



POLITICAL PRINCIPLES IN THE U.S. CONSTITUTION

LESSON SUMMARY

BENCHMARK
SS.912.CG.1.5 Explain how the U.S. Constitution and its amendments uphold the following political principles: checks and balances, consent of the governed, democracy, due process of law, federalism, individual rights, limited government, representative government, republicanism, rule of law, and separation of powers.
BENCHMARK CLARIFICATIONS
- Students will explain how the structure and function of the U.S. government reflect these political principles. - Students will differentiate between republicanism and democracy, and discuss how the United States reflects both. - Students will describe compromises made during the Constitutional Convention (e.g., the Great Compromise, the Three-Fifths Compromise, the Electoral College).
FLORIDA CIVIC LITERACY EXAM COMPETENCY CONNECTION
Competency 1: Understanding of the basic principles and practices of American democracy and how they are applied in our republican form of government Competency 4: Understanding of landmark Supreme Court cases, landmark legislation, and landmark executive actions and their impact on law and society
ESSENTIAL QUESTION
How do the U.S. Constitution and its amendments uphold important political principles?
GOVERNMENT CONTENT VOCABULARY
checks and balances, consent of the governed, Constitutional Convention, democracy, due process of law, Electoral College, federalism, Great Compromise, individual rights, limited government, representative government, republicanism, rule of law, separation of powers, Three-Fifths Compromise
INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES
Primary source analysis, Annotating and paraphrasing
MATERIALS
- Constitutional Convention slides - Compromises Made During the Constitutional Convention reading - Constitutional Convention Compromises Chart

- I Have, Who Has Vocabulary Cards
- U.S. Constitution text
- Key Principles in the U.S. Constitution chart
- Ticket Out The Door (2 per sheet)

B.E.S.T. STANDARDS

The grade in which this lesson is taught will determine the specific B.E.S.T. standards correlation.
Thematically, this lesson aligns to:

- ELA.R.2.1 Structure
- ELA.R.2.2 Central Idea
- ELA.R.2.4 Argument

ACTIVITY SEQUENCE

DAY 1

1. Begin the lesson by projecting the “[Constitutional Convention slides](#).”
2. Project slide 1 and ask students if they can identify the famous location/event shown in the photo (Independence Hall, Philadelphia, PA, location for the Declaration and Constitution)
3. Move to slide 2 and review with students the demographics of the delegates at the Constitutional Convention. Ask students: After examining this list, what problems/controversies/debates do you think arose amongst this group?
4. Project slide 3. Together, read the quotes from Benjamin Franklin.
5. Have students complete a think-pair-share for the questions on slide 3.
6. Once the discussion is complete, explain to students that during the Constitutional Convention in 1787, many debates were held, and many delegates expressed views related to what they felt were the most important principles to include in the new government. Ultimately, compromises had to be made to get the version of the U.S. Constitution we know today. In this lesson, we will examine some of the more contentious compromises as well as some of the important agreed-upon principles that were included.
7. Place students into pairs.
8. Distribute a “[Compromises Made During the Constitutional Convention reading](#)” and a “[Constitutional Convention Compromises Chart](#)” to each student.
9. Instruct students to work as pairs to read the text, annotating as they go. Next, they need to paraphrase the information into the appropriate sections of their chart.
10. As students read with their partners and fill in their charts, circulate the room to monitor for engagement and understanding.
11. When pairs complete their chart, review the compromises with a whole-class discussion.
Teacher Note: Use the sample answers provided to help guide the discussion.

