



We the People

CONSTITUTION DAY

Activity Booklet

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FASCINATING FACTS ABOUT THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION

Today is Constitution Day, a holiday celebrated in America every year on September 17, the anniversary of the day the framers signed the document. Here are some facts you should know about the U.S.

Constitution and its creation:

The U.S. Constitution has 4,400 words. It is the oldest and shortest written Constitution of any major government in the world.

Of the spelling errors in the Constitution, “Pensylvania” above the signers’ names is probably the most glaring.

Thomas Jefferson did not sign the Constitution. He was in France during the Convention, where he served as the U.S. minister. John Adams was serving as the U.S. minister to Great Britain during the Constitutional Convention and did not attend either.

The Constitution was “penned” by Jacob Shallus, A Pennsylvania General Assembly clerk, for \$30 (\$830 today).

Since 1952, the Constitution has been on display in the National Archives Building in Washington, DC. Currently, all four pages are displayed behind protective glass framed with titanium. To preserve the parchment’s quality, the cases contain argon gas and are kept at 67 degrees Fahrenheit with a relative humidity of 40 percent.

The Constitution does not set forth requirements for the right to vote. As a result, at the outset of the Union, only male property-owners could vote. African Americans were not considered citizens, and women were excluded from the electoral process. Native Americans were not given the right to vote until 1924.

The Great Compromise saved the Constitutional Convention, and, probably, the Union. Authored by Connecticut delegate Roger Sherman, it called for proportional representation in the House, and one representative per state in the Senate (this was later changed to two.) The compromise passed 5-to-4, with one state, Massachusetts, “divided.”

FASCINATING FACTS CONTINUED...

Because of his poor health, Benjamin Franklin needed help to sign the Constitution. As he did so, tears streamed down his face.

The oldest person to sign the Constitution was Benjamin Franklin (81). The youngest was Jonathan Dayton of New Jersey (26).

When the Constitution was signed, the United States population was 4 million. It is now more than 327 million. Philadelphia was the nation's largest city, with 40,000 inhabitants.

A proclamation by President George Washington and a congressional resolution established the first national Thanksgiving Day on November 26, 1789. The reason for the holiday was to give "thanks" for the new Constitution.

The first time the formal term "The United States of America" was used was in the Declaration of Independence.

It took one hundred days to actually "frame" the Constitution.

There was initially a question as to how to address the President. The Senate proposed that he be addressed as "His Highness the President of the United States of America and Protector of their Liberties." Both the House of Representatives and the Senate compromised on the use of "President of the United States."

George Washington and James Madison were the only presidents who signed the Constitution.

James Madison was the only delegate to attend every meeting. He took detailed notes of the various discussions and debates that took place during the convention. The journal that he kept during the Constitutional Convention was kept secret until after he died. It (along with other papers) was purchased by the government in 1837 at a price of \$30,000 (that would be \$695,000 today). The journal was published in 1840.

Although Benjamin Franklin's mind remained active, his body was deteriorating. He was in constant pain because of gout and having a stone in his bladder, and he could barely walk. He would enter the convention hall in a sedan chair carried by four prisoners from the Walnut Street jail in Philadelphia.

FASCINATING FACTS CONTINUED...

On March 24, 1788, a popular election was held in Rhode Island to determine the ratification status of the new Constitution. The vote was 237 in favor and 2,945 opposed!

Benjamin Franklin died on April 17, 1790, at the age of 84. The 20,000 mourners at his funeral on April 21, 1790, constituted the largest public gathering up to that time.

Vermont ratified the Constitution on January 10, 1791, even though it had not yet become a state.

The word “democracy” does not appear once in the Constitution.

There was a proposal at the Constitutional Convention to limit the standing army for the country to 5,000 men. George Washington sarcastically agreed with this proposal as long as a stipulation was added that no invading army could number more than 3,000 troops!

John Adams referred to the Constitution as “the greatest single effort of national deliberation that the world has ever seen” and George Washington wrote to the Marquis de Lafayette that “It (the Constitution) appears to me, then, little short of a miracle.”

The delegates were involved in debates from 10 a.m. until 3 p.m. six days a week with only a 10 day break during the duration of the convention

The Constitution contains 4,543 words, including the signatures and has four sheets, 28-3/4 inches by 23-5/8 inches each. It contains 7,591 words including the 27 amendments.

From 1804 to 1865 there were no amendments added to the Constitution until the end of the Civil War when the Thirteenth amendment was added that abolished slavery. This was the longest period in American history in which there were no changes to our Constitution.

As evidence of its continued flexibility, the Constitution has only been changed seventeen times since 1791!

The median age in America by the end of the 18th century was 16 years of age (today it is around 34 years of age), 19 of every 20 citizens lived on the land, and 70% of the land was worked by its owners (30% by tenants).

FASCINATING FACTS CONTINUED...

The national government spent \$4.3 million during the first session of Congress from 1789-1791. During the last year that George Washington was President of the United States (1796-1797), the entire cost of running the federal government was \$5,727,000.

The election of George Washington as the first President under the Constitution was not really “unanimous”. In actuality, two electors from Virginia and two electors from Maryland did not vote. New York was entitled to eight electoral votes but the state legislature could not decide how these electors would be chosen, so the state of New York officially did not vote for the President. The electoral vote in 1789 should have totaled 81 but only 69 votes were cast.

Although the United States Treasury Department stopped distributing currency denominations of \$500, \$1,000, \$5,000 and \$10,000 in 1969, for all intents and purposes the production of each stopped after World War II. However, these notes are still legal tender and may be found on rare occasions in circulation. James Madison, the “Father of the Constitution” is on the \$5,000 bill.

