

Constitution Day

September 17, 2011



In May of 2005, Congress enacted a law requiring schools that receive federal funds to hold a commemoration of Constitution Day each year. The law states *“Each educational institution that receives Federal funds for a fiscal year shall hold an educational program on the United States Constitution on September 17 of such year for the students served by the educational institution.”* For purposes ... of this requirement, *“educational institutions”* includes but is not limited to *“local educational agencies”* and *“institutions of higher education”* receiving Federal funding. Section 111 requires that Constitution Day be held on September 17 of each year, commemorating the September 17, 1787 signing of the Constitution. However, when September 17 falls on a Saturday, Sunday, or holiday, Constitution Day shall be held during the preceding or following week.” (Fed. Register)

Since September 17 falls on Saturday schools throughout America will celebrate our nation’s commitment to freedom through a Constitution and Citizenship Day Celebration on September 16. This celebration commemorates the day in 1787 when the Constitutional Convention adjourned from its long months of deliberation at the State House in Philadelphia (now Independence Hall), after having completed the arduous and historic task of writing the United States Constitution, the oldest and most revered constitution in the world.

Constitution Day is a great day for Americans to renew their commitment to democracy by reciting the Preamble and participating in patriotic activities such as wearing red, white and blue, singing the national anthem, and learning about the history and ideals of the Constitution itself. The enclosed resources are designed to support schools in creating a meaningful learning experience for students.

The Constitution is housed at the National Archives and is viewed by visitors from all over the world. Nothing is like seeing this awe-inspiring document in person, but you may view and print large-size photo copies of each page of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights online at **Charters of Freedom** <http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/charters.html>.

The Constitutional Convention was a closed meeting and the discussions were not made public or reported in the newspaper. No official minutes were made of the debates and discussions held during the meeting, but James Madison made personal notes. These notes are what historians use in analyzing the ideas of the Framers. You may read the transcription of **Madison’s Notes** for yourself at

http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/debcont.asp Access them by date from a calendar showing the days the convention held meetings.

The National Archives has developed and posted some excellent resources to commemorate Constitution Day in the classroom <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/constitution-day/> .

One of the most interesting of the National Archives resources is **39 Signers** <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/constitution-day/signers.html>. Here is biographical information on each of the signers of the Constitution. In all, 55 delegates attended the Constitutional Convention sessions, but only 39 actually signed the Constitution. The delegates ranged in age from Jonathan Dayton, aged 26, to Benjamin Franklin, aged 81, who was so infirm that he had to be carried to sessions in a sedan chair.

There are many other websites with excellent information about the writing and ratification of the U.S. Constitution. **The National Constitution Center** <http://constitutioncenter.org/ncc_progs_Constitution_Day.aspx> is a must have bookmark for educators. There are online activities and continuous new lessons and pod casts related to the Constitution.



Lessons & Activities

The Center for Civic Education <http://new.civiced.org/resources/curriculum/constitution-day-and-citizenship-day> and the **Constitutional Rights Foundation** <http://www.crf-usa.org/constitution-day/> each have a host of lessons drawn from their resources designed for teachers in elementary, middle, and high school classrooms to use for Constitution Day.

Elementary

Picture Books and the Bill of Rights

http://constitutioncenter.org/ncc_edu_Picture_Books_and_the_Bill_of_Rights_634213574937131250.aspx
Acquaint students with the Bill of Rights through children's literature.

Class Constitution

<http://www2.scholastic.com/browse/lessonplan.jsp?id=187> or
http://www.congresslink.org/print_lp_classconstitution.htm

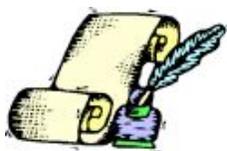
Analyze the basic concepts of the United States Constitution and then create a "Class Constitution."

Middle School

The Constitutional Convention: What the Founding Fathers Said

http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=402

What were some of the conflicts debated in the meetings and discussions that led to the creation of the Constitution of the United States? What interests and passions drove those conflicts—and to what shared principles did the Founders appeal as they struggled to reach a compromise?



Drafting the Constitution

<http://memory.loc.gov/learn/lessons/constitu/const-11.html>

This lesson focuses on The Committee of Detail's draft of the Constitution submitted on August 6, 1787. The delegates debated its contents for a month before referring it to the Committee of Style.

Ratification of the Constitution

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

Before the Constitution could become the law of the land, it had to withstand public scrutiny and debate. On September 28, Congress directed the state legislatures to call ratification conventions.

