

USA Studies Weekly

Ancient America to Westward Expansion

DISCOVER MORE!

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Primary Source & Bonus Media

GRADE
5

Things Heat up in Philadelphia

“Whew! Jackson, it’s really hot in here. Can we turn on the air conditioning ... or at least open a window?”

“Shhh, Alana! They’ll hear us. You know there isn’t any air conditioning in Philadelphia in 1787. And no, we can’t open a window because they’re all nailed shut.”

“Why are all the windows nailed shut?”

“The men at the Constitutional Convention wanted their meetings to be held in private, so they had all the windows nailed shut. They also closed the curtains to keep people from looking in. There were guards at all the doors, and the delegates were the only ones allowed into the convention.”

“Delegates are representatives, right? And why did they want to keep the meeting private?”

“Well, they wanted to be able to speak freely

and to change their opinions back and forth without having their words printed in every newspaper in the country. They were willing to brave the summer heat to protect the privacy of their meetings.”

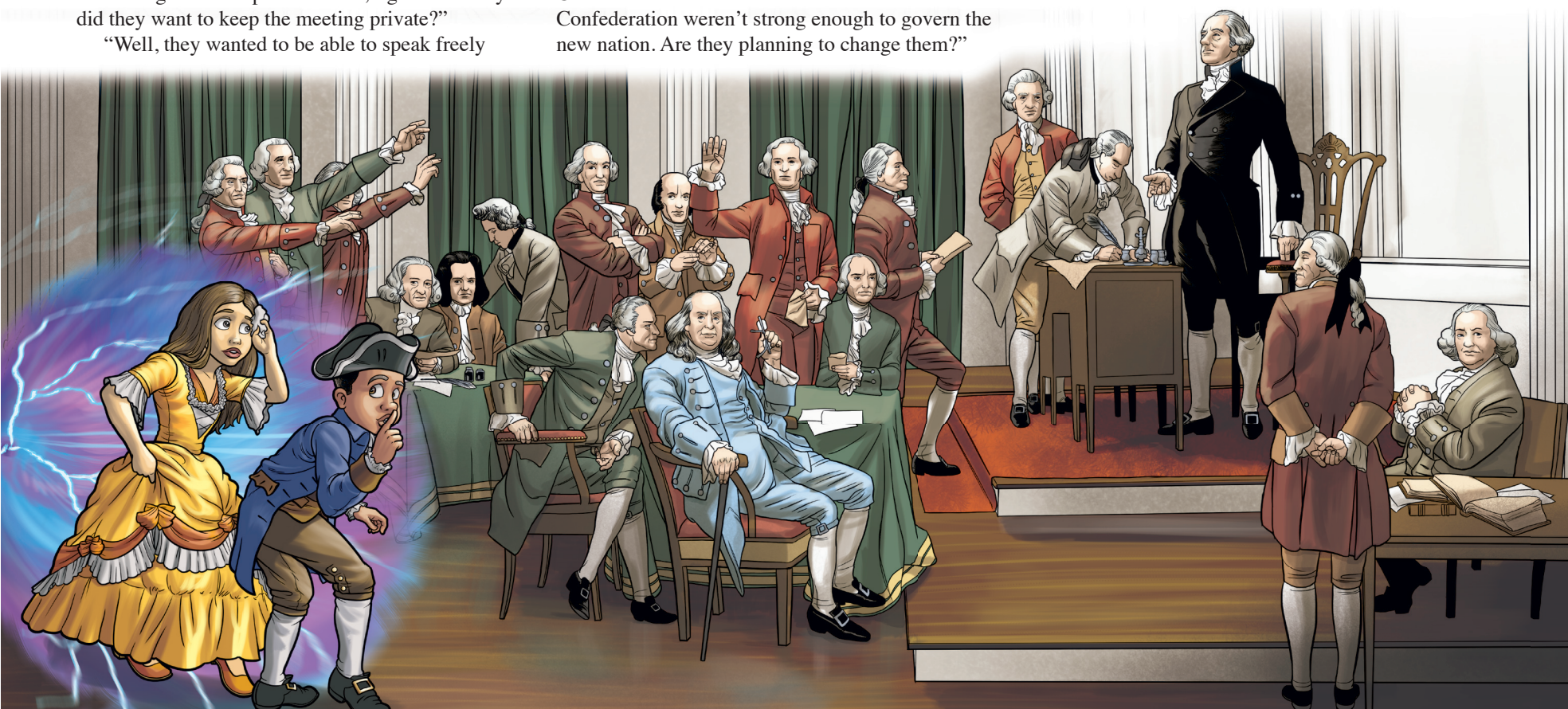
“These guys must have been strong, Jackson. I’m ready to melt in this heat.”