DAY 2

1. Begin today’s lesson by reviewing some of the more contentious compromises made at the Constitutional Convention that you learned about yesterday. Explain that today, students will be examining some of the most important agreed-upon principles reflected in the U.S. Constitution and in the structure and function of our government today.
2. Distribute one of the “[I Have, Who Has Vocabulary Cards](#)” to each student.
Teacher Note: There may not be enough vocabulary cards for every student to have one. You can have extra students pair up with a student who has a card and help them in the activity.
3. Explain to students that each card has a vocabulary term at the top (‘I Have’) and a definition of a different vocabulary word at the bottom (‘Who Has’).
4. As a class, students should use their prior knowledge of civics/government vocabulary, along with context clues, to find the person who has the vocabulary term at the top of the card that matches the definition at the bottom of theirs. They should stand next to that person. As students begin to match terms and definitions, they should end up forming a circle if done correctly.
Teacher Note: Students should possess definitional knowledge of all of these terms from previous grade levels and courses. If you feel your students need additional support, explicitly teach these terms first and then engage in this activity.
5. Once students have found their matches and the circle is formed, start with one student and have them read their definition (‘Who Has’). Have the student next to them reveal the vocabulary term that matches (‘I Have’) and then read their ‘Who Has’ definition. Continue all the way around the circle.
6. Have students return to their seats and pass out the “[Key Principles in the U.S. Constitution chart](#).”
7. Provide students access to either a paper or digital copy of the U.S. Constitution.

Teacher Note: As the U.S. Constitution will be a frequently referenced document throughout the Government course, many teachers will acquire a set of ‘pocket constitutions’ to keep on hand in the classroom for student use.

8. Explain to students that today, their task is to use the U.S. Constitution and its amendments to show how the United States upholds and reflects the principles listed on the chart. Encourage them to not just look at the text, but to think of the functions and structures of government it establishes.

Teacher Note: This lesson and activities are structured from the assumption that students have been exposed to these terms/principles numerous times in this course and previous years. If this is not the case, the teacher could pull specific constitutional excerpts to project for students, discuss as a class, and match them together to the principle they reflect. You could use the provided Content Background Information below to help you pull those examples.

9. Provide students time to work, circulating the room to monitor for engagement and assist when needed.
10. Once students have finished, conduct an all-class review. Focus on ensuring students can differentiate between the terms/principles of democracy and republicanism/representative government.
- Democracy (direct): Power is held by the people; people directly decide on policy
 - Republic: Power is held by the people; people select representatives to make policy decisions on their behalf

Teacher Note: Use the sample answers provided to guide the review of the key principles.

11. End the lesson by having students complete the “[Ticket Out The Door](#),” responding to the following prompt: How does the United States reflect elements of both a democracy and a republic?

SAMPLE ANSWERS

[Constitutional Convention Compromises Chart](#)
[I Have, Who Has Vocabulary Cards](#)
[Key Principles in the U.S. Constitution chart](#)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[FJCC/LFI Website](#)
[Florida Department of Education: Florida Civic Literacy Exam Homepage](#)
Florida Department of Education’s Civic Literacy Reading List

- *Democracy in America* by Alexis de Tocqueville
- *Federalist Papers* by James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay
- *Notes on the Constitutional Convention* by James Madison

SOURCES

Federalist No. 14: <https://guides.loc.gov/federalist-papers/text-11-20#s-lg-box-wrapper-25493285>
Debate over the creation of the Electoral College:
<https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2012/summer/archivist.html>
The U.S. Constitution: <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript>
Historical Context: The Constitution and Slavery from the Gilder Lehrman Institute:
<https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/teaching-resource/historical-context-constitution-and-slavery#:~:text=The%20framers%20of%20the%20Constitution,refuse%20to%20join%20the%20Union.>
The Delegates from Teaching American History:
<https://teachingamericanhistory.org/resource/convention/the-delegates/#:~:text=The%20average%20age%20of%20the.and%20six%20from%20British%20Universities.>

Franklin Quote from Constitutional Convention and Ratification from the National Constitution Center:
<https://constitutioncenter.org/education/constitution-101-curriculum/4-constitutional-convention-and-ratification>

