



# 'A More Perfect Union'

## Lesson Instructions for Younger Students

### Overview

This lesson, prepared especially for Constitution Day, introduces students to the U.S. Constitution. Students watch a slide show on the Constitution, then in pairs they answer "enduring questions" about the Constitution, and finally as a class, they hold a discussion on these questions.

### Preparation & Materials

- Watch the slide show, prepare your own commentary, and anticipate questions that students might ask about each slide.
- Set up the slide show for viewing in your classroom.
- **Handout 1: Four Enduring Questions**— 1 per student
- **Handout 2: "A More Perfect Union"**— 1 per pair
- If students have a textbook with material on the Constitution, consider letting them use it during the paired activity.

### Procedure

1. Introduce the slide show to students.
2. Present the slide, commenting on important points, and allowing questions and discussion on each slide. Consider having the whole class recite the Preamble to the Constitution at the end of the slide show.
3. When done with the slide show, explain that the Constitution still enlivens debate today. Tell them that they are going to discuss four enduring questions about the Constitution.
4. Divide the class into pairs. Distribute **Handout 1: Four Enduring Questions** to each student. Ask them to read the instructions on the handout. Answer any questions they have.
5. Distribute **Handout 2: "A More Perfect Union"** to each pair. Also, if applicable, tell students they may also consult their textbooks to get more information about a question.
6. When students finish the paired activity, call on one pair to discuss their answer to question #1. Hold a discussion on the question. Repeat for each question.

## Instructions

As a group, do the following:

- A. Read each question below and discuss it fully. Look at **Handout 2: "A More Perfect Union"** for more information on the question.
- B. Form your own reasoned opinion on each question.
- C. Be prepared to report your answer on each question, including reasons for your answer.

## Four Enduring Questions About the Constitution

1. Do you think it was right for the Constitution to be drafted in secret? Today, laws demand legislatures hold open hearings. Do you think the Constitutional Convention should have been open to the public? Explain.
2. Do you think we need *both* the Senate and House of Representatives? Explain.
3. The president is chosen by the Electoral College. Do you think this is the best way or do you favor another way? Explain.
4. Do you think federal judges should serve lifetime terms in office? Explain.

## Notes From 'A More Perfect Union': Crafting the U.S. Constitution

This reading is taken from the slide show. It has information you can discuss to help you answer the questions.

### The Constitutional Convention Met in Secret

In 1787, Congress decided to act. It called a convention in Philadelphia to revise the Articles of Confederation. Delegates from the states met at the Philadelphia Statehouse on May 25, 1787. They chose George Washington as the presiding officer. The delegates quickly decided two things. One, the convention would be held in secret. Today, all we know about the convention comes from the notes



Virginian James Madison took. Two, they were not going to revise the Articles. They were going to create a new constitution.

#### The Different Plans for Representation in Congress

Virginia was the most populous state. It proposed that each state's representation in Congress be based on its population. The more people, the more members of Congress a state would have.

New Jersey had far fewer people than Virginia. It proposed that each state have one vote in Congress, just like under the Articles of Confederation.

The delegates deadlocked on this issue. The big states favored the Virginia Plan. The smaller states supported the New Jersey Plan.

Delegates from Connecticut proposed a compromise. After weeks of debate, the convention agreed to it. Congress would consist of two houses:

1. The House of Representatives. It was based on population. Each state would send one representative for every 30,000 people who lived in it. If a state did not have 30,000 people, it would still have one representative.
2. The Senate. Each state would have two U.S. senators.

### **The Electoral College**

Delegates at the Constitutional Convention debated how the president should be elected. Some proposed the people should elect the president. Others proposed the state legislatures should elect the president. Delegates took 60 votes until they settled on the Electoral College.

The Electoral College votes for president. Each state is given a number of electors based on how many members of Congress it has. Each state legislature decides how its electors are chosen.

### **The Courts: The Judicial Branch**

The delegates at the Constitutional Convention created a Supreme Court. They also gave Congress the power to create a federal court system of lower courts. The delegates gave all federal judges life terms. They wanted judges to decide cases based on the law, not politics or what was popular.