At the conclusion of the Constitutional Convention, Benjamin Franklin observed the symbol of a half-sun on George Washington’s chair and remarked, “I have the happiness to know that it is a rising and not a setting sun.”

Of the fifty-five delegates who attended the convention 34 were lawyers, 8 had signed the Declaration of Independence, and almost half were Revolutionary War veterans. The remaining members were planters, educators, ministers, physicians, financiers, judges and merchants. About a quarter of them were large landowners and all of them held some type of public office (39 were former Congressmen and 8 were present or past governors).

William Few of Georgia was the only member to represent the yeoman farmer class which comprised the majority of the population of the country. Nineteen of the members who were chosen to represent their state never attended a meeting.

The only other language used in various parts of the Constitution is Latin.

Four of the signers of the Constitution were born in Ireland.

HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW THE PREAMBLE TO THE CONSTITUTION?

Use the word bank below to fill in the blanks. Can you do it without looking at the words?

We the people of the _____
_____, in Order to form a more
_____ Union, establish _____,
insure domestic _____, provide for
the common defence, _____ the general
_____, and secure the _____
of _____ to ourselves and our
_____, do ordain and
establish this _____ for the
United States of America.

**PERFECT
LIBERTY
POSTERITY
BLESSINGS**

**STATES
WELFARE
CONSTITUTION
TRANQUILITY**

**PROMOTE
UNITED
JUSTICE**

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HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION?

How well do you know some of the history surrounding the constitution? We've put together our own 10 question quiz to test your knowledge! Enjoy!

1. What was our country's first constitution called?
 - A. The articles of confederation
 - B. The Declaration of Independence
 - C. The "Federalist Paper"
 - D. The Emancipation Proclamation
2. Laws for the United States are made by:
 - A. The president
 - B. The Senate
 - C. Congress
 - D. The Supreme Court
3. A man accused of a crime in court has a right to:
 - A. Hear the witnesses against him
 - B. Be tried wherever he wants
 - C. Have any judge he wants
 - D. Change courts
4. Invoking the Fifth Amendment means an accused man:
 - A. Refuses to testify against himself
 - B. Refuses to be tried again
 - C. Demands a grand jury
 - D. Wants to appeal his case.
5. Our first vice-president was:
 - A. Alexander Hamilton
 - B. Thomas Jefferson
 - C. Benjamin Franklin
 - D. John Adams
6. The Bill of Rights is:
 - A. The first ten amendments
 - B. The fifteenth amendment
 - C. The entire constitution
 - D. All of the amendments

7. If neither the president nor the vice-president can serve, the position would be filled by:

- A. The speaker of the house
- B. The chief justice
- C. The elected president of the senate
- D. The secretary of state

8. The major department head who is appointed by the president to deal with foreign countries is the:

- A. Secretary of Defense
- B. Secretary of state
- C. Attorney General
- D. Secretary of Commerce

9. The president is elected if he:

- A. Wins a majority of the electoral votes
- B. Wins most of the country's vote
- C. Wins all of the states' votes
- D. Wins most of the states' votes

10. The Supreme court has the right to:

- A. Review decisions of the inferior courts
- B. Set up inferior courts
- C. Set punishment for traitors
- D. Impeach the president



PREAMBLE TO THE
CONSTITUTION

SOLUTION!

“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.”

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HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION?

ANSWERS!

1. A The Articles of Confederation. The Articles of Confederation was in effect from 1781 - 1789. It was based on the concept of a weak central government because of the experience we had under the strong influence of Great Britain. This constitution was our first written plan of government and was based on an opposition to a strong central government, strong executive, taxation and the power to control trade.
2. C. Congress. This is found in Article 1, Section 1: "All legislative Powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and House of Representatives." Thus, the function of Congress is to legislate or make the laws.
3. A - hear the witnesses against him. This is guaranteed to every person in the United States based on the Sixth Amendment to the Constitution: "In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the State and district wherein the crime shall have been committed, which district shall have been previously ascertained by law, and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation; to be confronted with the witnesses against him
4. A - refuses to testify against himself. This constitutional right is found in the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution: "No person shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation."
5. D - John Adams. The elections of 1789, 1792, 1796 and 1800 were based on the constitutional provision that the individual with the most electoral votes became president and the one with the second highest became vice-president. John Adams received the second highest vote count in the election of 1789 and became President George Washington's vice-president. The process was changed in 1804 with the adoption of the Twelfth Amendment.
6. A - the first ten amendments. There was a concern when the Constitution was written in 1787, that the federal government would be too powerful. The Bill of Rights was added in 1791 to put a check on the power of the national government and to protect the individual rights of all Americans.

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HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION?

ANSWERS!

7. A - the speaker of the house. The importance of succession to the presidency was initially addressed in Article 2, Section 1, Clause 6 and further clarified by the Presidential Succession Act of 1947. The present order of succession is President, Vice-President, Speaker of the House of Representatives, President Pro Tempore of the Senate and then the various cabinet positions based on their order of creation (with the exception of the Department of Defense that combined the Departments of War and Navy in 1947). The Secretary of Defense is now fifth in the overall order of succession.
8. B - Secretary of State. The Secretary of State was the first Cabinet Position created by President George Washington in 1789. The country's first Secretary of State was Thomas Jefferson.
9. A - wins a majority of the electoral votes. Based upon the electoral process as described in the Constitution in Article 2, Section 1, Clause 3: "The Person having the greatest Number of Votes shall be the President, if such Number be a Majority of the whole Number of Electors appointed ..."
10. A - Review decisions of the inferior courts. The Supreme Court is the highest judicial body. It therefore reviews decisions of inferior courts. It does not establish inferior courts, set punishment for traitors or impeach the President.

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