

# Constitution Day

## September 17<sup>th</sup>

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### LESSONS AND RESOURCES

#### What Is Constitution Day?

Source: Associated Press, 05/25/05, "Schools Required to Teach Constitution on Sept. 17<sup>th</sup>".  
<http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/news.aspx?id=15344>

**Activity #1: (Elementary)** Read through the Associated Press article about Constitution Day. Then read aloud those parts of the article that you feel are appropriate for a young student. Instruct your student that he/she is to write one paragraph about when and what Constitution Day is. Discuss what concepts your student would like to include from the article. Write the key words from your discussion on the board as their word bank to refer to when they do their writing. Show them how to write a "Name It, Verb It, Finish It" topic sentence.

**(Secondary)** For older students, ask them to write a 3-5 paragraph persuasive essay explaining their reasons why Congress should or should not have passed the bill requiring schools to teach about the Constitution on the day of its adoption, one day of every year.

#### Transcriptions of the Articles of the Constitution

Source: National Archives and Records Administration, The Charters of Freedom

**Articles of the Constitution** (click on printer-friendly version)

[http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/constitution\\_transcript.html](http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/constitution_transcript.html)

**Amendments 1-10, The Bill of Rights** (click on printer-friendly version)

[http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/bill\\_of\\_rights\\_transcript.html](http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/bill_of_rights_transcript.html)

**Amendments 11-27** (click on printer-friendly version)

[http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/constitution\\_amendments\\_11-27.html](http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/constitution_amendments_11-27.html)

# High-Resolution Download Copies of all Original Handwritten Documents

Source: National Archives and Records Administration, The Charters of Freedom

[http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/charters\\_downloads.html](http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/charters_downloads.html)

## "A More Perfect Union"

Source: National Archives and Records Administration, The Charters of Freedom

[http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/constitution\\_history.html](http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/constitution_history.html)

**Activity #2: (Secondary)** Take turns reading out loud with your older student this overview article about the creation of the U. S. Constitution. Have your student be able to explain the failings of the Articles of Confederation, the Virginia Plan, the New Jersey Plan, the Hamilton's Plan, the Great Compromise, and the issues among the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists.

## "The Declaration of Independence: A History"

Source: National Archives and Records Administration, The Charters of Freedom

[http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/declaration\\_history.html](http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/declaration_history.html)

**Activity #3: (Secondary)** Take turns reading out loud with your older student this detailed account of the Declaration of Independence, from the Articles of Confederation to the Declaration's drafting through its preservation today at the National Archives. Discuss this in the context of being one of the major events on the road to the adoption of the United States Constitution.

## Timeline of Events Leading to the Constitution

Source: National Archives and Records Administration, The Charters of Freedom

**Activity #4: (All Grades)** Read through the Timeline "highlights" with younger and older students. For older students, re-read the timeline, only this time, read the information for each link as you go through the list of events.

**1763** - When the King began to assert his authority over the colonies to make them share the cost of the Seven Years' War England had just fought and won, the English colonists protested by invoking their rights as free men and loyal

subjects. It was only after a decade of repeated efforts on the part of the colonists to defend their rights that they resorted to armed conflict and, eventually, to the unthinkable—separation from the motherland.

[http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/charters\\_of\\_freedom\\_1.html](http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/charters_of_freedom_1.html)

**1774** - The sole governing authority presiding over the tumultuous events of the American Revolution between 1774 and 1789 was a body known as Congress. It was made up of representatives from the thirteen colonies and had no power to regulate commerce or lay taxes, and little ability to enforce any of its decisions.

[http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/charters\\_of\\_freedom\\_2.html](http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/charters_of_freedom_2.html)

**July 4, 1776** - Congress completed the final editing of the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration announced to the world the separation of the United States of America from the British monarchy. It explained the causes of this radical move with a long list of charges against the King. By the time the last of the fifty-six signers had affixed their names to the final, edited document months later, the largest invasion force in British military history had begun to reach New York harbor and soldiers had taken New York City.

[http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/charters\\_of\\_freedom\\_3.html](http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/charters_of_freedom_3.html)

<http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/declaration.html>

**May 1776** - In anticipation of its separation from Britain, Congress understood that it would be left with no central government. It had to design and install a new government quickly. Congress advised each of the colonies to draw up plans for state governments.

**June 1776** - The Continental Congress began to work on a plan for a central government. It took five years for it to be approved, first by members of Congress and then by the states.

**1780** - All thirteen states had adopted written constitutions.

**March 1, 1781** - The Articles of Confederation, our country's first constitution, went into force. It had taken five years for the Continental Congress to write and approve it. The first constitution was composed by a body of individuals that

directed most of its attention to fighting and winning the War for Independence. It came into being at a time when Americans had a deep-seated fear of a central authority and long-standing loyalty to the state in which they lived and often called their "country". Ultimately, the Articles of Confederation proved unwieldy and inadequate to resolve the issues that faced the United States in its earliest years, but it marked a crucial step toward nationhood.