“Take a look around, Alana. Some of the smartest and bravest leaders of their time are here today. There’s George Washington, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, Benjamin Franklin and Edmund Randolph, just to name a few. Many of the delegates were members of the Continental Congress and helped write their own state constitutions.”

“So, what is the point of the Constitutional Convention? I remember that the Articles of Confederation weren’t strong enough to govern the new nation. Are they planning to change them?”

“That was the original plan, so the delegates got together to make changes in the Articles of Confederation. When they started working, they decided it would be better to start over and create a completely new constitution, or written plan for government. Right now the delegates from Virginia, including James Madison and Edmund Randolph, are presenting a plan to write a new document that gives more power to the national government. If we’re quiet, maybe we will learn more about this plan and what it means for the United States.”

“That sounds exciting, Jackson. But first, let’s go outside and see if there’s a breeze. I can’t take as much heat as the Founding Fathers!”



Connections

Celebrate Constitution Day!

On Sept. 17, 1787, the Constitutional Convention completed its work in Philadelphia. The U.S. Constitution was finished. How does your school celebrate Constitution Day?

Did you know that Congress actually passed a law that schools across the country should celebrate this important day in history by

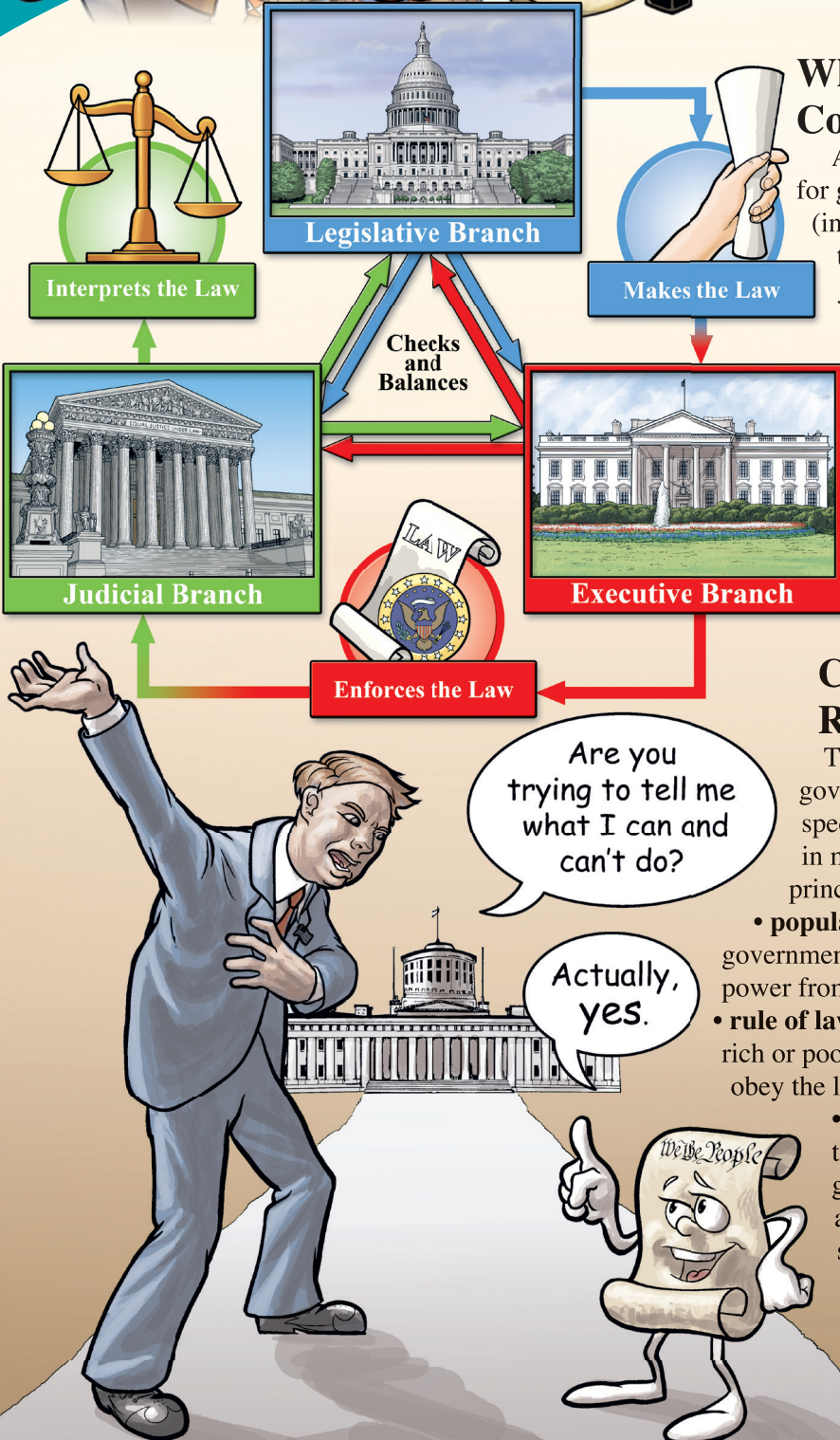
learning more about our Constitution? It’s true. Some students celebrate by memorizing the Preamble and reciting it together on Sept. 17. Others sing the national anthem or dress in red, white and blue. At some schools, students play games, perform plays or write reports that help them learn more about the Constitution.

