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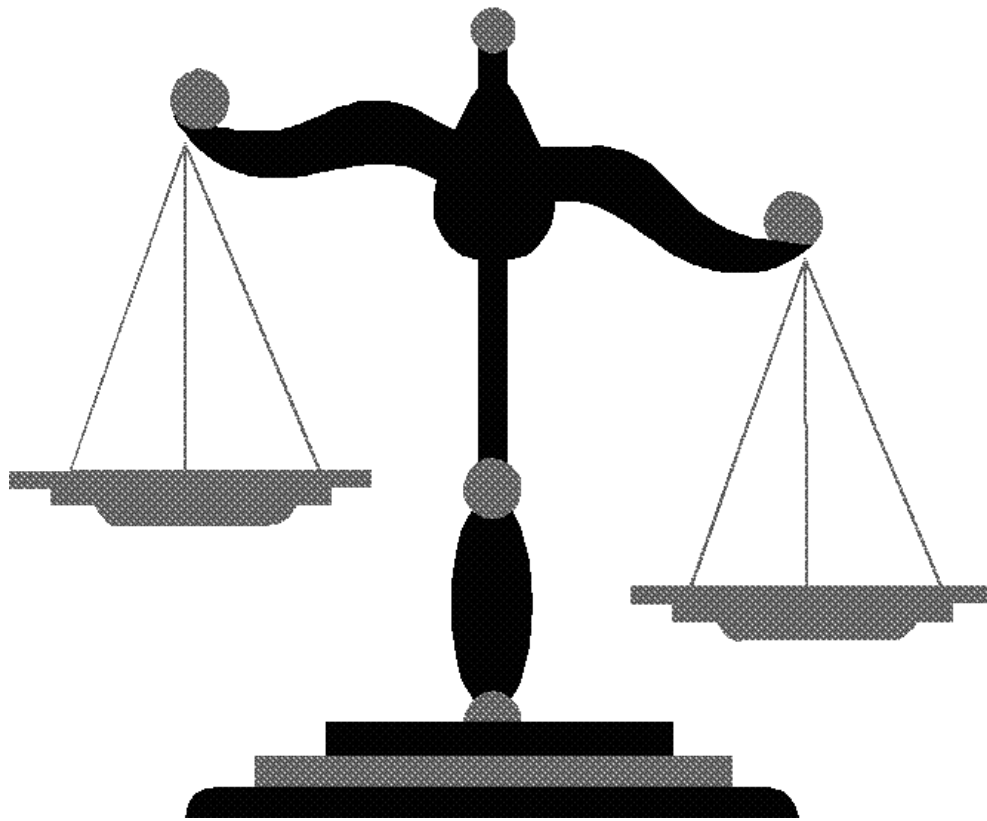
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# i Think = Government

## The Constitution



by Sharon Coletti  
and Kendra Corr

*With contributions by Dr. G. Dale Greenawald*

\*\* It is the goal of InspirEd Educators to create instructional materials that are interesting, engaging, and challenging. Our student-centered approach incorporates both content and skills, placing particular emphasis on reading, writing, vocabulary development, and critical and creative thinking in the content areas.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Objectives (terms, questions and answers) ...	page 6
At First Sight (overview) ...	page 8
Fears of Our Founding Fathers (government goals) ...	page 12
Those Who Came Before (influences) ...	page 17
The Powers That Be (principles of government) ...	page 24
People Rule! (popular sovereignty) ...	page 29
The Rule of Law (limits of power) ...	page 33
I Know My Rights! (the Bill of Rights) ...	page 44
Who's Responsible? (civil responsibility) ...	page 49
Yours, Mine, and Ours (Federalism) ...	page 54
Separate but Equal (divided, balanced powers) ...	page 58
Sitting in Judgment (judicial review) ...	page 65
A Delicate Balance (order vs. freedom) ...	page 71
When the Times They Are A-Changin' (amendments) ...	page 76
What Might Have Been (unratified amendments) ...	page 79
Dollars and Cents (taxes) ....	page 84
Reviewing Terms (vocabulary puzzle) ...	page 89
Differentiated Content and Skills Assessments (A - modified; B - average; C - accelerated) ...	page 91
Resources (bibliography) ...	page 96



## At First Sight

### Springboard:

Students should study the Preamble to the Constitution and answer the questions on the “Break It Down” handout.

