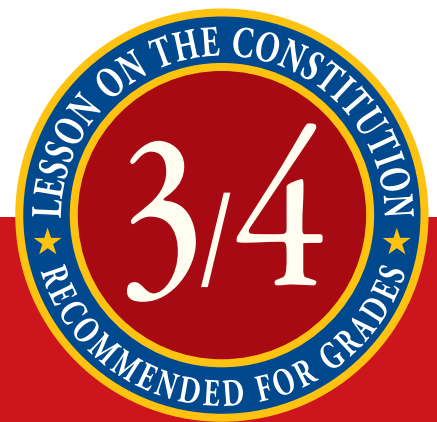


We the People

Constitution Day

ACROSS THE COUNTRY ***** SEPTEMBER 17



About Constitution Day

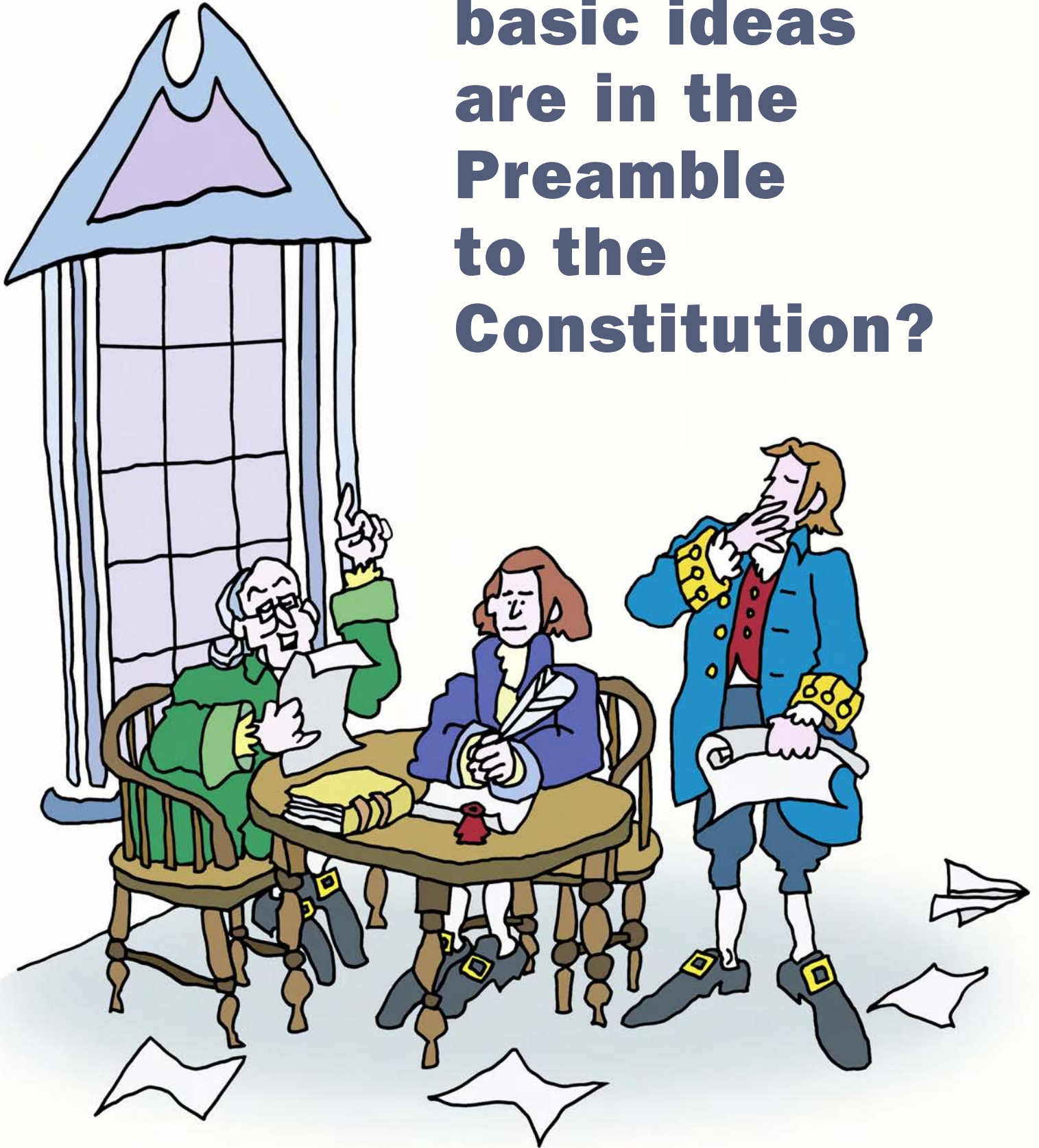


In 1952, President Harry S. Truman signed a bill that moved “I Am an American Day” from the third Sunday in May to September 17 so that this holiday would coincide with the signing of the U.S. Constitution in 1787. Congress renamed the holiday “Citizenship Day.” A joint resolution passed in 1956 requested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

