

## THE PREAMBLE OF THE U.S. CONSTITUTION

**SS.7.CG.1.8** Explain the purpose of the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution.

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### 2023 BENCHMARK UPDATES

- Updated from SS.7.C.1.6
  - Changed from “~~Interpret the intentions~~ of the Preamble of the Constitution.” to “Explain the purpose of the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution.”
- Depth of Knowledge Changes within Benchmark
  - Changed from “Interpret” to “Explain”
- Benchmark Clarification Changes
  - Changed from “Students will identify the goals and purposes of government as set forth in the Preamble of the U.S. Constitution (i.e., form a more perfect union, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity).” to “Students will identify the goals and purposes of the national government as set forth in the Preamble of the U.S. Constitution (i.e., form a more perfect union, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity).”
- Vocabulary Changes
  - No changes

## Essential Teacher Content Background Information

[Teacher Content Notes Not Appropriate For Student Use]

### This section addresses the following topics:

1. Purpose of the Preamble of the U.S. Constitution
2. Dissecting the Preamble of the U.S. Constitution

### 1. Purpose of the Preamble of the U.S. Constitution

The Preamble of the U.S. Constitution provides information as to why the U.S. Constitution was being written; it does not form or specify any power of government. The U.S. Constitution was written in order to take the goals of government and create a workable structure reflecting the goals of government outlined in the Preamble.

### 2. Dissecting the Preamble of the U.S. Constitution

The matrix that follows takes each phrase in the Preamble of the U.S. Constitution and clarifies its deeper meaning. The clarifications explain how the Preamble establishes the goals and purposes of government.

Phrase	Deeper Meaning	Modern Application or Example
we the people	The people grant the powers to the government in this clause. The creators of the U.S. government were, by definition, an elite group that understood that they were creating a nation where the majority of the population were not elites, but common people. This majority's approval was necessary; one way to gain their approval was to confirm that the people were forming the government, and it was not being handed down by a god or a king.	In elections, the people decide who will govern. One of the results of the Progressive Movement (1890s-1920s) was the direct election of U.S. Senators who had been elected by state legislatures up to the ratification of the 17 <sup>th</sup> Amendment.
form a more perfect union	The U.S. Constitution was intended to improve on the Articles of Confederation, the government in place at the time. The Articles of Confederation had worked well to a point, and was the best that the colonists could come up with when the Articles were created. The Framers understood that the Constitution would not be "perfect", but "more perfect".	Amendment process in the Constitution allows for change in order to respond to issues that emerge such as concerns about presidential abuse of power reflected in term limits.
establish justice	The purpose of establishing justice is to maintain public order. Maintaining public order requires that the government follows the rule of law and treats the law as supreme. After the experiences of the people as colonists and new Americans, they wanted a	The Bill of Rights extends protections to persons accused of crimes. Even though the nature of these crimes is unpopular and may be especially heinous, the Bill of Rights guarantees

Phrase	Deeper Meaning	Modern Application or Example
	level playing field where courts were established with uniformity and would treat the people with fair and equal treatment.	to all citizens a level playing field when they are brought to trial.
insure domestic tranquility	The purpose of insuring domestic tranquility was to protect citizens from internal conflict. Internal conflict creates instability. Avoiding instability, such as Shays's Rebellion (1786-1787) was needed in order for a new nation to take hold.	The president and governors may call in the National Guard to address concerns that may or have resulted in violence in a state or area. For example, the National Guard was called in to maintain order in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and to New York and New Jersey after Superstorm Sandy in 2012.
provide for the common defense	The purpose of this phrase is to present the goal of protecting citizens from external attacks, which was a problem under the Articles of Confederation. No one state was really capable of fending off an attack from land or sea on its own so the states needed each other to survive attacks, especially from Britain or Spain, or by Native Americans.	The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 were deemed by the federal government to be a terrorist attack on the nation even though New York City and Washington, DC were the prime targets of the attacks. As a federal concern, the federal government took action on behalf of victims.
promote the general welfare	Government focuses on the "public interest" which allows every state and citizen to benefit from what the government could provide. The point of having tranquility, justice, and defense was to promote the general welfare which reinforces the concept of "we the people".	Public policies focusing on environmental protection promote the public interest.
secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity	The "public interest" is intended to work to the people's benefit and not to their detriment for now and forever. In essence, the U.S. would resemble a paradise for liberty.	There are occasions when First Amendment protections are offensive to some; however, in protecting free speech rights for some, free speech rights for all are protected. However, free speech exercises may not violate the public interest because they would compromise the people's benefit.
do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America	This phrase finishes the "we the people" approach by giving the document a name, naming the nation and summarizing the Preamble. There is a higher order involved here which is "the people". The Constitution replaced the Articles of Confederation ("establish") and created one national government.	Since the U.S. Constitution was ratified, every state that has entered the union has also adopted a constitution.

