

Inventing America Episode 2  
Making a Government: The Untold Story of the Constitution  
Lesson Guide Middle School

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 factors involved in calling the Constitutional Convention
- Analyze the alternative plans considered by the delegates and the major compromises agreed upon to secure approval of the Constitution.
- Analyze the fundamental ideas behind the distribution of powers and the system of checks and balances established by the Constitution.
- Analyze the features of the Constitution which have made this the most enduring and widely imitated written constitution in world history.

The Learner will...

1. Explain why the founding fathers called the Constitutional Convention
2. Explain the different plans considered by the delegates and evaluate their compromises
3. Explain why the founding fathers created a system of checks and balances and identify different checks and balances.
4. Analyze the Preamble of the Constitution to determine its purpose and the importance of "we the people."

Vocabulary:

- Pillory
- Virginia Plan
- Articles of Confederation
- Quorum
- Shays' Rebellion
- Anarchy
- Senate

Materials:

1. Inventing America Episode 2: Making a Government: The Untold Story of the Constitution
2. Episode 2 Activities Handout
3. Creating a Government Anticipatory Set Activity
4. Exit Ticket

Extension Activity:

1. Preamble Extension Activity Handout

Discussion Questions:

1. What were the networks and rivalries of the time? How do you think those relationships affected the Constitutional Convention?
2. How did Morris explain the difference between a federal government and a national government? Are they different?
3. Franklin stated multiple times, “one must take what one must get,” referring to the need to compromise during the convention. What were some of the compromises the founders made? Do you see compromise happening in politics today? In what ways? Why or why not?
4. In the video, Washington said “whatever the result, I doubt the new federal government will survive twenty years.” Later, Franklin stated, “if we can keep it.” What might Washington, Franklin, and the other delegates have been worried would happen to the new government?

Video Disclaimer: The teacher can choose to show the video in full or show the video clips. This guide will break the video up into five parts video questions. If you choose to show the entire video, please note that this video does include references to the founding fathers’ personal lives including their extra-marital affairs, some profane language, as well as some references to drinking.

Procedure:

1. **Anticipatory Set:** Distribute the Creating a Government handout to the students. Tell the students to imagine that everyone in the class was crossing the Pacific Ocean. However, suddenly our plane hit turbulence and crashed onto a small unknown island. The class is now stranded on a small island and there is no chance of getting rescued in the near future. This realization has caused panic among the survivors and fighting over the supplies that have been recovered. It is clear that some form of government and order needs to be established. The students need to create and agree upon a form of government for the island. Students should first work either by themselves or with a partner to establish their ideal government. Then, as a class, they must share out their ideas and create a government. Record their ideas on the board. After students attempt to create a government, ask the following questions:
  - a. What were some challenges to creating a government?
  - b. Why didn’t everyone agree?

- c. Do you think your government will work? What will you do if the government fails?
- d. What inspired some of your ideas for the government?

Explain to students that creating a government is difficult. The founding fathers first created the Articles of Confederation, but after ten years, they realized that this government needed to be revised. The founders gathered at the Constitutional Convention where they debated and compromised to create the US Constitution.

2. **Objectives and Vocabulary:** Go over the learning objectives for the day with the students and explain that the students will hear interviews with James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, Benjamin Franklin, Gouverneur Morris, and George Washington
3. Define the following vocabulary which the students will hear throughout the video:
  - a. Pillory
  - b. Virginia Plan
  - c. Articles of Confederation
  - d. Quorum
  - e. Shays' Rebellion
  - f. Anarchy
  - g. Senate
4. **Viewing the Video:** The teacher can choose to show the video in full or show the video clips. This guide will break the video up into five parts and include questions that go with each section.
5. Play video: Part 1- 0-17:21. This section introduces students to James Madison and Alexander Hamilton. The two men discuss the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation and the reasons why the convention was called.
6. As students view the video they should answer the following questions on their handout:
  - a. What was the punishment for lying in 18th century Virginia? What were some other cruel and unusual punishments that came from "monarchical rule?"
  - b. What were some new laws that were implemented under the Virginia Declaration of Rights?
  - c. What were some issues with the Articles of Confederation?
  - d. Why was the Virginia Plan so radical in the world of 18th century monarchies?
  - e. What was Daniel Shays' Rebellion? Why was it "a blessing in disguise?"
7. After viewing this section of the video, discuss the above questions and check for student understanding.

8. Play video: Part 2- 25:24- 38:12. This segment introduces students to Benjamin Franklin and Gouverneur Morris. The men discuss the disagreements over representation in Congress and the Virginia Plan.
9. As students view the video they should answer the following questions on their handout:
  - a. What were some models the founding fathers used when constructing the federal government?
  - b. On May 25, they finally had enough delegates for a quorum. What were the first two orders of business they had to conduct?
  - c. The Constitutional Convention split into two groups. What did the smaller states want? What did the larger states want?
  - d. Where did the founders get the word "senate" from? What did it mean?
  - e. What is the difference between a democracy and a republic?
  - f. What did William Patterson of New Jersey offer as an alternative to the Virginia Plan?
10. After viewing this section of the video, discuss the above questions and check for student understanding.
11. Play video: Part 3- 38:12-44:08. This segment includes a visit from George Washington at the Constitutional Convention. The founders debate the role of the executive and how much power this person should have.
12. As students view the video they should answer the following questions on their handout:
  - a. Why did Benjamin Franklin believe the executive should not be paid?
  - b. Hamilton stated that, "In my opinion the crucial question before the House was not how much the executive should be paid, but rather how he should be chosen. And what should be the limit of his power?" According to Hamilton, how long should the executive hold power?
12. After viewing this section of the video, discuss the above questions and check for student understanding.
13. Play video: Part 4- 44:12-End. This segment will explain the founders' solutions to the problems and explain the role compromise played in writing the Constitution.
14. As students view the video they should answer the following questions on their handout:
  - a. What was the Great Compromise the delegates finally agreed upon?
  - b. How was the issue of slavery resolved at the Convention?
  - c. How did they solve the problem of the power of the executive?
15. After viewing this section of the video, discuss the above questions and check for student understanding.
16. **Reflection and Critical Thinking:** Ask students to reflect on the video and discuss the following questions:

- a. What were the networks and rivalries of the time? How do you think those relationships affected the Constitutional Convention?
  - b. How did Morris explain the difference between a federal government and a national government? Are they different?
  - c. Franklin stated multiple times, “one must take what one must get,” referring to the need to compromise during the convention. What were some of the compromises the founders made? Do you see compromise happening in politics today? In what ways? Why or why not?
  - d. In the video, Washington said, “whatever the result, I doubt the new federal government will survive twenty years.” Later, Franklin stated, “if we can keep it.” What might Washington, Franklin, and the other delegates have been worried would happen to the new government?
17. Direct students’ attention to activities 2 and 3 on their Inventing America guide. For Activity 3, give the students an overview of the 3 branches of government if the students are not familiar with them. Model the example to the students so they understand how to complete the activity.
18. **Assessment of Learning:** Even though Washington feared the country would not last more than 20 years, the United States is still in existence. Why do you think that is? What features of the Constitution have made it a successful government?

**Extension 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.