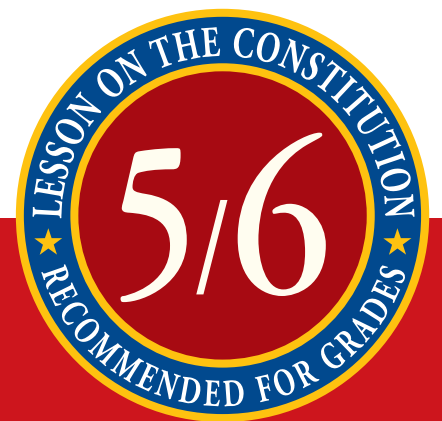


We the People

Constitution Day

ACROSS THE COUNTRY ***** SEPTEMBER 17



About Constitution Day



In 1952, President Harry S. Truman signed a bill that moved “I Am an American Day” from the third Sunday in May to September 17 so that this holiday would coincide with the signing of the U.S. Constitution in 1787. Congress renamed the holiday “Citizenship Day.” A joint resolution passed in 1956 requested the President to proclaim the week beginning September 17 and ending September 23 each year as “Constitution Week.”

Senator Robert C. Byrd (D-WV) entered an amendment to the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2005 that changed the name of the September 17 holiday to “Constitution Day and Citizenship Day.” The purpose of “Constitution Day and Citizenship Day” is to honor and celebrate the privileges and responsibilities of U.S. citizenship for both native-born and naturalized citizens, while commemorating the creation and signing of the supreme law of our land.

The addition of the amendment, known as Public Law 108-477, requires all schools that receive federal funds hold an educational program for their students on September 17 of each year. This lesson, which is adapted from curricular materials on the Constitution produced by the [Center for Civic Education](#), is designed to assist schools and federal agencies to meet the requirements of this law.

We the People

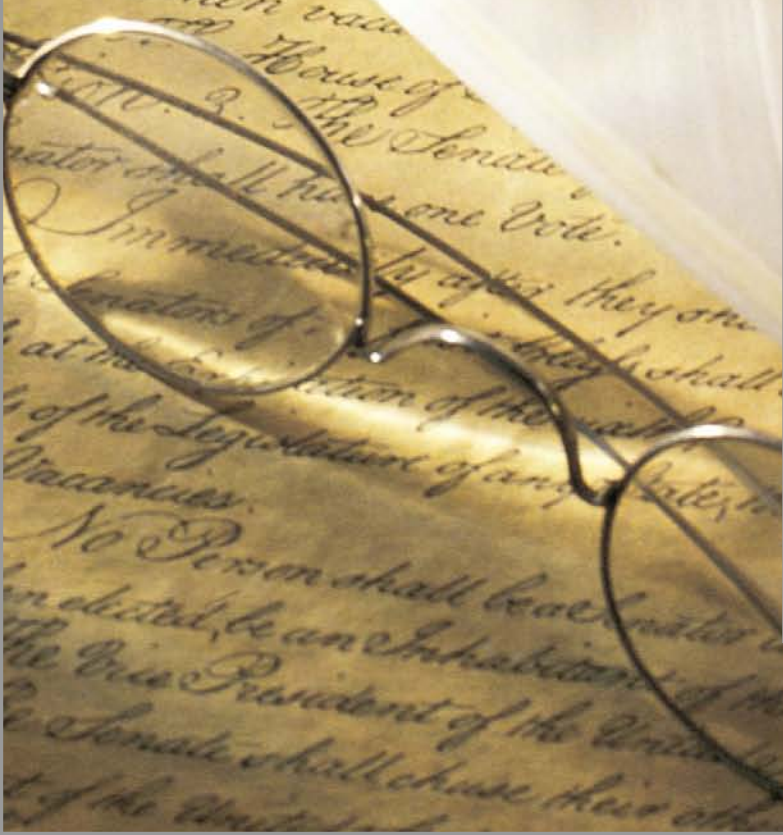
insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common Defence
and our Posterity, We ordain and establish this Constitution

Article

Section. 1. All legislative Powers herein granted shall be vested
in a Congress of Representatives.