Here are a few Constitution facts for you:

- Benjamin Franklin, at 81, was the oldest delegate to attend the convention. He was very sick and had to be carried to the meetings in a special chair.
- Jonathan Dayton was the youngest delegate at the age of 26.

- The Constitution is made up of 4,543 words including the signatures.
- The original Constitution is on display in the National Archives Building in Washington, D.C.
- Delaware was the first original state to ratify the Constitution, on Dec. 7, 1787, and Rhode Island was the last, on May 29, 1790.

Florida Next Generation Sunshine State Standards: **SS.5.A.1.1** - use primary and secondary sources to understand history. **SS.5.C.1.2** - define a constitution and discuss its purposes. **SS.5.C.1.5** - describe how concerns about individual rights led to the inclusion of the Bill of Rights in the U.S. Constitution. **SS.5.C.2.3** - analyze how the Constitution has expanded voting rights from our nation’s early history to today. **SS.5.C.2.5** - identify ways good citizens go beyond basic civic and political responsibilities to improve government and society. **SS.5.C.3.2** - explain how popular sovereignty, rule of law, separation of powers, checks and balances, federalism and individual rights limit the powers of the federal government as expressed in the Constitution and Bill of Rights. **SS.5.C.3.4** - describe the amendment process as defined in Article V of the Constitution and give examples. **SS.5.C.3.5** - identify the fundamental rights of all citizens as enumerated in the Bill of Rights. **SS.5.E.1.3** - trace the development of technology and the impact of major inventions on business productivity during the early development of the United States. **SS.5.G.4.1** - use geographic knowledge and skills when discussing current events.



What Does a Constitution Do?

A constitution is a written plan for government. The Preamble (introduction) says the purpose of the Constitution is to establish justice (fairness), ensure peace, defend the nation and protect the rights of all citizens. The Constitution set up a strong national government to replace the weak Articles of Confederation. It also gave each state the power to govern itself.

What Does our Constitution Really Say?

