Writing the Constitution

Backwards Planning Curriculum Units

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How To Use This Unit

Backwards planning offers an innovative yet simple approach to meeting curriculum goals; it also provides a way to keep students engaged and focused throughout the learning process. Many teachers approach history instruction in the following manner: they identify a topic required by state and/or national standards, they find materials on that topic, they use those materials with their students, and then they administer some sort of standard test at the end of the unit. Backwards planning, rather than just starting with a required instructional topic, goes a step further by identifying exactly what students need to know by the end of the unit—the so-called "enduring understandings." The next step involves assessment: devising ways to determine whether students have learned what they need to know. The final step involves planning the teaching/learning process so that students can acquire the knowledge needed.

This product uses backwards planning to combine a PowerPoint presentation, activities that involve authentic assessment, and traditional tests (multiple-choice and essay) into a complete curriculum unit. Although the materials have enough built-in flexibility that you can use them in a number of ways, we suggest the following procedure:

1. Start with the "essential questions" listed on slide 2 of the PowerPoint presentation (these also appear in the teacher support materials). Briefly go over them with students before getting into the topic material. These questions will help students focus their learning and note taking during the course of the unit. You can also choose to use the essential questions as essay questions at the end of the unit; one way to do this is to let students know at the outset that one of the essential questions will be on the test—they just won't know which one.

2. Next, discuss the activities students will complete during the unit. This will also help focus their learning and note taking, and it will lead them to view the PowerPoint presentation in a different light, considering it a source of ideas for authentic-assessment projects.

3. Present the PowerPoint to the class. Most slides have an image and bullet points summarizing the slide's topic. The Notes page for each slide contains a paragraph or two of information that you can use as a presentation script, or just as background information for your own reference. You don't need to present the entire PowerPoint at once: it's broken up into several sections, each of which concludes with some discussion questions that echo parts of the essential questions and also help students to get closer to the "enduring understandings." Spend some time with the class going over and debating these questions—this will not only help students think critically about the material, but it will also allow you to incorporate different modes of instruction during a single class period, offering a better chance to engage students.

4. Have students complete one or more of the authentic-assessment activities. These activities are flexible: most can be completed either individually or in groups, and either as homework or as in-class assignments. Each activity includes a rubric; many also have graphic organizers. You can choose to have students complete the activities after you have shown them the entire PowerPoint presentation, or you can show them one section of the PowerPoint, go over the discussion questions, and then have students complete an activity.

5. End the unit with traditional assessment. The support materials include a 30-question multiple-choice quiz; you can combine this with an essay question (you can use one of the essential questions or come up with one of your own) to create a full-period test.

6. If desired, debrief with students by going over the essential questions with them again and remind them what the enduring understandings are.

We are dedicated to continually improving our products and working with teachers to develop exciting and effective tools for the classroom. We can offer advice on how to maximize the use of the product and share others' experiences. We would also be happy to work with you on ideas for customizing the presentation.

We value your feedback, so please let us know more about the ways in which you use this product to supplement your lessons; we're also eager to hear any recommendations you might have for ways in which we can expand the functionality of this product in future editions. You can e-mail us at access@socialstudies.com. We look forward to hearing from you.

Dr. Aaron Willis
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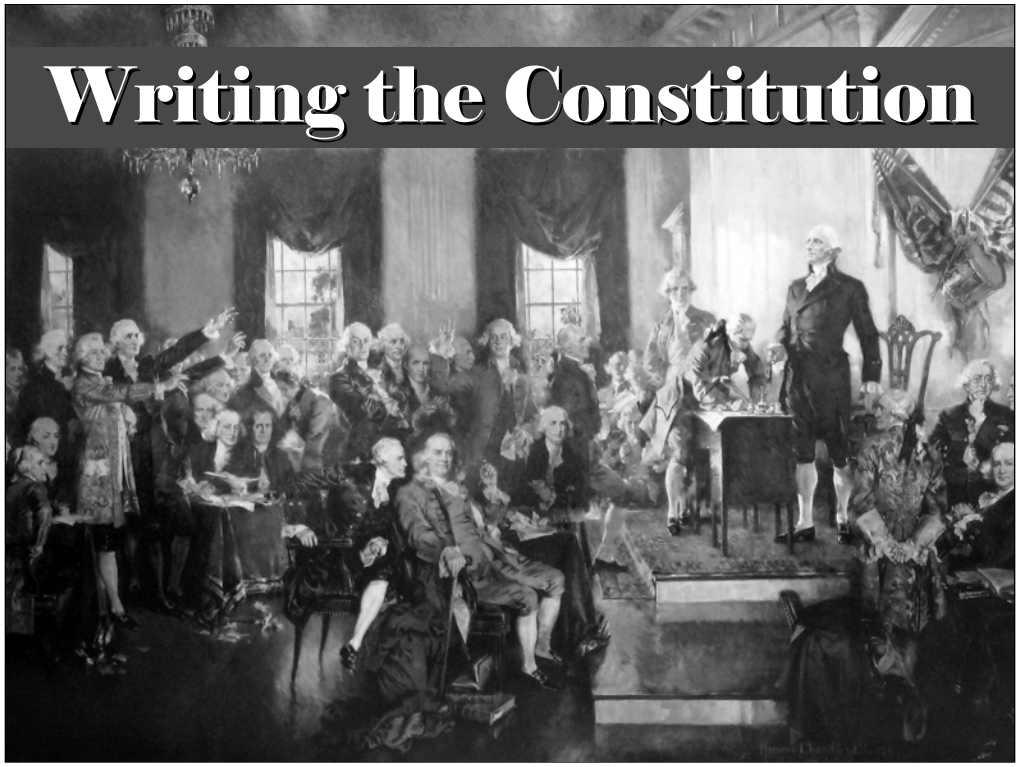
Writing the Constitution



