

We The People: Analyzing the Preamble Primary Source Activity Grades 9-12

This activity can be used as an extension to viewing Episode 2: Making a Government or independently from it.

The learner will analyze the Preamble of the Constitution to determine its purpose and the importance of “we the people.”

National History Standards:
Standard 3A

The student understands the issues involved in the creation and ratification of the United States Constitution and the new government it established.

- Analyze the features of the Constitution which have made this the most enduring and widely imitated written constitution in world history

Common Core State Standards:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.3: Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.5: Analyze how a text uses structure to emphasize key points or advance an explanation or analysis.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.6: Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.8: Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author's claims.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.9: Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

Activity: In *Inventing America* Episode 2, the founding fathers discussed the Committee of Style and Arrangement which wrote the Constitution. In this particular activity, students will examine the Preamble of the United States Constitution. Students should compare the earlier draft of the Preamble to the final draft to better understand the intent of the Constitution. Students should then use critical thinking skills to answer the questions provided.

Guiding question: Who is included in “We the people?”

We the People- Analyzing the Preamble

Morris, Madison, and Hamilton made up the Committee of Style and Arrangement which was tasked with writing the final draft of the Constitution. Gouverneur Morris ultimately wrote the final draft of the Constitution because he had the ability to “clothe the skeleton in muscles.” In order to better understand the final draft of the Preamble of the United States Constitution, one must look at the earlier drafts written by Morris. Read both the earlier draft and the final draft to compare them and answer the questions below.

The Earlier Draft of the Preamble

We the people of the states of New-Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations, Connecticut, New-York, New-Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North-Carolina, South-Carolina, and Georgia, do ordain, declare and establish the following constitution for the government of ourselves and our posterity.

The Preamble of the US Constitution

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.

1. Why might the earlier draft have included all of the individual state names? What does this tell you about how the states viewed themselves in 1787?

1. Why might Morris have removed all of the individual state names in exchange for just “we the people” in the final draft? How does this change the meaning of the document?

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1. What is the purpose of the Preamble?

1. Before signing the Constitution, Benjamin Franklin said “the time is nigh for us to establish a government that will prove to the world that we can indeed make it on our own.” How does the preamble prove this to the world?

1. How might the phrase “we the people” have influenced other other countries in the late 1700s and early 1800s? Can you think of any specific examples?

1. How has the meaning of the phrase “we the people” changed over time?