

JEFFREY: It says, "We the people of the United States." Is that who wrote it?

MR. BEANBODY: Well, the people we just saw -- they're called the "framers" of the Constitution -- spoke for, or *represented* all the people of the United States. So in a sense, yes, all the people were responsible for writing it.

LILLY: "To create a more perfect union." What does that mean?

MR. BEANBODY: It means the people who wrote the Constitution did so to come up with a better way to govern themselves.

JEFFREY: And it says the people "ordain and establish" this Constitution...?

MR. BEANBODY: Meaning that they officially created it to have, as the Constitution says, a country that is fair and peaceful; where people could protect themselves, if need be; where everyone would be encouraged to create a better life for himself or herself and for everyone else; and where all our freedoms, such as freedom of the press, would be protected, both now and in the future.

Now, I think it's one of those times during which we have to go backward to move forward.

So, let's go back to the summer of 1787, shall we?

There's the man who's often called, "The Father of the Constitution," James Madison.

He carefully studied many different forms of government -- those of the Greeks, Romans, English and so on.

After his lengthy studies, he began to write down his ideas and to speak about them at the convention.

James Madison was the most respected framer, with the possible George Washington, who would become our country's first president.

Which leads us to something very important about the Constitution: it established our form of government, which has three parts or "branches."

The first, called the "executive branch," is the president and a vice president who make sure that all of the laws are obeyed.

Of course, they have many helpers.

The second, called the "legislative branch," makes those laws.

This branch has two parts -- the Senate and the House of Representatives.

The third part of our government is called the "judicial branch."

It's made up of judges who decide exactly what the laws mean when there's a question about them. And who has or hasn't broken a law.

JEFFREY: Wow! Did the Constitution do anything else, Mr. Beanbody?

MR. BEANBODY: Oh, yes, indeed, Jeffrey. You see that part there, called Article 5?

It made sure that the Constitution could be brought up to date, in case it needed to be.

And in fact, less than two years after the Constitution was written, the first ten amendments, or additions, were agreed upon.

And these "Bill of Rights," as they are called, became part of the Constitution, which was finally approved in 1789.

LILLY: What do the Bill of Rights say, Mr. Beanbody?

MR. BEANBODY: They say that we Americans can speak whatever is on our minds, as long as our words don't hurt anyone.

We are free to write whatever we want, also -- again, as long as our words aren't harmful.

We are free to practice any religion we want and to gather in any group of our choosing.

In addition, we have the right have a trial by jury, among other rights.

Now that we've taken a trip back to the 18th century, it's time to head back to the present, which, by a remarkable coincidence, is September 17th, Constitution Day!

JEFFREY AND LILLY, TOGETHER: Constitution Day?

MR. BEANBODY: Right! Every year, on that day, Americans all around country celebrate this remarkable document that has played such an important role in the success of our great nation.

Schools in Iowa first recognized Constitution Day in 1911. By 1949, every state had a Constitution Day, but not all of them were on September 17th.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower changed that in 1952, when he proclaimed that September 17th would be a national holiday called "Constitution Day and Citizenship Day."

Although now it's more commonly shortened, to just "Constitution Day".

Louisville, Ohio is called "Constitution Town" because a woman who lived there, Olga Weber, was partly responsible for the Senate passing a resolution in 1956 making September 17th through the 23rd "Constitution Week."

An organization of women called the Daughters of the American Revolution also was partly responsible for the seven-day event.

So there are some communities that have a week-long celebration with actors who give speeches by famous Americans, such as Benjamin Franklin; with plays that reenact the Constitution's signing; and with patriotic songs.

Also, many people from different lands become American citizens during the week, usually on Constitution Day.

And throughout the land, schools have special programs and lessons about this wonderful historical document.

LILLY: Gee, Mr. Beanbody, the Constitution and Constitution Day are really important, aren't they?

MR. BEANBODY: Indeed they are, Lilly.

The Constitution is one of history's most important documents because it gave us a form of government that has lasted more than 200 years, a government that assures us that we have many freedoms -- of speech, of assembly, of religion, of the press, and many more.

And we're guaranteed the right to a trial by jury.

Constitution Day is a special day that helps us remember the most important law of our land and the wise men who wrote it many years ago.

My goodness! That trip back in time has tuckered me out! Time for a little snooze. Why don't you two continue your game?

Oh, and don't forget: it's always a good idea to consult and follow the rules!

Web Resources

Bill of Rights Institute

<http://billofrightsinstitute.org/resources/educator-resources/constitution-day-resources/>

The Charters of Freedom

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

The United States Constitution

<http://www.house.gov/house/Constitution/Constitution.html>

Discussion Questions – The Constitution & Constitution Day: A Beginner's Guide

1. What are community rules often called? (ordinances)
2. What are state rules usually called? (laws)
3. What is the "main law" of the United States called? (Constitution)
4. Where was the Constitution written? (Philadelphia, PA)
5. What year was the Constitution written? (1787)
6. What was the Constitutional Convention? (a meeting during which representatives wrote the Constitution)
7. What is the first part of the Constitution called? (the preamble)
8. What does the preamble say? (It tells why the Constitution was written and who wrote it.)
9. Who were the "framers?" (The people who wrote the Constitution and who represented all Americans)
10. What is the Bill of Rights? (the first 10 additions to the Constitution)
11. Who is known as "Father of the Constitution?" (James Madison)
12. What did James Madison study? (different forms of government; *i.e.*, Greek, Roman, English, etc.)
13. What are the three branches of government established by the Constitution? (legislative, executive, judicial)
14. Who makes up the executive branch? (president and vice president)
15. What two institutions make up the legislative branch? (the Senate and House of Representatives)
16. What's another name for the legislative branch? (congress)
17. Who makes up the judicial branch? (judges)
18. When is Constitution Day and Constitution Week? (September 17; September 17-23)
19. Where is "Constitution Town?" (Louisville, Ohio)