## Lesson Summary

ESSENTIAL QUESTION		
What are the goals and purposes of government according to the Preamble?		
BENCHMARK		
SS.7.CG.1.8 Explain the purpose of the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution.		
CIVICS EOC REPORTING CATEGORY		
N/A		
OVERVIEW		
In this lesson, students will understand the goals and purposes of government as defined by the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution.		
BENCHMARK CLARIFICATIONS		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Students will explain how the Preamble serves as an introduction to the U.S. Constitution (e.g., establishes the goals and purposes of government).</li><li>Students will identify the goals and purposes of the national government as set forth in the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution (i.e., form a more perfect union, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity).</li><li>Students will recognize that the intention of the phrase “We the People” means that government depends on the people for its power and exists to serve them.</li></ul>		
BENCHMARK CONTENT LIMITS		
N/A		
CIVICS CONTENT VOCABULARY		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>defense, domestic, insure, justice, ordain, posterity, Preamble, tranquility, union, welfare</li></ul>		
INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES		
Document analysis	Close reading of complex text	Use of video
MATERIALS		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The U.S. Constitution images</li><li>The Preamble to the U.S. Constitution activity sheet</li><li>Preamble Vocabulary slide</li><li>The Preamble video (external link)</li></ul>		
B.E.S.T. STANDARDS		

- ELA.7.V.1.1- Integrate academic vocabulary appropriate to grade level in speaking and writing.
- ELA.K12.EE.1.1- Cite evidence to explain and justify reasoning.

## Suggested Student Activity Sequence & Pace

DAY	ACTIVITY SEQUENCE
DAY 1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To begin this lesson, place students into pairs and project these few images of portions of “The U.S. Constitution”.</li> <li>2. Pose the following questions for brainstorm and discussion: What do you know about the U.S. Constitution? What is the purpose of the U.S. Constitution?</li> <li>3. Have students share out.</li> <li>4. Lead students to the understanding that the U.S. Constitution outlines the government structure and function for the nation.</li> <li>5. Engage students in a discussion about the structure of the document by posing the following questions: What do you notice about how the document is structured? Is there an introduction to the document?</li> <li>6. Provide students with time to brainstorm and share out. Lead students to the understanding that the Preamble is the introduction to the rest of the Constitution.</li> <li>7. Project and pass out “The Preamble to the U.S. Constitution” activity sheet and explain to students that they will do an analysis and close reading of the Preamble in order to understand the ideas contained within the introduction to the Constitution.</li> <li>8. Read aloud the Preamble to the whole class.</li> <li>9. Pose the following questions for discussion: What words or phrases from the text stand out to you? What do you think this text means? Encourage students to mark the text on their activity sheet.</li> <li>10. Direct student attention to the vocabulary chart on the activity sheet and project the “Preamble Vocabulary” slide. <i>Teacher Note:</i> The terms are listed as they appear in the text.</li> <li>11. Read the Preamble aloud to the class for the second time and pause at each term. Instruct students to define the term using the clues available. If additional support is needed to define terms in context, utilize the S.L.A.P. technique: 1. SAY the word aloud to the class, 2. instruct students to LOOK for clues, 3. instruct students to ASK themselves what the word might mean and think of another word that may be used to express that meaning, and 4. PUT that word in place of the unknown word, does it make sense? Why or why not?</li> <li>12. Have students add the definition for each term on the activity sheet.</li> <li>13. Read the Preamble to the class for a third time.</li> <li>14. Pose the following questions for discussion: What are the punctuation marks in the text? (period and commas) What do these marks tell you about the structure of the text? (It is a complex sentence, with multiple and related ideas connected by commas.)</li> <li>15. Have the students circle the period, to illustrate the punctuation and sentence complexity.</li> <li>16. To wrap up the lesson, ask students to answer a 3-2-1 on a separate sheet of paper or back of the activity, writing three things they learned about the Preamble, two reasons why the Preamble is important, and 1 question they still have.</li> </ol>
DAY 2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Explain to students that there are two important questions about our government that can be answered in the Preamble: Where does the government’s power come from? What are the goals and purposes of government?</li> </ol>