GOVERNMENT CONTENT VOCABULARY

TERM	DEFINITION
checks and balances	a principle of government that allows each branch of government to limit the power of the other branches
consent of the governed	the idea that government gains its power/authority from the people
Constitutional Convention	a meeting in Philadelphia in 1787 where delegates decided to throw out the Articles of Confederation and draft the U.S. Constitution
democracy	a form of government in which political power is held by the people; may be direct or indirect
due process of law	the right of people accused of crimes to have laws that treat them fairly, so that they cannot lose their life or freedom without having their legal rights protected
Electoral College	a group of electors appointed by each state and the District of Columbia who, under Article II, Section 1, Clause 2 of the U.S. Constitution, form every 4 years for the sole purpose of selecting the president and vice president
federalism	the division of power between the national government and state governments
Great Compromise	compromise that established the United States legislature as bicameral (two-house); the Senate would allow each state two representatives; the House of Representatives would have the number of representatives allowed for each state be determined by its population
individual rights	rights an individual is born with that cannot be given or taken by government (ex. life, liberty, pursuit of happiness); also known as inalienable/unalienable rights
limited government	a government that has been limited in power by a constitution, or written agreement
representative government	a form of government that allows people to vote and elect government officials to represent their beliefs and make decisions on their behalf
republicanism	the political belief that supports the idea of republican government where citizens choose their representatives and leaders and actively participate in civic life for the common good of the nation/community
rule of law	a principle under which all persons, institutions, and entities are accountable to laws; no one is above the law
separation of powers	a principle of government that sets up a structural division of responsibilities within distinct branches, each with their own powers and processes
Three-Fifths Compromise	compromise that determined how to count the slave population when calculating a state's total population for legislative representation and taxation purposes

CONTENT BACKGROUND INFORMATION

[Teacher Content, Not Intended For Student Use]

1. Key Political Principles in the U.S. Constitution and Government

Principle	Definition	Example(s)
checks and balances	a principle of government that allows each branch of government to limit the power of the other branches	House of Representatives has the sole power of impeachment while the Senate tries impeachments; the presidential veto; Congressional veto override (Article I); judicial review (Article III)
consent of the governed	the idea that government gains its power/authority from the people	From the Preamble: <i>"We the People of the United States, ... do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."</i> Representatives and (after the Seventeenth Amendment) Senators chosen by the people of the states
democracy	a form of government in which political power is held by the people; can be direct (each individual person makes decisions) or indirect (people elect representatives to make decisions)	Representative democracy set up in the form of Congress in Article I Fifteenth, Nineteenth, and Twenty-Sixth Amendments expansion of voting rights to African Americans, women, and those at least eighteen years old Seventeenth Amendment provides for the direct election of Senators
due process of law	the right of people accused of crimes to have laws that treat them fairly, so that they cannot lose their life or freedom without having their legal rights protected	Fifth Amendment: <i>"No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a Grand Jury, ... nor shall any person be subject for the same offence to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law;"</i> Sixth Amendment right to a fair, speedy trial by a jury of one's peers, right to representation, et al. Seventh Amendment right to a jury in civil trials Eighth Amendment protection against cruel and unusual punishment
federalism	a system of government in which power is divided and shared between national, state, and local governments	Article IV Tenth Amendment reserves powers not enumerated to the states

individual rights	rights guaranteed or belonging to a person; cannot be given or taken away by government	Amendments 1-9 of the Bill of Rights
limited government	a government that has been limited in power, such as by a constitution, or written agreement	From the Preamble of the U.S. Constitution: <i>“We the People of the United States, ... do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”</i> Article VI, Clause 3: <i>“The Senators and Representatives before mentioned, and the Members of the several State Legislatures, and all executive and judicial Officers, both of the United States and of the several States, shall be bound by Oath or Affirmation, to support this Constitution”</i>
representative government	a type of government that allows people to vote and elect government officials to represent their beliefs and make decisions on their behalf	Representatives and (after the Seventeenth Amendment) Senators chosen by the people of the states Reapportionment of House seats every 10 years based on the Census Fifteenth, Nineteenth, and Twenty-Sixth Amendments expansion of voting rights to African Americans, women, and those at least eighteen years old Twenty-Fourth Amendment’s elimination of the poll tax to protect voting rights
republicanism	the political belief that the best form of government is one where citizens choose their representatives and leaders and actively participate in civic life for the common good of the nation/community	Preamble: <i>“We the People...”</i> Article IV Section 4: guarantee of a republican form of government to every state Representatives and (after the Seventeenth Amendment) Senators chosen by the people of the states
rule of law	those who govern must follow the laws; no one is above the law	Article VI Clause II (the “Supremacy Clause”): the Constitution is the supreme law of the land Elections See “checks and balances” and “due process of law” above
separation of powers	a structure of government that sets up different branches with their own	The legislative, executive, and judicial powers are divided via Articles I, II, and III