[http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/charters\\_of\\_freedom\\_4.html](http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/charters_of_freedom_4.html)

[http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/charters\\_of\\_freedom\\_5.html](http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/charters_of_freedom_5.html)

**September 17, 1787** - The Constitution of the United States of America was signed. Eleven years after the Declaration of Independence, the War for Independence had been won, but the survival of the young country seemed in doubt because of economic depression, social unrest, interstate rivalries, and foreign intrigue that appeared to be unraveling the fragile confederation. In early 1787 a special convention was called to revise the Articles of Confederation. After four months, what emerged from that room was not a revision, but an entirely new form of government—the Constitution of the United States of America. The delegates created a strong central government made up of three branches: legislative, executive, and judicial; each would be perpetually restrained by a sophisticated set of checks and balances. They hoped this Constitution would insure the survival of the experiment they had begun in 1776.

[http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/charters\\_of\\_freedom\\_6.html](http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/charters_of_freedom_6.html)

<http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/constitution.html>

**December 15, 1791** - Congress put into effect 10 Amendments to the Constitution that we now call the Bill of Rights. Twelve Amendments were proposed, but only 10 were added. These 10 Amendments explicitly list some of the rights guaranteed the people and include some of America's most treasured freedoms: freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, and the right to a fair and speedy trial.

[http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/charters\\_of\\_freedom\\_7.html](http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/charters_of_freedom_7.html)

[http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/bill\\_of\\_rights.html](http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/bill_of_rights.html)

# Activities

## The 39 Delegates:

Source: National Archives and Records Administration Digital Classroom

Find out about some the 39 delegates who signed the Constitution on September 17, 1787.

**Activity #5: (All Grades)** Click on the link below and select two of the delegates from the list. Write a summary paragraph for each of the two delegates.

<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/constitution-day/signers.html>

**Activity #6: (All Grades)** Click on the link below and select two of the delegates from the list. List up to ten things that these two delegates had in common, or list up to ten things that they did not have in common.

<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/constitution-day/signers.html>

**Activity #7: (All Grades)** Click on the link below. Since there were thirteen colonies, and 39 delegates, find out which delegates came from each of the colonies. Go on a WebQuest and find out what the process was for selecting these delegates.

<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/constitution-day/signers.html>

## Analyzing Original Documents:

Source: National Archives and Records Administration Digital Classroom

**Activity #8: (Secondary)** Print out from the link below, and complete the Written Document Analysis Worksheet to analyze the original document, "Delaware's Ratification of the Constitution". Print out from the two links below, a copy of the original document of "Delaware's Ratification of the Constitution", and the transcription of "Delaware's Ratification of the Constitution" to help you complete your analysis worksheet.

Written Document Analysis Worksheet:

<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/document.html>

Enlarged original document of Delaware's Ratification of the Constitution:

<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/constitution-day/images/delaware.gif>

The transcription of Delaware's Ratification of the Constitution:

<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/constitution-day/transcript.html>

## Advantages and Disadvantages of Working With an Original Handwritten Source:

Source: National Archives and Records Administration Digital Classroom

**Activity #9: (All Grades)** From the link below, print out a transcription copy of the Articles of the Constitution, and give it to your student:

[http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/constitution\\_transcript.html](http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/constitution_transcript.html)

From the link below, print out a high-resolution, original, handwritten copy of the Articles of the Constitution (four pages) and give it to your student:

[http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/charters\\_downloads.html](http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/charters_downloads.html)

Looking at the handwritten original document of the Articles of the Constitution, discuss that fact that this is more than a 200 year old document. Discuss the unique qualities of the handwriting, the spelling, the formation of the letter "s", the vocabulary, style, and the use of parchment and iron-based ink which bleeds through in time. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of working with a handwritten original source.

## Interview a Delegate:

**Activity #10: (Elementary)**

Click on the link below and choose one of the delegates:

<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/constitution-day/signers.html>

Click on the link below and print out the form, "Interviewing a Founding Father"

[http://stage30.scholastic.com/content/collateral\\_resources/pdf/a/april05\\_unit\\_InterviewFather.pdf](http://stage30.scholastic.com/content/collateral_resources/pdf/a/april05_unit_InterviewFather.pdf)

Use the information you read about your delegate to complete your interview form. Then on a separate piece of paper, write one paragraph using the information that you gathered.