Soon after delegates from the 13 colonies signed the Declaration of Independence, they began to tackle the daunting task of creating a new national government. The first attempt—the Articles of Confederation—preserved state sovereignty at the cost of a weak central government that soon demonstrated its inability to function effectively. Fifty-five delegates met in Philadelphia in 1787 with the aim of revising the Articles, but quickly realized that only under a new constitution could the central government adequately address the issues that plagued the country. Compromises between various interests marked the proceedings, especially on matters of representation in the new legislature and of taxation. Delegates consulted and synthesized information from several historical sources to provide a foundation for the document, which when finalized, resulted in a three-branch federal government with a two-house legislature, a strong executive to enforce the laws, and a national court system.

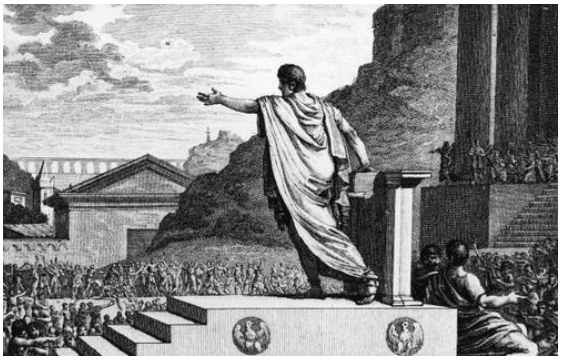
After the convention had finished its work, the process of ratification by state conventions began. Supporters of the Constitution managed through persuasion and deal-making to reach the required number of states for ratification: some conventions agreed to approve the document only if the new government pledged to add several amendments giving explicit protections of individual rights. The Constitution became the supreme law of the land, and the promised amendments, the Bill of Rights.

Essential Questions

- Why did the colonists seek to develop a weak central government at the close of the Revolutionary War?
- What problems were inherent in the Articles of Confederation?
- What philosophical and political ideals did the Framers draw from writing the Constitution?
- How did the Framers use compromise to ensure that the Constitution would reflect different points of view?
- How did the Framers ensure that governmental power would be shared between national and state governments, as well as among the three branches of the federal government?
- How does the Constitution ensure civil liberties?

Foundations: Greece and Rome

- Democratic elements of ancient Greek civilization
- Aristotle's classification of government
- The ancient Roman Republic



A Roman tribune presiding over a council of citizens

Though the U.S. Constitution may be a relatively new document, some of its principles stem from forms of government developed by the ancient civilizations of Greece and Rome. The ancient Greeks (who originated the term) practiced a form of democracy, although not all residents of Greece could participate. A great segment of the population did not qualify as citizens. Some historians estimate that citizens made up only one-eighth of its population. The system did allow for common citizens to have positions of significance in the government.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle was one of the first to classify governments according to the question, "Who rules?" According to his classification scheme, government rule by one person would generally be a monarchy or dictatorship. An oligarchy or aristocracy would be rule by a few, and democracy would be rule by the masses.

The Framers of the Constitution also relied on the concept of a republic as developed by the ancient Romans. The Constitution implemented a three-part system of government, and also borrowed heavily from the Romans to develop a system of checks and balances, as well as the legislative bodies of an assembly and the Senate.

The Magna Carta

- Signed by King John of England in 1215
- Placed monarchs and magistrates under rule of law
- Established English common law
- Influenced the Fifth Amendment

One of the earliest precedents for the U.S. Constitution can be found in the creation of the Magna Carta in 1215. Compelled by the nobles of his kingdom to sign the document, King John of England placed himself (as well as future monarchs) under the "rule of law"; this established that no government official can be above the law, and as such all must follow written law.

The Magna Carta formed the foundation of English common law, which considers basic fundamental legal procedures and traditions as binding precedent. American colonists followed the same rules of law in establishing colonial legislatures and then a national government. The Framers of the United States Constitution considered the Constitution the supreme law of the land, which could not be overturned by subsequent political administrations, just as the Magna Carta stated that no future monarch could take away rights given to the nobles.

Perhaps one of the best examples of the influence of the Magna Carta on American government can be found in the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution. The Magna Carta says that, "No freeman shall be taken, imprisoned,...or in any other way destroyed...except by the lawful judgment of his peers, or by the law of the land. To no one will we sell, to none will we deny or delay, right or justice." Nearly six centuries later, the Fifth Amendment would assert, "No person shall...be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law."

Thomas Hobbes

- *Leviathan* (1651)
- Discusses the origin of centralized government
- Explains the "social contract" theory
- Early humans gave up a "state of nature" for government's protection

The cover of *Leviathan* depicts government as an unruly monster

Published in 1651 (around the time of the English Civil War), Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* attempted to explain the need for the development of governments and states. In Hobbes's view, early humans lived in what he called a "state of nature" in which inevitable and unfettered conflict made life "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."

As a result of this conflict, Hobbes asserted that people created a "social contract" with the more powerful and elite of society in order to form governments. In these governments, which Hobbes noted were created with "the consent of the governed," citizens gave up certain rights under natural law (i.e., that everyone has a right to own all property) in order to receive protection under the government. In return, the government would expect all citizens to obey the law. However, nowhere in *Leviathan* does Hobbes note that the government would be absolutely required to protect the rights of citizens. Other philosophers would later expand on Hobbes's work in order to provide for this protection.