James Madison, John Jay, and Alexander Hamilton wrote some persuasive essays to convince people to support the new Constitution and its call for a strong national government. These essays are called the **Federalist Papers** http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/fed.asp. Meanwhile, Patrick Henry, Elbridge Gerry, and George Mason organized the opposition to the new Constitution. Some of their writings, now called the **Anti-Federalist Papers**, may be viewed at <http://www.constitution.org/afp/afp.htm>

Foundations of Our Constitution

<http://www.crf-usa.org/foundations-of-our-constitution/foundations-of-our-constitution.html>

These lessons help students explore documents that serve as the foundation for American democracy.

High School

Debate on Ratification

<http://filebox.vt.edu/users/grumbolo/portfolio/federalist.pdf>

or <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/ratification/>

The first lesson is excellent and takes less time but the second has a great set of online support material on the ratification arguments and process developed by Dr. Gordon Lloyd.



James Madison: From Father of the Constitution to President

http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=561

The four lessons here explore the issue whether the key Founder of the Constitution envisioned that it should be interpreted strictly or more broadly.

How Does Government Secure Natural Rights?

http://www.civiced.org/index.php?page=wtp_hs02_sb

This lesson introduces some basic ideas the Framers used in creating the kind of government they thought would best protect the natural rights of each individual and promote the good of all.

iCivics: The Democracy Lab

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

These games will increase your knowledge of the Constitution and its fundamental ideas: checks and balances, separation of powers, Bill of Rights and the roles of all three branches of government.

How Has the Constitution Shaped the Economic system in the United States?

<http://ecedweb.unomaha.edu/lessons/fecg1.htm>

The Founders believed that economic freedom as well as political freedom was essential for national prosperity and growth. Here students explore economic provisions in the Constitution.

Bill of Rights Institute

<http://www.billofrightsintstitute.org/teach/freeresources/Lessons/>

Here are dozens of short and motivating lessons based on primary sources and the news about the impact of the Bill of Rights on society and our daily lives.

Children's Literature for Constitution Day

- Allen, Kathy. **The U.S. Constitution. (Pebble Plus)**
- Armentrout, David. **Bill of Rights (Documents that Shaped the Nation)**
- Burgan, Michael. **The Bill of Rights and Creation of the U.S. Constitution**
- Catrow, David. **We the Kids: The Preamble to the Constitution**
- Cefrey, Holly. **The United States Constitution and Early State Constitutions: Law and Order in the New Nation and States**
- Coleman, Warren. **Bill of Rights (New True Books)**
- Collier, Christopher, and James L. Collier. **Decision in Philadelphia: The Constitutional Convention of 1787**
- Donnelly, Karen. **Bill of Rights**
- Feinburg, Barbara S. **Constitutional Amendments**
- Findlay, Bruce. **Your Rugged Constitution: How America's House of Freedom Is Planned and Built**
- Finkelman, Paul. **American Documents: The Constitution**
- Freedman, Russell. **In Defense of Liberty: The Story of America's Bill of Rights**
- Fritz, Jean. **The Great Little Madison**
- _____ **Shh! We're Writing the Constitution**
- Gerberg, Mort. **The U.S. Constitution for Everyone**
- Hamilton, John. **The Constitution (Government in Action)**
- Hossell, Karen Price. **The United States Constitution**
- Hudson, David. **The Bill of Rights: The First Ten Amendments to the Constitution**
- Jordan, Terry L. **The U.S. Constitution and Fascinating Facts About It**
- Kelley, Brent P. **James Madison: Father of the Constitution**
- Krull, Kathleen. **A Kid's Guide to the American Bill of Rights**
- Levy, Elizabeth. **If You Were There When They Signed the Constitution**
- Maestro, Betsy. **More Perfect Union, A: The Story of Our Constitution**
- Maestro, Betsy and Giulio. **Voice of the People**
- Marcovitz, Hal. **The Constitution (American Symbols and Their Meaning)**
- McPhillips, Martin. **The Constitutional Convention**
- Mortensen, Lori. **Writing the U.S. Constitution**
- Peterson, Christine. **The U.S. Constitution (First Facts)**
- Pierce, Alan. **The Constitution**
- Prolman, Marilyn. **The Constitution (Cornerstones of Freedom)**
- Rivera, Sheila. **Bill of Rights**
- Quiri, Patricia Ryon. **The Constitution and The Bill of Rights**
- Spier, Peter. **We the People: The Constitution of the U.S.**
- Stein, Conrad. **Bill of Rights (Cornerstones of Freedom)**
- Swain, Gwenyth. **Declaring Freedom: A Look at the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, and the Constitution**
- Taylor-Butler, Christine. **The Constitution of the United States (True Books)**
- Travis, Cathy. **The Constitution Translated for Kids**
- Williams, Jean Kinney. **The U.S. Constitution**
- Weidner, Daniel. **The Constitution: The Preamble and the Articles**



* * * *

Developed by Margaret Hill, Ph.D., Director One Nation: Many Faiths TAH Project. Updated 6-5-11.