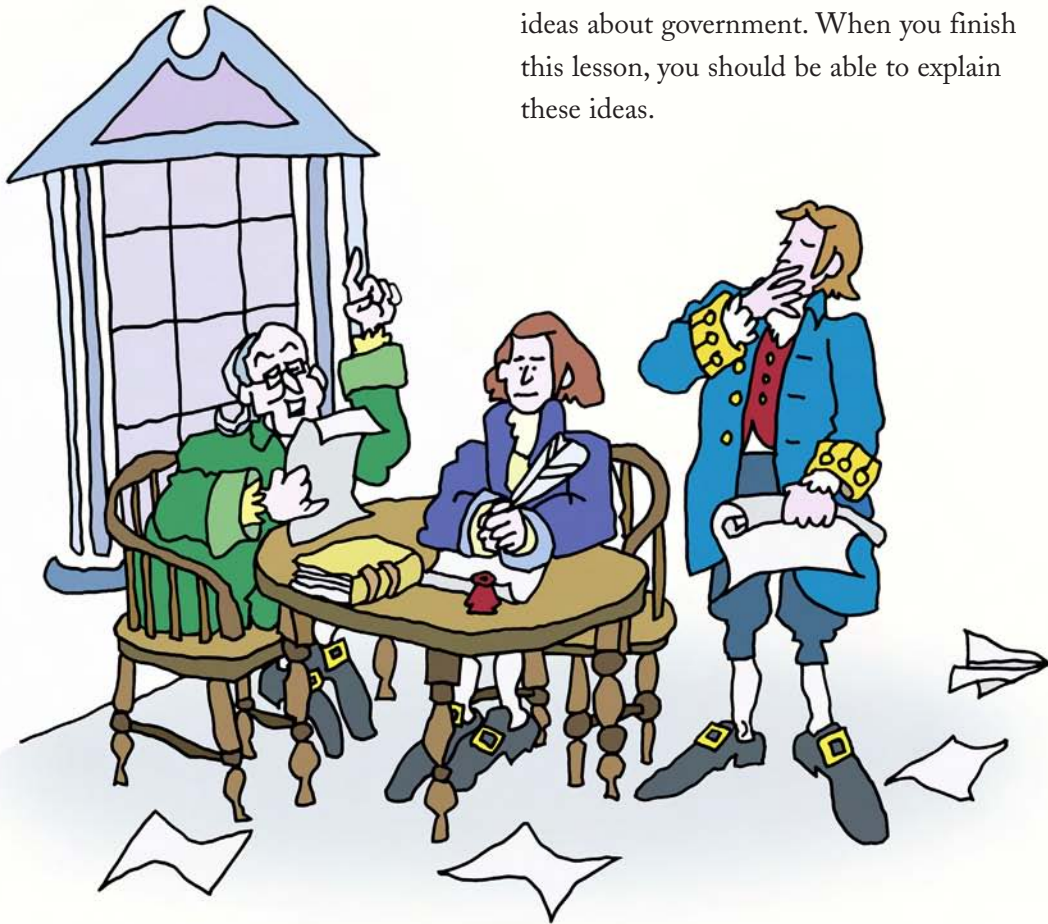
Section. 2. The House of Representatives shall be composed of
Members chosen every second Year by the Electors in each State
shall have the Qualifications requisite for Electors of the most
numerous State. No Person shall be a Representative who shall not have
attained to the Age of twenty five Years, when elected, be an Inhabitant
of that State in which he shall be chosen, and seven Years shall be
apportioned among the States, and direct Taxes shall be apportioned among the
States, which shall be determined by adding to the whole Number of
free Persons, including those bound to Service for a Year or more, three
fifths of all other Persons. The actual Enumeration shall be made
within three Years after the first Meeting of the Congress, and
thereafter in such Manner as they shall by Law direct. The Term of
their Office shall be three Years.

**What Basic
Ideas About
Government
Are Included in
the Preamble
to the
Constitution?**



Purpose of the Lesson

The Framers wrote an introduction, also called a preamble, to the Constitution. The Preamble states the purposes of our Constitution. It includes some of the basic ideas about government. When you finish this lesson, you should be able to explain these ideas.



Terms to understand



a more perfect union
blessings of liberty
common defense
domestic tranquility

establish
general welfare
justice
ordain

Ideas to discuss



What do you think should be the purposes of government?

Before you learn about the purposes stated in the Preamble, let's examine your own ideas. Then you can compare your ideas with those in the Constitution. You might find that you and the Framers have many of the same ideas.

Work with a partner or in a group of three to five students. Discuss the questions that follow. Be prepared to share your ideas with the class.

1. What is a purpose?
2. Why is it important to know what your own purposes are?
3. Why is it important to know what the purposes of a government are?
4. List five or six purposes that you think a government should have.
5. Explain why you think each of the purposes you have listed for government is important.



