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Delaware Day 4th Grade Competition

Lesson One

Why Was The U. S. Constitution Written?

Students will be able to:

- Explain why the Constitution was written. (Panel 1:1)
- Rephrase the Preamble using their own words. (Panel 1:2)

This lesson contains information, resources and ideas to help students understand why the Constitution was written. Teachers will determine best practices and methods for instruction.

1. Introductory Activity

- a. Distribute Document 1: *What if there were no rules?* Ask students to write for a few minutes in response to these questions about what life would be like if there were no rules. Ask them to share their thoughts aloud with the group.
- b. Explain that people create governments so the kinds of problems that students listed in Document 1 would not happen.
- c. Ask students to try to come up with a definition of the word “government.” (A tricky word to define. Essentially a government is a group of people who have the job of creating the rules, making sure the rules are fair and making sure the rules are followed. If you prefer the word “system,” a government is a system that has been created so that rules are created and followed.)

2. Historical background

Document 2: *Historical Background* gives a simplified explanation about the events that led to the Constitution.

3. Activities: The Preamble and the Constitution

- a. Explain that many countries have constitutions, but ours is the oldest constitution and many countries use ours as a model. The Constitution of the United States describes the agreement “the people” made to form a new government. Our constitution describes how our government is organized and what kinds of responsibilities each branch of the government has. It also describes how laws will be made, enforced and interpreted and how it can be changed (amended). The Constitution includes a Bill of Rights which are the first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution. The Bill of Rights defined the rights of the people including freedom of speech and

religion. The idea was to protect the people and the states from a federal government becoming too powerful.

- b. Find an image of “The Preamble” online to show students. Ask them why the words *We the People* might have been written in such large letters. Help students understand that this new government wanted to make sure that the power to choose the leaders stayed with the people. Remind them that under the king, the people had no voice.
- c. Distribute the text of Document 3: *The Preamble*. Read it aloud to the students and consider playing the Schoolhouse Rock video about the Preamble. If your school allows you access to YouTube, you can google “Schoolhouse Rock, the Preamble”. Alternatively, you can use the lyrics and invite students to come up with their own performance. Lyrics are at <http://www.schoolhouserock.tv/Preamble.html>
- d. Divide the class into six groups and assign each group a different phrase from the Preamble (Document 4a). Encourage them to use dictionaries, textbooks, or the internet to try to figure out the meaning of their portion. Explain that each phrase identifies a purpose of government. (Document 4b provides an answer key.)
- e. To extend the lesson, you could ask students to draw a visual representation of each phrase. Alternatively, they could bring in newspaper stories that illustrate one or more of these purposes of government.

WHAT IF THERE WERE NO RULES?

1. If there were no rules for your classroom or school, what kinds of problems might happen?
2. What kinds of problems would your neighborhood have if there were no rules? What would your life be like?
3. If there were no governments or laws, how would states and countries behave toward one another?
4. Have you ever experienced any rules that you did not like?
5. Why do people need rules and laws?

Historical Background

Before the United States became its own country it was a part of England and ruled by a king. Instead of states, they were called colonies. Some people in the colonies were unhappy with how the king was treating them. He would not let the people have any say about what kinds of laws they had to follow. Many of his laws were unfair. The colonists finally became so upset with their treatment that they declared their independence and went to war with England. This war was called the American Revolution.

Now that the 13 colonies were no longer part of England, they were not colonies anymore. They were called states and they needed to create their own government. They did not want the type of government they had under the king where he made all the rules and the people had no rights. They decided that each state would have more power than the national government. The states would have their own money and their own presidents. They called this new system a confederation and described it in a document called the Articles of Confederation. The confederation lasted twelve years.

Eventually everyone agreed there were problems with the Articles of Confederation. Leaders from the thirteen states gathered in Philadelphia in 1787 to try to fix the Articles. In the end, they replaced the Articles of Confederation with the Constitution. The delegates argued about many issues, including slavery and whether the large states should have more power than the small states. The leaders developed a new constitutional system of government where the states kept some power while the Federal government took on more responsibilities. For example, the federal government was now in charge of currency so every state would have the same coins and dollar bills. The federal government would also be in charge of dealing with foreign nations. The United States was not perfect yet because many people still were not allowed to vote, but it was on its way to becoming a “more perfect union.”

Preamble to the United States 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.

The Preamble

The Preamble lists the reasons the Constitution was written. Try to put these reasons in your own words.

The Phrase	The Meaning
To form a more perfect union	
Establish justice	
Insure domestic tranquility	
Provide for the common defense	
Promote the general welfare	
Secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity	

The Preamble – Answer Key

The Preamble lists the reasons the Constitution was written. Try to put these reasons in your own words.

The Phrase	The Meaning
To form a more perfect union	To create a stronger country than we had under the Articles of Confederation
Establish justice	To make sure that everyone is treated fairly
Insure domestic tranquility	To try to keep the peace by creating fair laws and enforcing them
Provide for the common defense	To create a military that can protect the entire country
Promote the general welfare	To encourage what is good for all people
Secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity	To promise freedom for us and future generations