

We The People: Analyzing the Preamble Primary Source Activity

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.6-8.2- Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.4- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.5- Describe how a text presents information (e.g., sequentially, comparatively, causally).
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6- Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).

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 will need to define some key phrases in the Preamble and answer some questions about the phrase “we the people.” Students will then rewrite the preamble in their own words and give examples of where they see these ideas today.

Guiding question: What is the purpose of the Preamble?

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.” Read the Preamble of the United States Constitution that Morris wrote and answer the questions below.

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. The Preamble has some difficult words and phrases included. Look up the following words/phrases and write down their definitions:
 - Domestic tranquility-
 - General welfare-
 - Posterity-
2. Why do you think Morris started the Preamble with “we the people?” Why are those three words so important?
2. Who do you think the founding fathers were including in that phrase “We the people” in 1787?
2. How has that phrase changed meaning over time? Who is included in that phrase today?

5. Analyze the Preamble and fill out the following chart:

Preamble	Rewrite the phrase in your own words	Where do you see this today?
In order to form a more perfect union		
Establish justice		
Insure domestic tranquility		
Provide for the common defense		
Promote the general welfare		
Secure the blessings and liberty to ourselves and our prosperity		
Do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.		