What basic ideas are in the Preamble to the Constitution?



Purpose of the Lesson

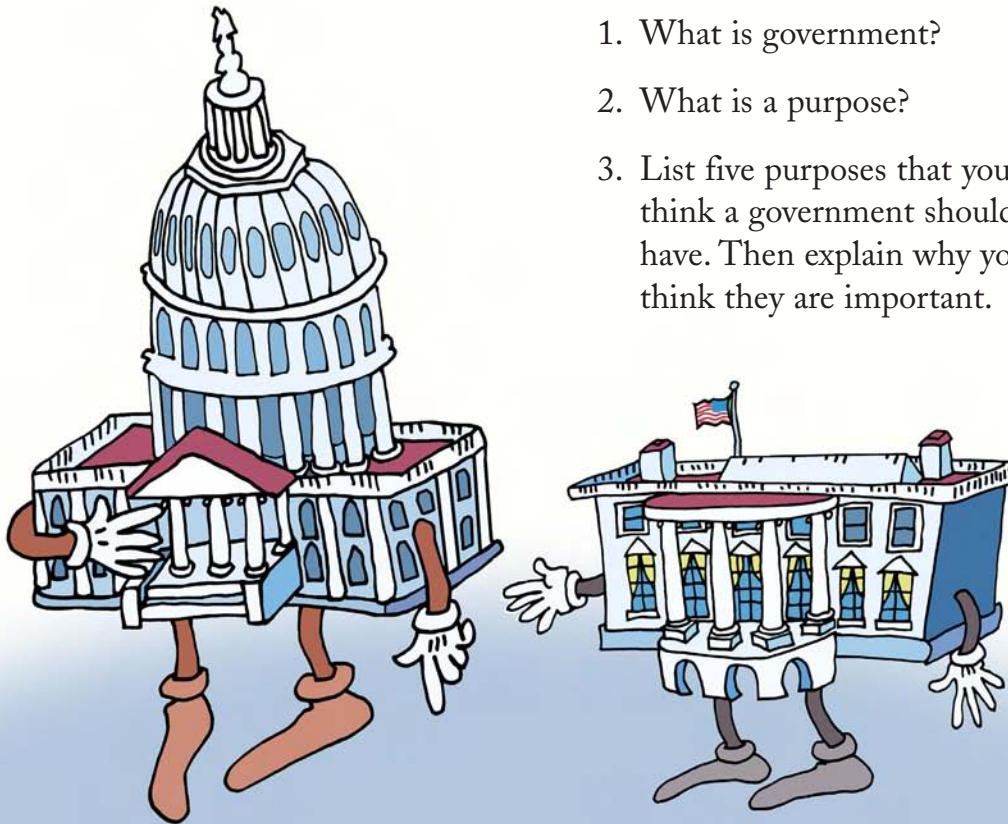
The Framers wrote an introduction, also called a preamble, to the Constitution. The Preamble states the purposes of our Constitution. It includes some of the basic ideas about government. When you finish this lesson, you should be able to explain these ideas.

What do you think the purpose of government should be?