The Constitution sets up our government with some very specific principles, or basic truths, in mind. Some of these important principles are listed below:

- **popular sovereignty:** the idea that government is created by and receives its power from the people
- **rule of law:** the belief that everyone, rich or poor, powerful or weak, must obey the law
- **separation of powers:** the fact that each branch of government (executive, judicial and legislative) must be separate from each other and function on its own
- **checks and balances:** the ability of each branch of government to keep

The Constitution is Born!

the other branches from becoming too powerful

- **federalism:** a system of government where the national, or federal, government has certain powers to govern the country, but also allows the states the power to rule themselves
- **individual rights:** specific rights of American citizens that are stated by the Constitution

One of the most important principles of the Constitution is to keep a separation of powers. By dividing the government into three separate branches, the Constitution made sure that one branch could never become too powerful and overthrow the others. This is called a system of checks and balances.

The Promise of a Bill of Rights

Once the Constitution was written, at least nine of the 13 states had to ratify, or approve, it. While some of the states ratified the Constitution quickly, others held back. They were afraid the new document might take away some of their rights. They wanted to make certain that the rights of individual citizens were protected and that the government wouldn't become too powerful.

Finally, the writers of the Constitution promised that Congress would amend (change) the Constitution. They promised to add a bill of rights later if the states would vote to approve it as it was. By the end of 1788, nine states had voted to approve the Constitution and it went into effect in 1789. By 1790, all 13 states had voted to ratify the Constitution.

Amending the Constitution

Under Article V of the Constitution, there is a way to amend the Constitution whenever it becomes necessary. One way to amend the Constitution is for two-thirds of both houses of Congress to propose (suggest) a change. The other way is for two-thirds of the state legislatures to ask Congress to hold a national convention and suggest an amendment. Once an amendment is proposed, it must be approved by three-fourths of the state legislatures or three-fourths of all ratifying conventions held in the states. It isn't often that both the Congress and the people of the United States agree that a proposal is important enough to be added to the Constitution. The process may be long and hard, but amending the Constitution is possible.

Adding the Bill of Rights

The Constitution was ratified, but the writers weren't done with it yet. In order to fulfill the promise they had made, they had to come up with a bill of rights to add to the document. When he first began, James Madison wrote down all the rights that must be protected by the Constitution. Eventually, this list was trimmed down to 10 amendments which were then added to the Constitution. These 10 amendments came to be known as the Bill of Rights and were officially ratified on Dec. 15, 1791.

Summary of The Bill of Rights

- First Amendment:** Gives freedom of religion, speech and the press. It also gives the right to meet together peacefully and the right to complain to the government.
- Second Amendment:** Protects the right to own and bear arms, or guns.
- Third Amendment:** States that the government cannot force people to open their homes to soldiers during times of peace.

Fourth Amendment:

States that the government cannot unfairly search citizens or take away their property.

Fifth Amendment:

Guarantees that no one can have their life, liberty or property taken away unless authorities follow the appropriate legal process.

Sixth Amendment:

Gives citizens the right to a lawyer and a trial by jury in criminal cases.

Seventh Amendment:

Guarantees the right to a trial by jury in civil cases.

Eighth Amendment:

Protects citizens from being punished with very high bail, fines or extreme punishments.

Ninth Amendment:

States that citizens have more rights than just those listed in the Constitution.

Tenth Amendment:

Gives the powers that are not granted to the federal government to the states or the people themselves.



Compromise American Character

During the Constitutional Convention, the states disagreed on how to set up Congress. The small states wanted to have the same number of representatives in Congress as the large states. The large states wanted the number of representatives to be based on the population (number of people living in a place) of each state. Instead of refusing to give up everything they wanted, the delegates decided to compromise, or give up something they wanted in order to reach an agreement. Roger Sherman suggested an idea to divide the Congress into two houses: one where the representation would be equal (Senate) and one where it would be based on the population of each state (House of Representatives). This made both sides happy, and the problem was solved.

When problems come up, good citizens work together and find a way to compromise. This allows both sides to be happy with the outcome.