▶ *The Federal Power Commission approved the construction of the Diablo Dam in Washington in 1927. Do you think government should regulate this type of project? Why or why not?*

Ideas to discuss

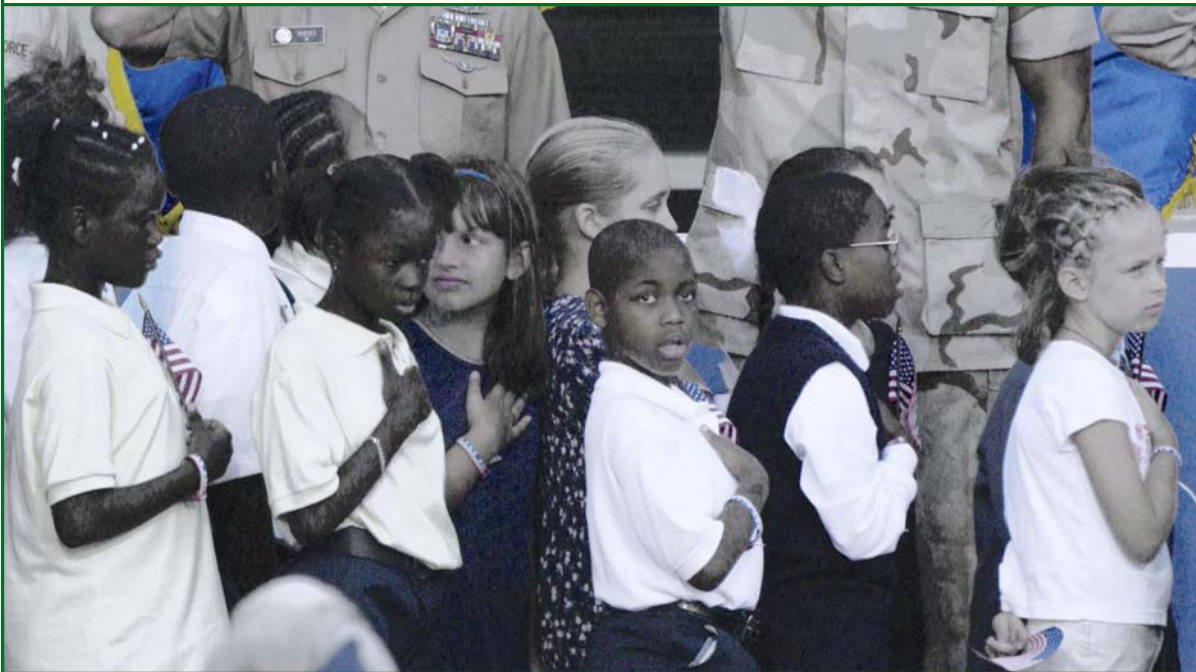


Why does the Preamble say “We the People do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America”?

In 1787, the Framers wrote and signed the Constitution. The Preamble to the Constitution says that “We the People of the United States do **ordain** (give official approval) and **establish** (accept) this Constitution for the United States of America.” This means that the Constitution was approved by the people of the United States and that they agreed to live under the government it created. Each generation of Americans—including yours—must give its approval or consent to live under the government created by the Constitution.

- How do you and other Americans show that you consent to be governed under the Constitution?
- How do you, as one of the people, ordain and establish the Constitution?

There are many ways of answering these questions. One way is by willingly obeying the laws. Another way to show your consent is by repeating the Pledge of Allegiance. You also give consent when you take part in solving your community’s problems. When you are older, you can give your consent by voting, serving on a jury, or holding public office. Taking your place as a citizen, one of “We the People,” means that you consent to live under the Constitution.



► *How can citizens show that they give approval to be governed by the Constitution?*

Problem to solve



What ideas are expressed in the Preamble?