**Objective:** The student will be able to explain ways that the federal government impacts their lives and others’.

**Materials:** Break It Down (Springboard handout)  
You and the Federal Government (handout)  
Internet, newspapers, or other sources of government information

**Terms to know:** **citizen** - member of a city, state, or nation

### Procedure:

- During discussion of the Springboard, explain that this lesson examines the extent to which the federal government influences citizens’ lives.
- Hand out copies of “You and the Federal Government.” Have the student(s) work independently, in pairs, or small groups, using the Internet, newspapers, magazines, or other sources to research and complete the handout.
- Have the student(s) share their ideas and discuss. (*Answers will vary, but students should recognize that the federal government makes laws, enforces them, and ensures the laws are carried out fairly according to the Constitution.*)
- During the discussion, refer back to the Springboard and have the student(s) identify and explain government functions that achieve the goals outlined in the Preamble to the Constitution. (*Courts insure fair treatment for all; the military helps protect citizens; the government funds programs for education, the elderly, and the poor, etc.*)





# Break It Down

## U.S. Constitution - The Preamble

**We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union**

What is the source of power for the U.S. government?

What does “more perfect Union” mean?

When originally written, it read, “We the States of the United States...” Why do you think the Founding Fathers wanted to make that change?

**Establish justice**

What does this mean?

How might a government “establish justice?”

**insure domestic tranquility**

What does this mean?

How might a government “insure domestic tranquility?”

**provide for the common defense**

What does this mean?

How might a government “provide for the common defense?”

**promote the general welfare and**

What does this mean?

How might a government “promote the general welfare?”

**secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity  
(future)**

What does this mean?

How might a government “secure the Blessings of Liberty for ourselves and our Posterity?”

**do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of  
America**

What does this mean?

What does this preamble say are the purposes of our government? Do you agree, disagree? Why, why not?



# Break It Down - Suggestions for Answers

## U.S. Constitution - The Preamble

**We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union**

What is the source of power for the U.S. government? *America's citizens are the source of its power.*

What does "more perfect Union" mean? *It is a nation in which people and states work together for the common good.*

When originally written, it read, "We the States of the United States..." Why do you think the Founding Fathers wanted to make that change? *A democracy is a government by the people. The Founding Fathers wanted to emphasize that the U.S. is a democracy.*

### **Establish justice**

What does this mean? *A just system was a major goal of the framers.*

How might a government "establish justice?" *The Constitution outlines the U.S. judicial system.*

### **insure domestic tranquility**

What does this mean? *The Founding Fathers wanted to establish a nation of people and states that could cooperate and peacefully coexist for the common good.*

How might a government "insure domestic tranquility?" *The Constitution lays out a plan of government in which people elect officials to make and carry out laws which allow people to live together in peace.*

### **provide for the common defense**

What does this mean? *The nation has had and will have enemies, and the federal government must have the power to protect its citizens. The federal government has the power to make war.*

How might a government "provide for the common defense?" *It must be able to raise, arm, train, and pay an army, navy, etc.*

### **promote the general welfare and**

What does this mean? *The government has some responsibility for the safety and well-being of its people.*

How might a government "promote the general welfare?" *The government should protect trade and business, provide education, health services, and so forth.*

### **secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity**

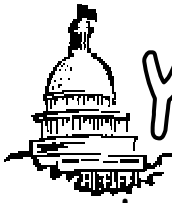
What does this mean? *The Constitution was designed for its time and for the future.*

How might a government "secure the Blessings of Liberty for ourselves and our Posterity?" *The Constitution is designed to be flexible, to change with the times as needed, and to ensure that ALL Americans have freedom under the law.*

### **do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America**

What does this mean? *They wrote the Constitution to achieve all of the stated goals.*

What does this preamble say are the purposes of our government? Do you agree, disagree? Why, why not? *The government should work for the good of the people and the nation. Answers may vary.*



# YOU & the Federal Government

**In what ways does the federal government affect your life?**

**Identify one or more areas of your life that you don't think are affected by the federal government.**

**Why do you think it may be important for you to know what the federal government does?**

**Why do you think it may be important to know how the federal government operates and makes decisions?**





## Fears of Our Founding Fathers

### Springboard:

Students should read “What Did He Mean?” and answer the questions.