Trades & Technology

The Spinning Jenny

In 1764, the American textile (cloth-making) industry got a huge boost with the invention of the spinning jenny. James Hargreaves was a British spinner and weaver. He created the invention to speed up the process of spinning yarn and thread used to make cloth. The spinning jenny held eight spindles instead of just one. When the spinner turned a wheel, eight balls of yarn were wound at once. Since the cotton business was booming at the time, speeding up the spinning process made it possible to weave more cloth in a much shorter time. Because of the success of the spinning jenny and several other textile inventions, many textile factories were built in the New England area. These factories gave jobs to workers in the area and offered Americans quality fabrics for a cheaper price.



photo by Clem Rutter

How are voting rights protected by the Constitution?

Over the years the Constitution has been amended several times to expand our rights to vote. In 1870, more voting rights were added by the 15th Amendment. It stated that race, color or "condition of servitude" (slavery) could not keep a citizen from voting. In 1920, the 19th amendment guaranteed women the right to vote. In 1964, the 24th Amendment made it illegal to charge people a tax to vote. Finally, in 1971, the 26th Amendment lowered the voting age from 21 to 18 years of age. This happened during the Vietnam War when many 18-year-old soldiers were fighting in battle, even though they were too young to legally vote. Supporters of the 26th Amendment often chanted, "Old enough to fight, old enough to vote!"