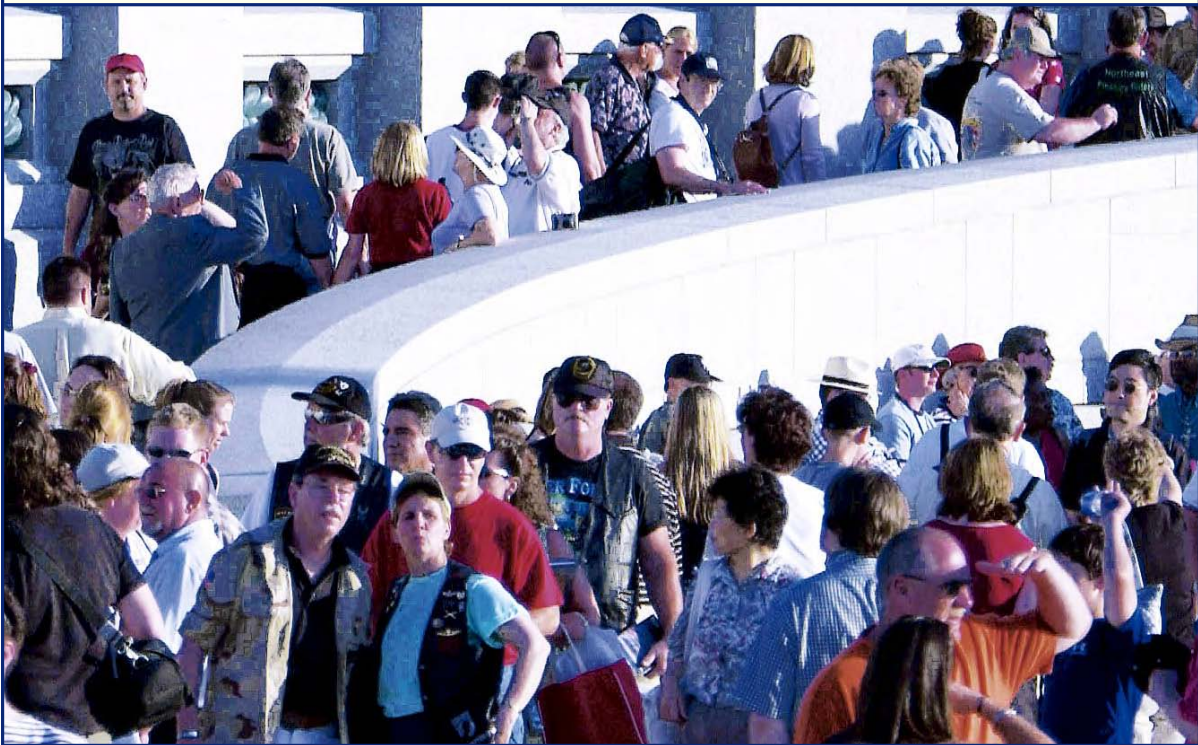
The Preamble to the Constitution explains who created the Constitution and the basic purposes of our government. “We the People” are the first words in the Preamble. These words are very important. They show that the power to govern belongs to the people. The people established the Constitution. They used it to create a government to protect their rights and their welfare.

The ideas in the Preamble are so important that you should study them carefully. To do this, first read the entire Preamble.

Preamble to the Constitution of the United States

We the People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, 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.

The Preamble is made up of many words that might be hard to understand when you first read them. But if you study them, you will find they are not that difficult.



▶ *Why are the first words of the Constitution, “We the People,” so important?*

Problem to solve (CONTINUED)

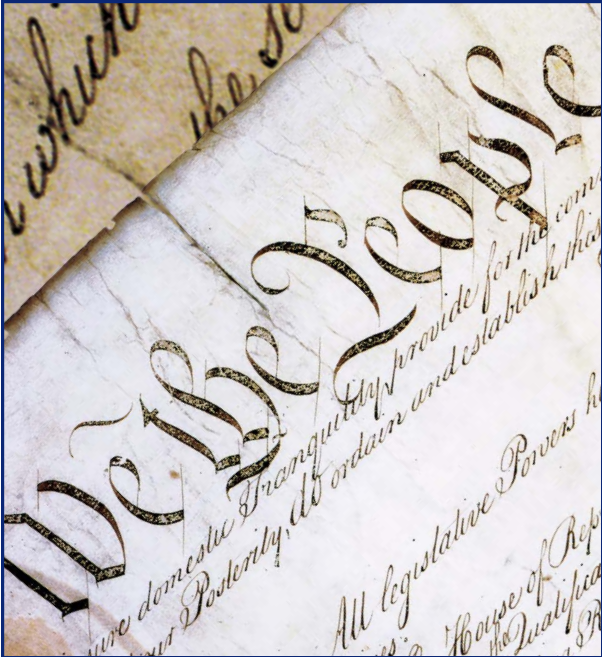


Let's examine the basic ideas in the Preamble to see how important they are to all of us. To do this, your class may work in small groups. Each group should study one part of the Preamble.

- Group 1** do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.
- Group 2** establish justice
- Group 3** insure domestic tranquility
- Group 4** provide for the common defense
- Group 5** promote the general welfare
- Group 6** secure the blessings of liberty

Each group should answer the following questions about the part it is studying. Be prepared to explain your group's answers to the rest of the class.

1. What do the words that your group studied mean? Give an example.
2. Why is the part of the Preamble that your group studied important?
3. What does the part your group studied have to do with protecting your rights and the common good?



▶ Are the purposes of government that are listed in the Preamble still the same today?

▶ Which words in the Preamble give government the right to organize military forces?

