

## Constitution Day Lesson Fourth Grade

### *History of the Constitution*

#### **Main ideas of this lesson:**

- We have three levels of government in our country.
- All three levels provide services and have laws.
- The Constitution unites the American people and the 50 states. It describes the rights of citizens and establishes a federal government with three branches.
- As colonies we fought a war for Independence and then worked hard to write our Constitution.

#### **Connections to the Constitution:**

- The plan for the country's federal government is in a written document called the Constitution.
- The Constitution is the 'supreme law of the land.'

#### **Basic Ideas about the Constitution for fourth graders:**

- The Constitution is the highest law in the United States. All other federal laws must comply with the Constitution. It says how the federal government works. It creates the President. It creates the Congress. It creates the Supreme Court. Each state also has a constitution.
- The Constitution can be changed. The Constitution is changed by an "amendment." Among the amendments is a list of the rights of the people. By listing these rights, they are made special. It is illegal for the government to violate those rights. There are 27 amendments. Not all of them involve rights, but many do. The first ten amendments are special. They are called the Bill of Rights.

#### **Activity:**

- Read and discuss the Informational Sheet on the *History of the Constitution*.
- Have students cut apart the strips on the Activity page and place them in the correct sequence. As an alternative, have students use context clues to try and place the strips in the correct sequence BEFORE reading. Then, use the reading to 'test' their sequence.
- Note a sheet showing the correct sequence has been included.

#### **Supplemental Activities:**

- **Video:** *Snoopy and the Making of the Constitution* or *Shh! We're Writing a Constitution*

## History of the Constitution

The Constitution was written in 1787. We actually have old copies of what was created. The master copies are stored at the National Archives in Washington D.C.

From May to September 1787 a group of men known as the Framers met. The Framers talked about what should be in the Constitution. The United States was a brand new country. The United States had a government that did not work very well. The Framers met to find a new way of running the country. This meeting is called The Convention. Some of the Framers are famous to us today. They include James Madison, Ben Franklin, and George Washington.

At that time there were only 13 states. The men came from all the states except Rhode Island. Each state had ideas for the new government. The Framers had many debates. They talked a lot. They made a lot of speeches. By talking about it, they came up with a plan on which everyone could agree. This plan was described in the new Constitution. They had to have a lot of compromises. Only by agreeing could all the arguments be worked out. Ben Franklin said he was not sure if the plan was perfect. He said that it was probably as perfect as it could be.

After the Convention, the Constitution had to be approved. Actually, only nine states had to agree to, or ratify, the Constitution. But everyone wanted all 13 states to agree. Two states took a long time to decide to agree. These states were Rhode Island and North Carolina. In the end, they did agree. Once the first nine states agreed, we say the Constitution was "ratified." New Hampshire was the ninth state to ratify.

Some people did not want to ratify the Constitution. One big reason was that it did not have a bill of rights. A bill of rights is a list of rights that belong to the people. The government is not allowed to break - or violate - these rights. Some of these rights might sound familiar: the right of free speech; the right to practice your own religion; the right to be silent if you are arrested. The original Constitution had no bill of rights. Many of the Framers did not think it was needed. But many people wanted one. So, promises were made to add one. Once the new government was running, one would be added.

Soon, the new government started meeting. Congress proposed the Bill of Rights. A list of twelve changes was sent to the states. In 1791, ten of those changes were agreed to by the states. The ten changes were added to the Constitution. These ten changes are called the "Bill of Rights."

Directions: Cut the strips apart and place them in the correct order.

A group called the Framers began to meet in May of 1787 with the goal of creating a government that would work better.

After it was written the Constitution had to be approved, or ratified.

The United States was a brand-new country. It had a government that did not work very well.

In 1791 ten changes were added to the Constitution. These changes are called the "Bill of Rights."

The Framers talked and debated.

People decided to have a meeting to find a new way of running the country.

The new government began to meet after the Constitution was ratified.

Finally, the Framers came up with a plan that on which everyone could agree.

## Correct Sequence

The United States was a brand-new country. It had a government that did not work very well.

People decided to have a meeting to find a new way of running the country.

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