Before you learn about the purposes stated in the Preamble, let's look at your own ideas. Then we can compare your ideas with those in the Constitution. You might find that you and the Framers think alike!

Work with a partner and answer the following questions:

1. What is government?
2. What is a purpose?
3. List five purposes that you think a government should have. Then explain why you think they are important.



What does the Preamble say?

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 Preamble’s Ideas

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

The 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.*

You can see the Preamble contains a lot of words that are not easy to understand when you first read them. But, if you study them, you will find they are not that difficult.



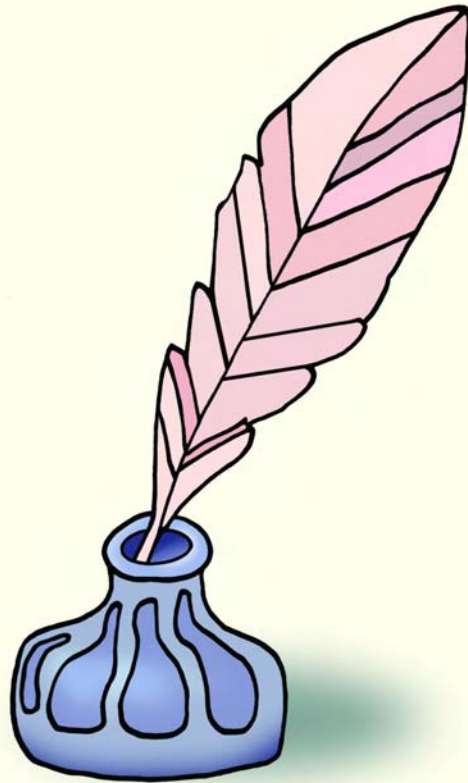
Problem Solving

Let's examine the basic ideas in the Preamble to see how important they are to all of us. To do this, your class should be divided into six groups. Each group should study one of the important parts of the Preamble listed below.

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.

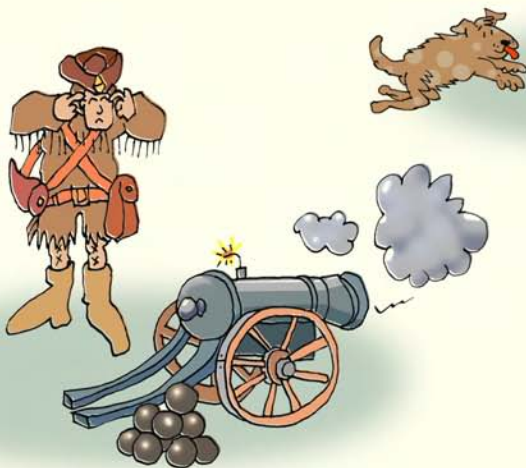
1. What does the part mean?
Give an example.
2. Why is it important?
3. What does it have to do with protecting your rights and welfare?

- **Group 1**
We the People 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



Activity

Working in groups of four, draw a picture for each of the five purposes found in the Preamble. Make sure you don't use the word or words themselves in your picture. Show your work to the other groups in the class and see if they can guess which purpose each picture shows.



What do these pictures tell us about the purpose of our Constitution?

We
the
People...



Reviewing and Using the Lesson

1. What basic ideas about the purposes of our government are included in the Preamble?
2. 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.
3. Explain these terms: preamble, justice, domestic tranquility, common defense, general welfare.

LESSON OVERVIEW

This lesson explores some 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. Ask students to read “What do you think the purpose of government should be?” Working with a partner, students should read the three questions and discuss possible answers. They should be encouraged to examine their own experiences and to form reasoned opinions. Have several pairs share their responses with the class.

B. Ideas to Discuss

What does the Preamble say?

Have students read the segment “What does the Preamble say?” Ask them why the first words of the Preamble are so important. Emphasize to the students that in our country, the power of government belongs to the people.

C. Problem-Solving Activity

Understanding the Preamble’s ideas

Have the students read the “Preamble’s Ideas.” Organize the class into six groups and assign each group one of the phrases from the Preamble. Follow the directions in the student text to conduct the problem-solving activity. Allow students to use dictionaries, encyclopedias, and history books to help them in answering the three questions.