Name _____

Constitutional Terms

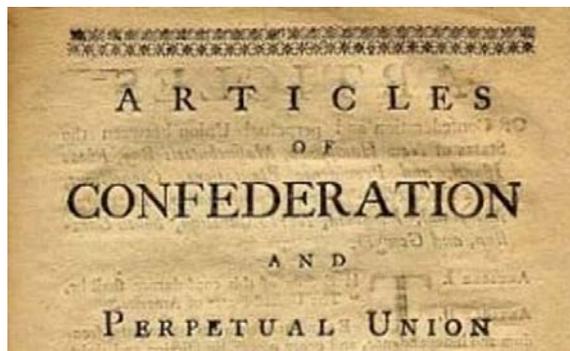
Directions: Write a definition next to each term.

1. Bill of Rights
2. Ordain and establish
3. Preamble
4. Ordinance
5. Constitutional Convention
6. Congress
7. Judicial Branch
8. Executive Branch
9. Framers

Why the Constitutional Convention Was Held

Shortly after the American colonies won their independence from Great Britain, a new government was established. The rules for the new government were called "The Articles of Confederation." Americans didn't like the powerful government of their former British rulers, so they decided to have a weak national government. The Articles were the result of that decision. The individual states would have most of the power. There was no national executive or court system. The national government could not collect taxes, nor could it raise an army or navy. And it didn't have a say in trade (business). Moreover, it couldn't print money. Each state had those powers. But when there were disagreements between the states, as was the case when

Virginia couldn't resolve the issue. placed taxes on trade declined. couldn't grow and



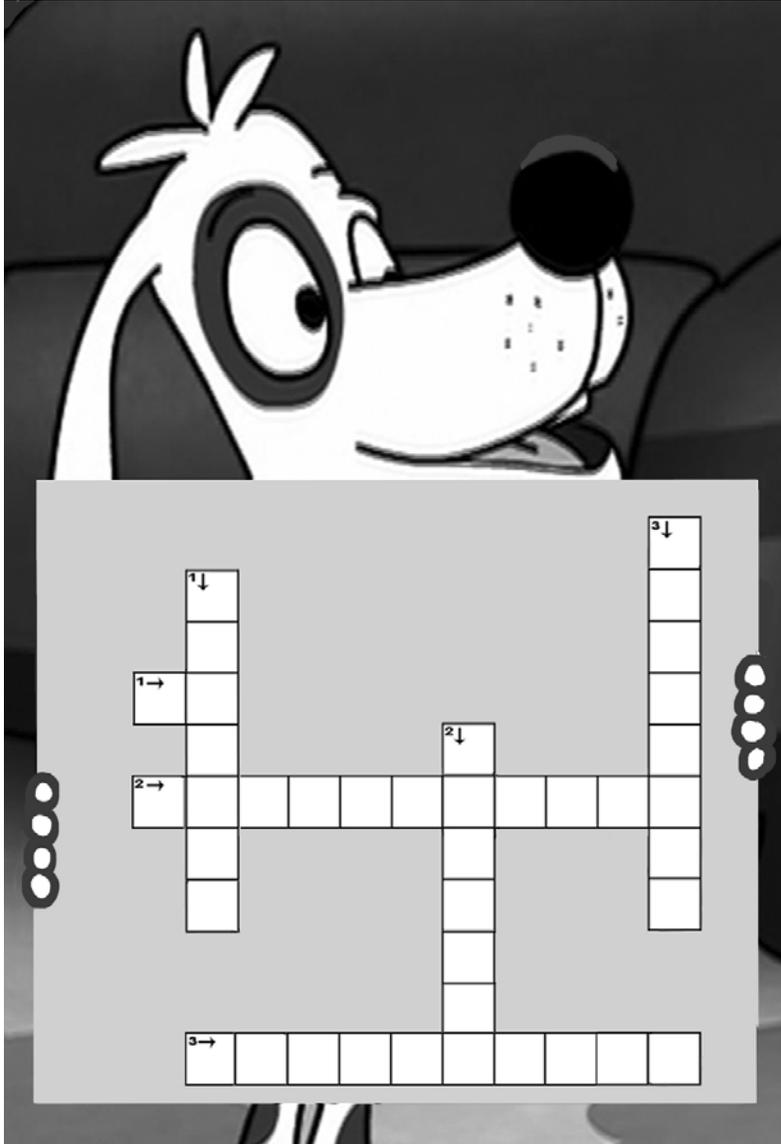
Maryland and wasn't a court to When states other states' goods, Businesses provide jobs.

Because the United States didn't have an army or navy to enforce the recently signed peace treaty, the British continued to occupy parts of the country, even though they weren't supposed to. And there were many other problems. That's why the Constitutional Convention was held -- to form a strong central government that could solve the many problems that cropped up under the Articles of Confederation.

Name _____

Mr. Beanbody's Puzzle

Directions: Use the information below to complete the puzzle.



Down

1. People who wrote the Constitution
2. Father of the Constitution
3. Senate and House of Representatives

Across

1. Abbreviation of the state where the Constitution was written
2. Law-making branch
3. First president