Reviewing the lesson



1. Some people have said the most important words in our Constitution are the first three words of the Preamble. These are the words, "We the People." Explain why you agree or disagree with this opinion.
2. In your own words, explain what establishing justice means. Why is this an important purpose of government?
3. Explain the difference between ensuring domestic tranquility and providing for the common defense.
4. What is the general welfare? What are some ways to promote the general welfare?
5. What are some of the blessings of liberty that you enjoy? How can you help to make sure that future generations will also enjoy them?
6. How can you and other Americans show that you consent to live under the Constitution?



LESSON OVERVIEW

This lesson explores some of the ideas in the Preamble to the Constitution. Students learn the importance of the words, “We the People.” The lesson emphasizes that the power to govern belongs to the people who have created the government to protect their rights and promote their welfare. Students read the Preamble and develop definitions for the six key phrases in the document.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of the lesson, students should be able to

1. explain the purpose of the Preamble to the Constitution
2. explain what some of the key phrases in the Preamble mean

TEACHING PROCEDURES

A. Introductory Activity

Understanding the importance of the Preamble

Have the students read the “Purpose of the Lesson” section and consider the objectives of the lesson. Write the “Terms to Understand” on the board, or use a vocabulary-building activity of your choice.

B. Ideas to Discuss

1. **What do you think should be the purpose of government?**

Have students work with a partner or in groups of three to five. Students should

read the five questions and discuss possible answers. They should be encouraged to examine their own experiences and to form reasoned opinions. Have each group or pair share their responses with the class.

2. **Why does the Preamble say “We the People do ordain and establish this Constitution?”**

Read the first paragraph of this section aloud with students. Then lead a discussion using the question and examples presented in the second paragraph. Make sure that students understand the concepts of “ordain” and “establish.”

C. Problem-Solving Activity

What ideas are expressed in the Preamble?

Have the class work in groups of three to five students. Assign each group one of the purposes of our national government. Students are responsible for explaining their assigned purpose and should give examples of how our national government tries to accomplish the purpose. The three questions at the end of the problem-solving activity will help each group to focus on their part of the activity. The activity presents the opportunity for groups to not just answer the questions but to engage in the exercise in a variety of ways: drawing a poster; preparing a short dramatic skit; conducting an imaginary radio call-in show; or conducting an imaginary interview with a member of Congress, the president of the United States, or a justice of the U.S. Supreme Court.

D. Concluding the Lesson

Conclude the lesson with a discussion of the questions in “Review the Lesson.”

The questions are directly related to the lesson objectives. You may wish to include additional questions developed by yourself or by students.

SUPPLEMENTAL ACTIVITIES

1. The people who worked on writing the Preamble were William Samuel Johnson, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, Rufus King, and Gouverneur Morris. Have students read more about these men and share what they learn with the class.
2. Working with a partner, the students could create a skit. One could portray Patrick Henry who said the Framers did not have the right to speak the language of “We the People” instead of “We the States.” The other student should portray Gouverneur Morris defending the position of the Framers in the use of the words “We the People.”
3. Students could create symbols to represent each of the six parts of the Preamble. In their own words, they would write a sentence that tells what each symbol meant. Use the symbols to create a bulletin board for your classroom.

ADDITIONAL READINGS

Commager, Henry Steele. *The Great Constitution: A Book for Young Americans*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1961.

Fritz, Jean. *Will You Sign Here, John Hancock?* Original Edition: New York: Coward McCann, 1976.

Prolman, Marilyn. *The Story of the Constitution*. Chicago: Children’s Press, 1995.

Winn, Marie. *Shiver, Gobble and Snore: A Story About Why People Need Laws*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972. Illustrated by Whitney Darrow. Her Concept Storybooks.





This supplemental lesson celebrating the Constitution is adapted from *We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution*, Elementary Level, Lesson 11, “What Basic Ideas are in the Preamble to the Constitution?”. This 2003 text was published by the [Center for Civic Education](#).

This Constitution and citizenship lesson is cosponsored by The American Association of School Administrators. AASA, founded in 1865, is the professional organization for over 14,000 educational leaders across America and in many other countries. AASA’s mission is to support and develop effective school system leaders who are dedicated to the highest quality public education for all children. AASA’s major focus is standing up for public education.

The [Center for Civic Education](#) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan educational corporation dedicated to fostering the development of informed, responsible participation in civic life by citizens committed to the values and principles fundamental to American constitutional democracy.

The Center specializes in civic/citizenship education, and international education exchange programs for developing democracies. For additional information on the Center’s programs and curricula, contact the [Center for Civic Education](#).

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5145 Douglas Fir Road
Calabasas, CA 91302
800.350.4223
818.591.9330 FAX
cce@civiced.org
www.civiced.org