**Objective:** The student will be able to explain America’s Founding Fathers’ concerns about limiting power in government.

**Materials:** What Did He Mean? (Springboard handout)  
Roots of Our Government (handouts)  
The Why’s and Wherefores (handouts)

**Terms to know:** **corruption** - dishonesty; use of a position for gain  
**repeal** - to cancel  
**boycott** - refusal to buy or use goods or services

### Procedure:

- During discussion of the Springboard, have the student(s) name some things they might do if they could do ANYTHING they wanted without any possibility of punishment. (*Answers will vary.*) Then have the student(s) suggest ways leaders might do wrong if they didn’t think there would be any consequences. (*Answers will vary.*)
- Hand out “Roots of Government” and “The Why’s and Wherefores.” Explain that America’s Founding Fathers were also concerned about government leaders or any part of government having too much power. Have the student(s) work individually or in pairs to read “Roots of Our Government” and complete “The Why’s and Wherefores”, identifying events that might support the Founding Fathers’ efforts to limit the government’s powers.
- Have the student(s) share their ideas and discuss:
  - ? What led America’s colonists to believe they had protections against the power of the British king? *The Magna Carta, Petition of Rights, tradition of British allowing colonies to essentially govern themselves, etc.*
  - ? What events led the American colonists to feel that government power should be limited? *Abuses of King John and Charles I: imprisoning people without trial and without evidence of illegal activity. Stamp Act, Intolerable Acts, Boston Massacre, etc.*
  - ? What events led the colonies to cooperate? *The Stamp Act Congress, the first joint petition to the crown; the Committees of Correspondence created a network of anti- British resistance across the colonies; the First Continental Congress asserts American rights; at the Second Continental Congress the Declaration of Independence was written, etc.*
- Continue the discussion, having the student(s) offer suggestions as to why British abuses of the colonies might have led to a fear of authority among colonists. (*Much of what was built into the Constitution and later the Bill of Rights reflects such fears. The Founding Fathers wanted to structure the government so no one person or branch could become too powerful.*)

# WHAT DID HE MEAN?



Lord John Acton was an English politician and historian who studied and taught about government in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. When he died in 1902, he was considered one of the most learned people of his age. Acton is known to have said that:

*"Power tends to corrupt, and **absolute** power corrupts absolutely."*

Which statement agrees with Acton's quotation?

- A. The more power a person has, the more evil (s)he is.
- B. People in power care most about those they rule.
- C. The most effective leaders are the most powerful.
- D. Power makes people do bad things to others.

Based on Acton's quotation, all of the following are true, **EXCEPT**

- A. powerful politicians face many temptations.
- B. power often leads to abuses of the less powerful.
- C. divided power can help to protect rights of citizens.
- D. very strong rulers who care about people are the best.

Which of these acts would **MOST LIKELY** be seen as "corrupt"?

- A. Helping a poor person by paying for food and clothing
- B. Giving a high government job to a loyal party supporter
- C. Tending to get along better with people of similar views
- D. Inviting a donor who gave a candidate money for a visit

Which definition **BEST FITS** the use of the word "absolute" in Acton's quotation?

- A. perfect in quality or nature
- B. not mixed; free from impurities
- C. unlimited in extent or degree
- D. not to be doubted or questioned

Which leader's actions provide an example of Acton's ideas?

- A. Hitler's power was used to eliminate Jews and other "undesirables."
- B. Mohandas Gandhi used his power to free India from British rule.
- C. Roosevelt's emergency powers helped the U.S. out of the Depression.
- D. Martin Luther King, Jr. used his power to fight for people's rights.

# WHAT DID HE MEAN? ANSWERS & EXPLANATIONS



Lord John Acton was an English politician and historian who studied and taught about government in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. When he died in 1902, he was considered one of the most learned people of his age. Acton is known to have said that:

*"Power tends to corrupt, and **absolute** power corrupts absolutely."*

Which statement agrees with Acton's quotation?

- A. The more power a person has, the more evil (s)he is. \*
- B. People in power care most about those they rule.
- C. The most effective leaders are the most powerful.
- D. Power makes people do bad things to others.