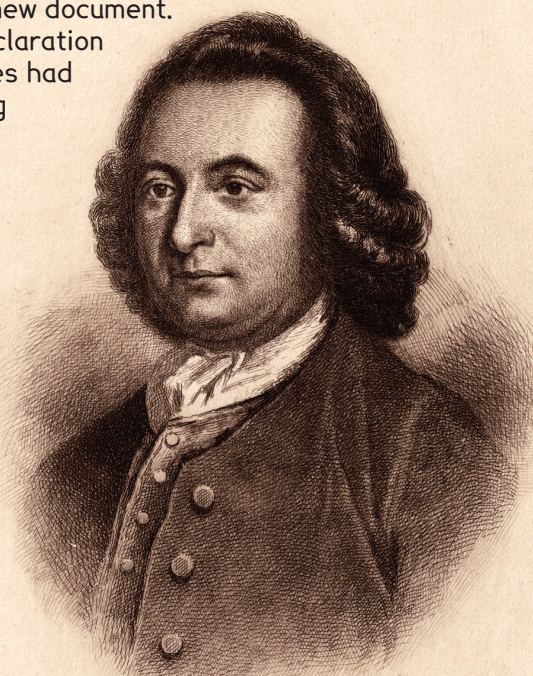
This Week's Question

Biography

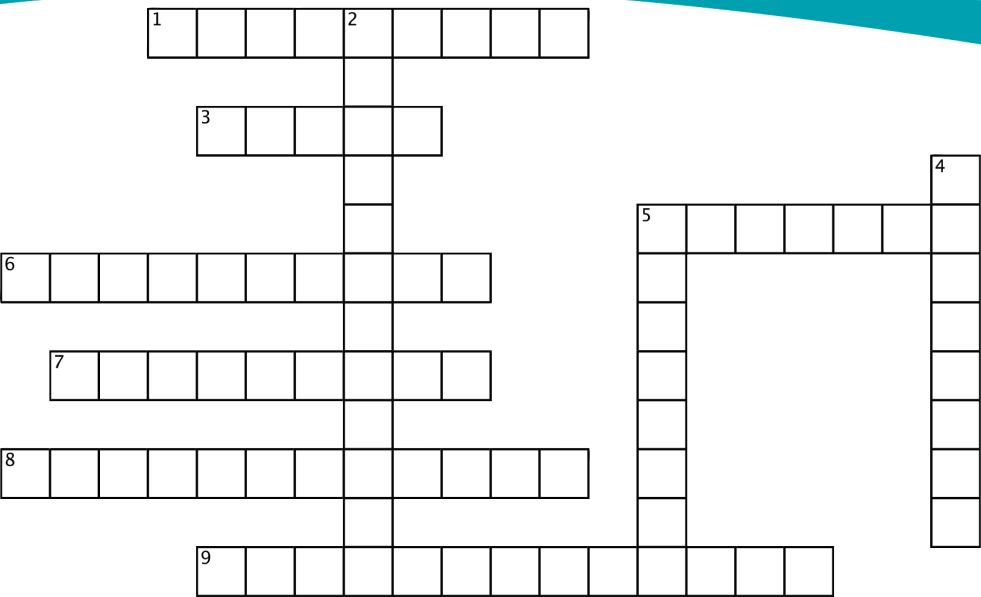
George Mason

When the Constitution was being drafted, George Mason, a delegate from Virginia, was amazed that a list of guaranteed rights was not included in the new document. He had written the Virginia Declaration of Rights and many other states had followed his example by adding their own bill of rights to their constitutions. He was worried about the new government having too much power.

When the delegates voted to accept the new Constitution without a bill of rights, Mason refused to sign it and set out to convince the 13 states not to ratify the new document unless a bill of rights was added. Eventually, a bill of rights based on the one suggested by George Mason was added to the Constitution, protecting the rights of all Americans.



Name _____



ACROSS

- 1. basic truth
- 3. to change
- 5. to suggest
- 6. to give up something in order to come to an agreement
- 7. another word for slavery
- 8. the first 10 amendments to the Constitution

- 9. invention that sped up the process of spinning yarn and thread

DOWN

- 2. written plan of government
- 4. representative
- 5. an introduction, or an explanation about what will follow



As you read this week’s lesson, circle or highlight all proper nouns with any color pen or highlighter. This will help you find some of the crossword answers and get ready for this week’s test.

Primary Source: The Preamble



A preamble is an introduction to something. The Preamble was written to clearly outline the goals of the Constitution. Read the copy of the Preamble below. When you have finished, look for any words that are unfamiliar. Underline these words in the paragraph and write them under “Unfamiliar Words.” Look up these words in the dictionary and write the definition under “Definitions.” (Use a separate piece of paper if you need more room.) Then rewrite the Preamble using words that are familiar to you, but that still have the same meaning as the paragraph. When you are finished, trade your paragraph with a friend to see if he or she agrees with your version of the Preamble. Remember not to change the meaning – just make the words more familiar and easier for you to understand.

Preamble

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.

Unfamiliar Words

Definitions

My Version of the Preamble

This week you many have noticed on pages 1 and 3 that the writing tool is a quill. Many famous historical documents were written using a quill! A quill is a large stiff feather from a bird and it has a hollow tube that is dipped in ink and used for writing. You can make your own quill! Materials: one large feather, an adult, a knife, tweezers and a bottle of ink. Ask an adult to help you cut the end of the feather into a point at a 45-degree angle. Next, use the tweezers to clean out any materials left inside the feather’s shaft. Dip the end of the quill pen in ink, and try writing your name on paper!

As you read this week’s lesson, use any color to circle or highlight five verbs. On a piece of paper, write a sentence for each verb using the perfect form (past tense + helping verb: I have walked. She has swung.). (LAFS.5.L.1.1c)



Over the last few years, many amendments have been proposed, but not passed, by Congress. Some of these include making it illegal to damage the American flag on purpose, allowing prayer in public schools and making English our country’s official language. Write a paragraph proposing your own amendment to the Constitution. Explain why you think it is important and what difference it would make for the country.



It has been well over 200 years since the Constitution was ratified. That’s a long time! How many times do you think the Constitution has been amended in all those years? The answer may surprise you ... only 27!



- 1. Where was the Constitutional Convention held?
- 2. Why were the windows nailed shut during the convention?
- 3. What is the Preamble to the Constitution?
- 4. What did many members of the convention feel was missing from the Constitution?
- 5. What is a system of checks and balances? How does it protect the people of this country?



- 6. How has the right to vote changed since the Constitution was ratified?
- 7. What does it mean to amend the Constitution?
- 8. What are the first 10 amendments to the Constitution called?
- 9. What is meant by the “rule of law”?
- 10. What is the spinning jenny? How did it improve business in the United States?



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