You may wish to have each group develop a skit that portrays its assigned phrase. Each group should present its skit and the rest of the class should guess which phrase of the Preamble is being portrayed. Each group should present its skit before it discusses its answers to the questions in the problem-solving activity. (*This could be used as a supplemental activity.*)

D. Concluding Activity

In examining the Preamble to the Constitution, focus on the ideas that are contained in it rather than just the words themselves. Ask students how the illustrations on page 4 are related to the Preamble.

Regroup the students into units of four. Each group should draw a picture for each of the five purposes of government found in the Preamble. This activity allows the students to make a connection between the ideas expressed in the Preamble and the purposes of government discussed at the beginning of the lesson.

Conclude the lesson by discussing the questions in “Review and Using the Lesson.” You may wish to include additional questions developed by yourself or by students.

SUPPLEMENTAL ACTIVITIES

1. You may wish to have each group develop a skit that portrays its assigned phrase. Each group should present its skit and the rest of the class should guess which phrase of the Preamble is being portrayed.
2. 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.

ADDITIONAL READINGS

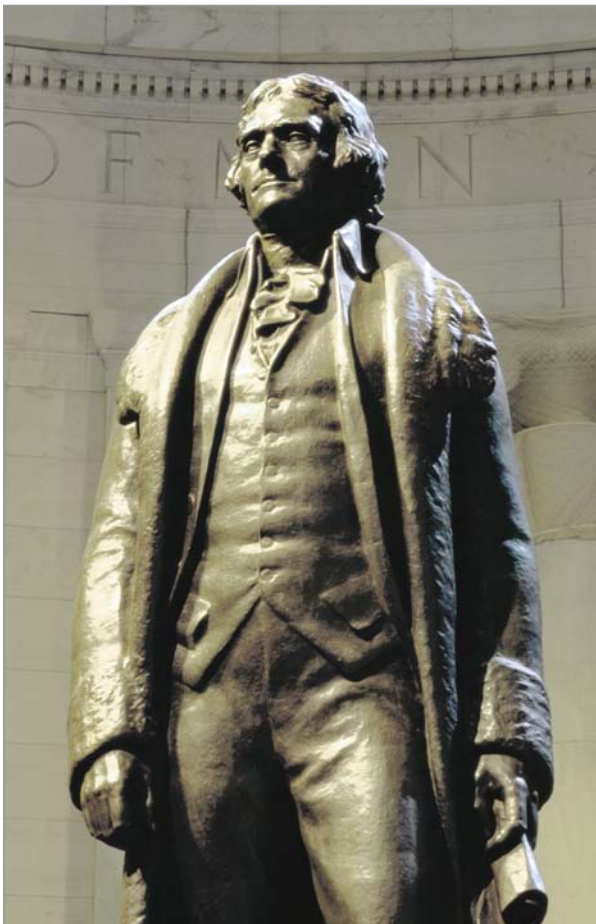
Burningham, John. *Mr. Grumpy's Outing*. New York: H. Holt & Co., 2001. Board Book Edition.

Fritz, Jean. *Shh! We're Writing the Constitution*. New York: Putman, 1987.

Levy, Elizabeth. *If You Were There When They Signed the Constitution*. New York: Scholastic Inc., 1987. Revised edition: 1992.

Suess, Dr. *Yertle the Turtle*. New York: Random House, 1976.





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](#).

We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution is directed by the Center for Civic Education and funded by the U.S. Department of Education under the Education for Democracy Act approved by the United States Congress. The program was established in 1987 under the Commission on the Bicentennial of the United States Constitution. This lesson is funded by the U.S. Department of Education Grant Q929A040001.

© 2005, Center for Civic Education. All rights reserved. Permission is granted to freely reproduce and use this lesson for nonprofit, classroom use only. Copyright must be acknowledged on all copies.

Image Credits

Page 2, *The Constitution of the United States*, National Archives; page 6, *The Great Bartholdi Statue*, by Currier and Ives from the Library of Congress; page 7, Thomas Jefferson, Photodisc.



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