## Constitution Day Webquest:

[http://www.murray.k12.ga.us/cesweb/constitution\\_day/webquestconstitutionday.html](http://www.murray.k12.ga.us/cesweb/constitution_day/webquestconstitutionday.html)

**Activities #11: (Elementary)** Click on the above website. Scroll to the lower half of the website homepage. Here you will see many tasks that your student can perform: You can memorize the Preamble to the Constitution with several

activities, write a five-paragraph theme about one of the founding fathers and tell why you chose him, draw and color a map of one of the states that ratified the Constitution and include seven facts about your choice including why you chose that state, make a poster illustrating the branches of the U. S. Government (or design a poster using Kidspiration or Inspiration), read lyrics and/or listen to some patriotic songs and write in your own words what it means to be patriotic, choose three symbols of the U. S. Government and make a sign about them using Kidpix or the software of your choice, Write a book report on, *Shh! We're Writing the Constitution*, by Jean Fritz. (Books and software mentioned in these activities are not available through the website. Parents need to already have them or need to obtain them.)

## Compare the Procedures for Ratifying the Constitution with the Procedures for Ratifying Amendments to the Constitution:

**Activity #12: (Secondary)** Uncover the issues involved in the creation and ratification of the United States Constitution and the new government it established while looking at Delaware's Ratification of the Constitution. From the link below, print out a transcription copy of the Articles of the Constitution:

[http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/constitution\\_transcript.html](http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/constitution_transcript.html)

From the link, print out a transcription copy of "Delaware's Ratification of the Constitution":

<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/constitution-day/transcript.html>

Ask your student to refer to Articles V and VII of the Constitution along with the "Delaware's Ratification of the Constitution" document and compare point-by-point the procedures for ratifying the Constitution with the procedures for ratifying amendments to the Constitution.

## Ben's Guide to U.S. Government (Grades K-2):

<http://bensguide.gpo.gov/k-2/symbols/index.html>

**Activity #13: (Lower Elementary)** Symbols of U.S. Government--symbol with definition and reader, and symbol matching game.

## Ben's Guide to U.S. Government (Grades 3-5):

<http://bensguide.gpo.gov/3-5/index.html>

**Activity #15 (Elementary)** Lots of information and fun activities at this site appropriate for elementary students. There are many links on the homepage, but the link "Historical Documents" is a favorite, and will let you click on the document you want to read about such as the Articles of the Constitution, and it will explain about the document using very simple, elementary vocabulary. You can sing songs, play games, do word puzzles, and much more at this website.

**Activity #16: (Elementary)** Preamble Scramble - Click on the link below to play this game.

[http://bensguide.gpo.gov/9-12/games/preamble\\_scramble.html](http://bensguide.gpo.gov/9-12/games/preamble_scramble.html)

## Ben's Guide to U.S. Government (Grades 6-8):

<http://bensguide.gpo.gov/6-8/index.html>

## Ben's Guide to U.S. Government (Grades 9-12):

<http://bensguide.gpo.gov/9-12/index.html>

## Constitution Day: Simplified Bill of Rights:

**Activity #17: (Most Grades)** Click on the link below and print out the "printer friendly" version of the original Bill of Rights:

[http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/bill\\_of\\_rights\\_transcript.html](http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/bill_of_rights_transcript.html)

Click on the link below and print out the simplified wording to the Bill of Rights:

[http://www.monet.k12.ca.us/Library/constitution\\_day.htm](http://www.monet.k12.ca.us/Library/constitution_day.htm)

Read through the original Bill of Rights one Amendment at a time, then read the same Amendment again in the simplified wording to help you better understand the meaning of the Amendment. Do this for all 10 Amendments in the Bill of Rights.

## Scholastic Constitution Lessons

[http://teacher.scholastic.com/scholasticnews/indepth/constitution\\_day/constitution\\_day/index.asp?article=benfranklin](http://teacher.scholastic.com/scholasticnews/indepth/constitution_day/constitution_day/index.asp?article=benfranklin)

**Activity #18: (Elementary)** Click on the link above. Students will want to read the articles, by clicking on the left side bars. The left side bar that says "Teacher Lesson Helper" will have the lesson plans/activities for the Constitution. They are designed for the classroom, but could easily be modified for the home.

## Concentrating on the Preamble:

<http://www.monet.k12.ca.us/Library/constitution%20day/ConstitutionDayk-2.pdf>

**Activity # 19: (Lower Elementary)** The above link will take you to several lesson plans to teach lower elementary students about the Preamble. The Preamble is also done as a handout/poster with the original language explained in the body of the text.

## United States Government for Kids:

Source: ThinkQuest.org

<http://library.thinkquest.org/5873/>

**Activity #20: (Elementary)** Go to the Thinkquest link provided above. Click and read about our government. Then click on the Activities. Choose one of the activities to complete: Government Quiz, Wordsearch, Crossword Puzzle, or What Are Your Cool Rules?

