

Lesson Plan

Classroom Constitution

Book: *George Washington*

Series: Influential Presidents

Level: Beacon

Objective

To have students explore the purpose and format of the US Constitution, and to draft a document that uses a similar structure to explain classroom rules.

Supplies

- *George Washington* book
- Computers or tablets that students can use
- “The United States Constitution” article from *Britannica Kids*: <https://kids.britannica.com/kids/article/United-States-Constitution/353886>
- Paper and pencils
- Classroom Constitution Guided Reading Assignment (attached)

Before the Activity

Read through the *George Washington* book, or assign it to students to read on their own. Divide students into groups of four or five and print a copy of the Classroom Constitution Guided Reading Assignment for each group.

Activity

The *George Washington* book explores the life of the first US president. It describes his path from a military leader to president of the United States. It also explains Washington’s important role as a lawmaker. Have the class turn to pages 16–17 and read the following sentences out loud: “George Washington led a group that wrote the Constitution. This set of laws created a stronger government. It also created a new job. A president would lead the country. This person would make sure people followed the laws.”

The new US Constitution was like an instruction manual for the government. To learn more about how the Constitution worked, divide students into their groups. Make sure each group has a GRA and a way to access the *Britannica Kids* website. In their groups, students should read the online article. They should also work together to answer the questions on the GRA.

Give students several minutes to fill out the GRAs. Then invite each group to share its constitution with the class. After each constitution, give the rest of the class a chance to

suggest amendments. Any student can raise his or her hand to propose an amendment. Then, the rest of the class will take a vote. If more than two-thirds of the class agrees, the amendment passes.

Evaluation

Collect the GRAs at the end of class and use the following system to give each group up to 10 points:

- 1 point each for answering the first six questions on the GRA
- 3 points for writing a constitution that follows the specified format
- 1 point for using correct grammar and spelling

Standards

This lesson may be used to address the Common Core State Standards' reading standards for informational text, grade 5 (RI 5.2, 5.4), and the National Council for the Social Studies standards 6 and 10.

Classroom Constitution Guided Reading Assignment

1. According to the “History” section of the web page, what document did the Constitution replace, and what was the main problem with that document?
2. According to the “Preamble” section, what is the preamble and why did the writers include it?
3. According to the “Federal System” section, which part of the US government gained more power?
4. According to the “Separation of Powers” section, what are the three branches of the government?
5. According to the “Checks and Balances” section, what is one example of a power that one branch has over another?
6. According to the “Amendments” section, what must happen for an amendment to be added to the Constitution?
7. On the back of this page, write a short constitution for your classroom. Include the following sections:
 - A preamble explaining the purpose of your constitution
 - A section explaining the groups you think the classroom should be divided into and the powers you think each group should have
 - A section explaining at least two rules that limit these powers

Classroom Constitution Guided Reading Assignment **ANSWER KEY**

1. According to the “History” section of the web page, what document did the Constitution replace, and what was the main problem with that document?

It replaced the Articles of Confederation, which did not give the central government enough power.

2. According to the “Preamble” section, what is the preamble and why did the writers include it?

The Preamble is a short explanation of the purpose of the Constitution. The writers wanted to make it clear that the people of America were making the rules.

3. According to the “Federal System” section, which part of the US government gained more power?

The national government gained more power.

4. According to the “Separation of Powers” section, what are the three branches of the government?

Legislative, executive, and judicial.

5. According to the “Checks and Balances” section, what is one example of a power that one branch has over another?

The president can choose members of the Supreme Court, but the Senate has the power to reject the president’s choices.

6. According to the “Amendments” section, what must happen for an amendment to be added to the Constitution?

Two-thirds of each house of Congress, and three-fourths of the states must approve every amendment.

7. On the back of this page, write a short constitution for your classroom. Include the following sections:

- A preamble explaining the purpose of your constitution
- A section explaining the groups you think the classroom should be divided into and the powers you think each group should have
- A section explaining at least two rules that limit these powers

We, the students of Ms. Smith's classroom, establish this Classroom Constitution in order to keep order and justice in the classroom.

Our classroom will be divided into three powers. Our executive branch will be held by the teacher, Ms. Smith. Our judicial branch will be made up of five students who are chosen by Ms. Smith. Our legislative branch will include the rest of the students in the class.

The legislative branch has the power to make new rules. Any student can suggest a new rule. If more than half the students in the legislative branch vote yes, then the suggestion becomes an official rule. The judicial branch has the power to argue for or against new rules. They can submit their arguments to the executive branch, where the new rule will be considered further. The executive branch can accept or deny the argument of the judicial branch.

The legislative branch has the power to reject the teacher's choice of a student for the judicial branch. If that happens, the teacher must select a different student. However, the executive branch has the power to veto, or say no to, any new rule created by the students of the legislative branch.