

# U.S. CONSTITUTION

The United States Constitution is a document that states how the federal government should operate. It outlines what the federal government can do, as well as what the federal (national) government cannot do. The U.S. Constitution also outlines the three branches of the government. Then it discusses the purpose of each branch in detail. The document is important because it protects the freedoms and rights of the citizens. It outlines basic rights for all Americans. The Constitution is organized into seven different parts called Articles. The U.S. Constitution is the oldest government document that is still in use today.

The United States had a document before the Constitution called the Articles of Confederation. The Articles of Confederation had many major problems. The Articles did not allow the government to collect money. In turn, the government did not have any money to operate. In 1787, this issue and others were discussed at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia. Here, the Constitution was drafted to replace the Articles of Confederation. The Constitution created a system of federal government that could operate without impacting the basic rights of any of the citizens. At the Constitutional Convention, the writers decided that the government needed three branches to operate. The three branches created a balance of power within the federal government. Each branch has a clear purpose, but none can become too powerful. This was very important to Americans at the time. They had just broken away from the tight rule of the British government. The three branches include the Legislative Branch, Executive Branch and the Judicial Branch.

The opening part of the Constitution is called the Preamble. This

# TEXT MARKING



How many articles does the Constitution have?



What document came before the Constitution?



Where was the Constitutional Convention?



What are the 3 branches of government?

# WORDS TO KNOW

**UNDERLINE (IN PASSAGE)  
THEN DEFINE**

drafted -

federal -

is an introduction to the Constitution. The Preamble was written by some of the most educated men in America at the time, and it outlined basic rights for all Americans. This was to protect all of the citizens of the United States in the best way possible. It made sure that the power was with the citizens, not with a government. The Preamble is primarily a summary of how the government can operate and how the citizens will be treated.

The Constitution also has amendments. An amendment means that there can be a change or addition to the Constitution, if needed. There have been twenty-seven amendments to the Constitution since it was drafted. The first ten amendments came in 1791 and are called the Bill of Rights. The Bill of Rights protects certain freedoms of the citizens. It clearly states that citizens have the right to freedom of speech, religion, assembly, press, and the right to a fair trial. When the Constitution was ratified, many states still had concerns about the freedoms of the citizens. So James Madison, Father of the Constitution wrote the Bill of Rights. This was a solution to keep the Constitution by outlining clearly the freedoms of the citizens. Various amendments have been added here and there for many reasons.

The Constitution, a piece of government, is the most important document in the history of the United States. Before the Constitution, each of the states operated like individual countries. There was not a strong federal government to hold them all together. There was not even a president to represent the United States. The Constitution created a federal government that allowed all of the states to operate together, as well as let the states operate partly on their own. It also allowed all of the states to have basic rights and protections for the citizens.

## TEXT MARKING



What is an amendment?



What are the first 10 amendments called?



Who is the Father of the Constitution?



What does the word constitution mean?

## WORDS TO KNOW

**UNDERLINE (IN PASSAGE)  
THEN DEFINE**

preamble -

ratified -

# ARTICLES OF CONFEDERATION

The Articles of Confederation was a document that outlined how the federal government would operate. It was the nation's first Constitution. The word 'constitution' simply means a plan of government. After the Revolutionary War, the leaders of the nation felt that an official document was necessary to outline the government. Six drafts were prepared of the Articles of Confederation. Each one was unique in different ways. In 1777, Congress selected a final version. There was much deliberation (discussion) about what should be included in the Articles of Confederation.

The document provided a firm, written set of rules for the government of the 13 states. The Founding Fathers were concerned about a government that was too powerful. The Founding Fathers did not want to create a government that was out of touch and too powerful. Having just come out of the Revolutionary War, they were afraid of being ruled by another abusive government like Britain. The hope was to create a central (national) government with just the right amount of power. They wanted it to be powerful enough to be effective but not excessively powerful. A committee of thirteen men from the Second Continental Congress prepared the document. The Articles of Confederation was only 5 pages long and included 13 articles. The document was then sent to the states for ratification, or approval, in 1777. The Articles provided a framework for the government to operate and went into effect on March 1, 1781. In order for the Articles to become official, all thirteen states had to approve it. Virginia was the first state to ratify it while Maryland was the last.

The Articles of Confederation had many flaws or weaknesses. The States basically operated as independent countries. The federal government was so weak that it could barely operate under the Articles of Confederation, and there was concern that the government needed to be stronger. The Articles of Confederation were filled with major flaws. For example, there

# TEXT MARKING



After which war were the Articles written?



What does the word deliberation mean?



How long was the Articles of Confederation?



What was the 1<sup>st</sup> state to ratify the Articles?

# WORDS TO KNOW

**UNDERLINE (IN PASSAGE)  
THEN DEFINE**

effective -

framework -

was no central leadership, like a President, and Congress did not have the power to enforce laws. Further, Congress had no ability to regulate trade or raise money through taxes, and the nation was lacking (did not have) a national court system, it also did not have a federal army and navy.

Shay's Rebellion was a major event that outlined how the Articles of Confederation were failing. The rebellion happened between August 1786 and February 1787. The leader of the rebellion was Daniel Shays. The country was having economic problems, and people could not pay their bills and taxes. They were losing possessions, even farms, and some were put in jail for debt (money owed). This caused an armed revolt (uprising) against the government. The federal government was so weak and poor that it could not stop the rebellion. Local and state militia stopped the rebellion. The federal government did little to aid with the rebellion because they could not offer help. Thus, many understood that the federal government needed change.

The States were interested in discussing changing or replacing the Articles of Confederation. A meeting was held in Philadelphia in 1787, and its main purpose was to discuss how to solve the problems of the Articles of Confederation. This meeting became known as the Constitutional Convention. After some debate, it was decided that the Articles needed to be replaced. The Articles of Confederation were replaced with the United States Constitution.

The new Constitution made a strong central government. It created a President, courts, and three branches of government. It also allowed the government to implement and regulate taxes. James Madison is known as the "Father of the Constitution".

The Articles of Confederation had a short life span. Under the Articles of Confederation, the economy and new nation could not thrive. The Articles of Confederation limited the growth and the strength of the United States. It was the United States' first failure in government.

## TEXT MARKING



What does the word debt mean?



What did the new Constitution create?



What was Shays' Rebellion?



What was America's 1<sup>st</sup> failure in government?

## WORDS TO KNOW

UNDERLINE (IN PASSAGE)  
THEN DEFINE

regulate -

thrive -

# SPARK SOME *creativity*

ESCAPE  
ROOMS

SCAVENGE  
R  
HUNTS

SPY  
MYSTERY

THINKTIVITY

SECRET  
MESSAGES

TEXT  
DETECTIVE

BREAKOUTS

READING  
CHALLENGE

INTERACTIVE  
NOTEBOOK

COLOR BY  
NUMBER

DIGITAL  
ESCAPES

DIGITAL  
BOARD  
GAME

GOOGLE  
SLIDES

TASK  
CARDS  
GAME

GOOGLE  
FORMS

PUZZLE  
STATIONS

BOOM  
CARDS

READING  
PASSAGES

## LET'S CONNECT

f

E

BLOG

p

Lisa@Thinktankteacher.com

## GRAB A FREEBIE

Grab a FREE  
Boston Tea  
Party activity!