## United States Government for Kids:

Source: ThinkQuest.org

<http://library.thinkquest.org/5873/importan.htm>

**Activity #21: (Elementary)** Click on the link above, and read the Preamble to the Constitution in its original words, or click on the phrase, and read it in everyday words. A great tool to help your student learn the meaning of the Preamble.

## American Symbols Game:

<http://www.texaslre.org/asymbols/symbolsgameintro.html>

**Activity #22: (Elementary)** Match the symbol to the definition for 30 symbols.

# Books to Read

## Elementary:

- *Shh! We're Writing the Constitution*, by Jean Fritz
- *We the People*, by Peter Spier
- *The Great Little Madison*, by Jean Fritz

## Secondary:

- "The Federalist Papers"

Source: United States Government

<http://thomas.loc.gov/home/histdox/fedpapers.html>

A series of 85 essays written by Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison in 1787-88 published to urge New Yorkers to ratify the proposed United States Constitution.

# Student & Teacher Resources

## Elementary:

- *U.S. Constitution Thematic Unit*

Source: Teacher Created Materials

Literature-based, cross-curricular activities.

- *Celebrating Constitution Day, K-3 Teacher Resource Book*

Source: Teacher Created Materials

This resource book contains lots of activities to introduce the Constitution to K-3 students. The activities are designed to engage students in history and civics.

- *Constitution Day Lessons*

<http://www.civiced.org/byrd2006/>

There is a very thorough lesson for each grade, K-12. The material was developed by the Center for Civic Education, the same folks who distribute the

"We the People" Civics books. All lessons also come in print and in MP3 (except there is not MP3 for Kindergarten).

## Secondary:

- **The United States Constitution**

Source: Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute

<http://www.cis.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1982/3/82.03.03.x.html>

Constitution Curriculum and Teacher Lesson Guide

- **A Roadmap to the United States Constitution**

Source: ThinkQuest.org

<http://library.thinkquest.org/11572/>

This site is dedicated to providing students of all kinds with knowledge of the United States Constitution and Bill of Rights. Find everything you've ever wanted to know about the U. S. Constitution. The website is divided into the following categories: Constitution (with quick links to each section of the Constitution and a plain English section), Origins, Creation, Issues, Court Cases, & Message Boards.

- **American History Projects: focusing on Multiple Intelligence**

Source: Good Apple

This teacher resource book provides excellent resource projects using the multiple intelligences theory. Students select projects using ideas available in this resource book. (Grades 4-8).

## Websites

- **Constitution Society (Secondary)**

<http://www.constitution.org/>

This site aims to eventually provide almost everything one needs to accurately decide what is and what is not constitutional in most cases.

- **Law Focused Education Center (Elementary)**

Website Homepage

<http://www.texaslre.org>

Pirate of the Preamble Game

[http://www.texaslre.org/PiratePreamble/pirates\\_game.html](http://www.texaslre.org/PiratePreamble/pirates_game.html)

Bill of Rights Match Game

<http://www.texaslre.org/BOR/billofrights.html>

The Pledge of Allegiance Game

[http://www.texaslre.org/pledge\\_game.html](http://www.texaslre.org/pledge_game.html)

Constitution Relay Game

<http://www.texaslre.org/onlinegames.html>

- **Constitution Day Inc.**

<http://www.constitutionday.com/>

To get this link to work, I had to copy/past the above link into the URL on my computer, and delete anything extra that the computer tried to add, then press enter, and it would go to the site.

Gives the schedule for the states to say the Preamble to the Constitution nationwide simultaneously. Constitution Day Video link to download onto computer and watch on Constitution Day (may need to download player).

- **U. S. Constitution Online (All Grades)**

Website Homepage

<http://www.usconstitution.net/>

To get this link to work, I had to copy/past the above link into the URL on my computer, and delete anything extra that the computer tried to add, then press enter, and it would go to the site.

The Constitution for Kids, Kindergarten through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade

<http://www.usconstitution.net/constkidsK.html>

The Constitution for Kids, 4<sup>th</sup> grade through 7<sup>th</sup> grade

<http://www.usconstitution.net/constkids4.html>

The Constitution for Kids, 8<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup>

<http://www.usconstitution.net/constkids.html>

- **National Constitution Center (Secondary)**

<http://www.constitutioncenter.org/>

Constitutional timeline

<http://www.constitutioncenter.org/timeline/index.html>

Search the interactive constitution by topic, key word/phrase, court case

<http://www.constitutioncenter.org/constitution/>

Constitution basics

<http://www.constitutioncenter.org/explore/BasicGoverningPrinciples/index.shtml>

Constitution in Other Languages

<http://www.constitutioncenter.org/explore/TheU.S.Constitution/OtherLanguages.shtml>

Constitution in Spanish

<http://www.constitutioncenter.org/explore/TheU.S.Constitution/Enespanol.shtml>