

LESSON PLAN

Benjamin Franklin and the U.S. Constitution

Level: Literacy, Low Beginning

Suggested Length: 2 or 3 class periods, depending on class time and level

Civics Test Questions

- #1—What is the supreme law of the land?
- #2—What does the Constitution do?
- #3—The idea of self-government is in the first three words of the Constitution. What are these words?
- #13—Name one branch or part of the government.
- #14—What stops one branch of government from becoming too powerful?
- #65—What happened at the Constitutional Convention?
- #66—When was the Constitution written?
- #67—The Federalist Papers supported the passage of the U.S. Constitution. Name one of the writers.
- #68—What is one thing Benjamin Franklin is famous for?
- Related Test Item:
- #12—What is the “rule of law”?

Reading Test Vocabulary

- American, Congress, President, country, government, right, states
- America, United States, U.S.
- What, When
- is/are/was, has/have, name
- a, for, in, of, on, the, to, we
- many

Writing Test Vocabulary

- citizens, freedom of speech, rights, states
- United States
- has/have, is/was
- and, for, in, of, on, the, to, we

Objectives:

Students will:

- learn about Benjamin Franklin’s role in U.S. history
- identify the purpose of the Constitution, the first three words, and the date it was written
- identify the writers of the Federalist Papers
- identify the three branches of government and explain separation of powers
- explain the purpose of the Constitutional Convention
- understand the concept of “rule of law”

Materials:

Handouts: **Benjamin Franklin, The U.S. Constitution, We The People, The Constitution Today, and Categories—Benjamin Franklin and the U.S. Constitution**

Optional handout (Literacy Level Writing Practice): **Constitution**

Benjamin Franklin and the U.S. Constitution Lesson Answer Key



Lesson Overview and Notes to Teacher:

This lesson on Benjamin Franklin and the U.S. Constitution covers Civics Test items from two sections: Principles of American Democracy and Colonial Period and Independence. It briefly introduces the branches of government, a topic which will be covered in more detail in separate lessons. We would recommend teaching the lessons on George Washington and Thomas Jefferson before introducing this lesson. The readings and pictures should help students understand the new concepts. As

with previous lessons, the goal for the students is to comprehend and answer the Civics Test items correctly. On one handout, a New Words box is included where students write simple definitions to new vocabulary. There are also two activities, Correct the Sentence and Categories, to reinforce the material introduced. Lastly, the Literacy Level Writing Practice handout, **Constitution**, helps beginners practice spelling and handwriting.

Introduction: Write **law** on the board. Ask the class **What is a law? (formal rule)**. Ask the students to name some examples of laws in the United States (**no drinking and driving, etc.**). Tell the students that you are going to talk about U.S. laws. Write **Constitution** on the board, and explain that the Constitution is the most important document about laws and government in America. To review, draw a timeline on the board—ask the class

When was the War of Independence? and mark it on the timeline (**1775–1783**). Ask **When was the Declaration of Independence written? (1776)**. Then explain that after gaining independence, Americans wanted more structure, or rules, over the government and more ways to protect the rights of the people. So the Founding Fathers met at the Constitutional Convention and wrote the Constitution (1787). Mark the Constitution and 1787 on the timeline.

Guided Practice: Distribute the handout **Benjamin Franklin**. Explain that Franklin was a famous person in American history and one of the writers of the Constitution. Ask the students if Franklin was a president. Explain that although he was never president, Franklin did many things to help the country. Discuss the picture

of Franklin on the handout. Read through the sentences for the students and explain any new vocabulary. Then model each sentence for students to repeat line by line. Point out that **What is one thing Benjamin Franklin is famous for?** is on the Civics Test.

Practice: Distribute the handout **The U.S. Constitution**. Discuss the painting on the handout and ask the students if they recognize anyone (Note: George Washington is standing on the platform and Benjamin Franklin is seated in the middle of the scene, looking at the viewer.) Continue with the reading in the handout in the same manner as above. Use the New Words box to have the students write definitions for the new vocabulary (**document=important paper, Founding Fathers=leaders in Colonial times, convention=big meeting, to pass=to vote yes**). Review the following Civics Test items for this handout: **What happened at the Constitutional Convention?**, **When was the Constitution written?**, and **The Federalist Papers supported the passage of the U.S. Constitution. Name one of the writers.** [Background context for teachers: The Constitution was written in the summer of 1787 and signed on September 17, 1787. Nine of the 13 states were required to ratify the Constitution. However, some states, like New York, were hesitant to ratify. From 1787 to 1788, Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison published 85 essays called the Federalist Papers in New York newspapers in an effort to advocate for the passage of the U.S. Constitution.]

Distribute the handout **We The People**. Explain that **self-government** means that the American people decide about their government and laws. In other words, the people elect leaders who represent them, and that under “rule of law,” everyone must follow the same laws. In teaching about “rule of law,” ask the students, **Who has to follow the same laws? (everybody)** and then ask, **Does the President have to follow the same laws? (yes)**, and **How about the police/judges, etc? (yes)**, in order to illustrate that everyone in the United States is subject to the same laws. Go over the reading with the students. At the bottom of the handout, have the students read and correct the sentences. See the **Answer Key** for the corrections. Point out that **What is the “rule of law”?** and **The idea of self-government is in the first three words of the Constitution. What are these words?** are items on the Civics Test.

Distribute the handout **The Constitution Today**. Go over the reading explaining that the Constitution protects our rights (or freedoms) and defines our government. Point out the pictures and ask the students if they can name the buildings (**the U.S. Capitol, the White House, the Supreme Court**). Ask **Where are these buildings?** and

Who works in them? Discuss the three branches of the government with the students, and ask if the government in their native country is arranged in the same way. Help the students fill in the words for each branch (**Congress, President, Courts**) under the pictures. Point out that

What is the supreme law of the land?, What does the Constitution do?, Name one branch or part of the government, and What stops one branch of government from becoming too powerful? are items on the Civics Test.

Evaluation: Distribute the handout **Categories—Benjamin Franklin and the U.S. Constitution**. Have the students listen as you go over the Word Bank, asking relevant questions

about each word or phrase. Review the different categories and then have the students write the words in the correct category.

Writing Practice for Literacy/Low Beginning Students: The handout **Constitution** is included for

optional copy work. Point out that **What is the supreme law of the land?** is an item on the test.