	distinct powers and responsibilities	
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2. How the United States Reflects Both Republicanism and Democracy

The United States is both a republic and a democracy. In *Federalist* No. 14, James Madison contrasted the two saying: “*In a democracy, the people meet and exercise the government in person; in a republic, they assemble and administer it by their representatives and agents. A democracy, consequently, will be confined to a small spot. A republic may be extended over a large region.*”

Many examples of democracies came from the ancient world and were *direct* (or “pure”) democracies. The Framers often expressed distrust and skepticism, believing that in a democracy as they understood it (direct democracy), majorities, especially in times of inflamed passions, would trample the rights of those in the minority. They referred to this idea as “the tyranny of the majority.” To avoid what they had studied as the pitfalls of direct democracy, they deliberately set up what they described as a republic, which is, according to the American Heritage Dictionary, “a political order in which the supreme power lies in a body of citizens who are entitled to vote for officers and representatives responsible to them.” The key difference to the Framers was that a republic relied on representation, while in a democracy, the people decided on issues themselves. The choosing of representation in government is still a democratic process. But given the size of the growing United States, electing representatives to make policy decisions on behalf of citizens seemed like a necessary and practical component for the new government. Although the U.S. republic would not have citizens involved in every policy decision like a direct democracy, the Framers still believed that the republic would only survive if citizens stayed engaged with civic and political responsibilities beyond voting.

As both democracies and republics gain their legitimacy from the people, and depend on rule by and for the people, the United States is best understood as a reflection of both.

3. Key Compromises Made During the Constitutional Convention

Name	Disagreement and Debate	Compromise and Result
The Great Compromise	Over the legislative structure of government under the Constitution; smaller states wished (“the New Jersey Plan”) to retain the equal weight of votes between states as under the Articles of Confederation; larger states thought that as they represented a greater portion of the population, they were entitled to greater weight behind their vote, with apportionment based on population (“the Virginia Plan”)	Proposed by delegate Roger Sherman (CT), created a bicameral legislature, with a lower house (the House of Representatives) apportioned based on population (to please the larger states), and an upper house (the Senate) retaining equal representation between the states (i.e. two senators per state).
The Three-Fifths Compromise	Over the counting of slaves as a part of a state’s population for purposes of representation in Congress and taxation. Northern states wanted them counted for purposes of taxation but did not want them counted for purposes of representation (thus giving the southern states <i>less</i> overall representation) while southern states held the inverse position: that slaves should be	Proposed by James Wilson (PA) after earlier proposed and debated ratios failed, settled on counting slaves (described in the Constitution under the euphemism “other persons”) as only three-fifths of their actual numbers for both representation and taxation

	counted as people for purposes of representation in Congress, but as property when it came to the levying of taxes	
The Electoral College	As originally designed, Congress would select the president. However, it was feared that this would violate the separation of powers and leave the president beholden to Congress. Some delegates (notably James Madison) favored a popular election of the president but this was viewed as impractical.	Electors apportioned among each state by weight of population and chosen by each state "in such manner as its Legislature may direct" Popular votes determines who wins each state's electors. 270 electoral votes are needed to win a presidential election.