*(Acton viewed power and excessive power as dangerous, so A is correct.)*

Based on Acton's quotation, all of the following are true, **EXCEPT**

- A. powerful politicians face many temptations.
- B. power often leads to abuses of the less powerful.
- C. divided power can help to protect rights of citizens.
- D. very strong rulers who care about people are the best. \*

*(A and B state negative consequences of power, while C offers the alternative to excessive power. Choice D is the opposite of what Acton is saying.)*

Which of these acts would **MOST LIKELY** be seen as "corrupt"?

- A. Helping a poor person by paying for food and clothing
- B. Giving a high government job to a loyal party supporter \*
- C. Tending to get along better with people of similar views
- D. Inviting a donor who gave a candidate money for a visit

*(Corruption is negative, but choices A and C are positive. Though D might be viewed as a political "favor," B is an even better example of one.)*

Which definition **BEST FITS** the use of the word "absolute" in Acton's quotation?

- A. perfect in quality or nature
- B. not mixed; free from impurities
- C. unlimited in extent or degree \*
- D. not to be doubted or questioned

*(The word is referring to excessive, unlimited power. That definition could substitute for the term.)*

Which leader's actions provide an example of Acton's ideas?

- A. Hitler's power was used to eliminate Jews and other "undesirables." \*
- B. Mohandas Gandhi used his power to free India from British rule.
- C. Roosevelt's emergency powers helped the U.S. out of the Depression.
- D. Martin Luther King, Jr. used his power to fight for people's rights.

*(Choice A is the only NEGATIVE example of the use of power.)*



# Roots of Our Government



The fifty-five men who gathered in Philadelphia in 1787 to decide how America was to be governed were men of wealth, experience, and intelligence. Many had been involved in the Revolutionary War, served in the Continental Congress, and were active in state politics. While there were differences among them, they all shared some common beliefs. They thought government was necessary for an ordered society, but that the powers of government should be limited. They also agreed government should represent and reflect the interests of its citizens.

Their ideas about government came from England. The *Magna Carta* of 1215 forced King John to accept that his power was not absolute. The nobles forced him to promise that legal processes would be followed before they could be deprived of life, liberty, or property. The *Magna Carta* guaranteed English citizens a right to trial by a jury of peers. The powers of the British monarchs were restricted again in 1628 when King Charles I signed *The Petition of Rights*, a document forcing the king to stop imprisoning people who had not broken the law and had not had a trial. It also stopped the king from using the army to enforce his decisions, sheltering troops in people's homes, or raising taxes without the consent of Parliament, the English legislature.

Of course American colonists thought they were entitled to the same rights as other British citizens. Prior to the French and Indian War the British government had been concerned with events across the globe and paid little attention to the colonies. Colonial governors and legislatures ruled them and they had ample freedom, but the French and Indian War changed everything.

The British needed money to pay for the war and reasoned that the colonies should pay for their own defense. England began taxing and restricting colonial trade. Some court cases were tried by a British judge, not a colonial jury. The British forced the colonists to provide housing and supplies for English troops.

When the British repealed some taxes in response to protests, England passed the Declaratory Act to assert its right to rule the colonies as it saw fit. As colonists boycotted British goods and engaged in violence such as the Boston Tea Party, the British punished the colonies by passing a series of laws known in America as the Intolerable Acts. The British used their soldiers to enforce laws and oppose American mobs. In the Boston Massacre of 1770, British troops fired into an angry crowd, killing several colonists. The colonists saw these British actions as violations of their rights and freedoms.

As tension between the colonies and the English government increased during the 1760's the colonies began to work together against what they viewed as abuses. In 1765 nine colonies sent representatives to the Stamp Act Congress, sending a protest to the King. This was the first time the colonies had come together to object to the actions of the British. By the early 1770's, a network known as Committees of Correspondence began to share information across the colonies and cooperate against the government.

In 1774 the First Continental Congress met in Philadelphia to discuss the tensions between the colonies and Britain. It sent a Declaration of Rights to the King and called for a boycott of British goods. The British merely responded with more laws and restrictions, refusing to change its policies. By April of 1775, the situation exploded when fighting between the two sides broke out at Lexington and Concord. Soon the Second Continental Congress met to decide its next steps, eventually writing the Declaration of Independence.

# → The Why's and Wherefores →

**DIRECTIONS:** Use facts from the "Roots of Our Government" to fill in the graphic organizer.

What led the American colonists to believe they had protections against the power of the British king?

What events led the American colonists to feel that government power should be limited?

What events led the colonies to cooperate?