2. Allow students time to use the Preamble on their “The Preamble to the U.S. Constitution” activity sheet from yesterday to brainstorm with a partner, verbally, about where the government’s power comes from.
3. Have students share out.
4. Read the Preamble aloud to the class for the fourth time.
5. Pose the following questions for discussion: Where does the government’s power come from? What does the text say?
6. Provide adequate time for students to think and share out ideas.
7. Instruct students to circle the text from this statement that answers the question: Where does the government’s power come from? Record this answer in the first box on page two of the activity sheet. (We the People)
8. Share with students that the phrase “We the People” is important because the government gets its power from the people and government exists to serve the people. Instruct students to take notes on their activity sheet.
9. Read the Preamble aloud for the fifth time.
10. Pose the following questions for discussion: Now that we know where government gets its power from, what are the goals and purposes of government? What is in the text to help you answer this question?
11. Provide adequate time for students to think and share out ideas.
12. Direct student attention to the graphic organizer on their activity sheet that is labeled: ‘Goals and Purposes’ and pose the following question for discussion: Based on the amount of boxes on the graphic organizer, can you identify the same amount of goals and purposes in the Preamble?
13. Work together as a whole class to identify the 6 goals and purposes and fill in the top row of the organizer.
14. Instruct students to work with their partner and using the definitions for each term from the previous day, summarize each goal and purpose in their own words in the spaces below on the graphic organizer.
15. Provide adequate time for students to complete all 6 goals and purposes.
16. Explain to students that they will watch a short video to help review the goals and purposes of the Preamble. Instruct students to add any notes to their graphic organizer, if there is anything that they left out of their notes. Adding quick drawings/pictures helps too!
17. Play “[The Preamble](#)” video from Schoolhouse Rock.  
**Teacher Note:** This video reviews the 6 goals and can be used if your students need extra reinforcement.
18. Provide time for students to add to their notes after the conclusion of the video.
19. Have students share out their notes from the Goals and Purposes section of the activity sheet.
20. Checking for Understanding (Formative Assessment):  
Instruct students to write a well-crafted informative response using the following prompt:  
**Prompt**  
Using what you have learned from the analysis of the Preamble, explain where the government gets its power and why the six goals and purposes of government are important to include.  
**Teacher Note:** This is the last question on the activity sheet.

**Extension Suggestion:** Divide the class into eight groups. Assign each group a section of the Preamble:

1. We the People of the United States,

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>2. in Order to form a more perfect Union,</li><li>3. establish Justice,</li><li>4. insure domestic Tranquility,</li><li>5. provide for the common defence,</li><li>6. promote the general Welfare, and</li><li>7. secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity,</li><li>8. do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America</li></ol> <p>Instruct each group to create a visual representation of their section of the Preamble. Display each visual, in order, in the classroom.</p>
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## Civics Content Vocabulary

Word/Term	Definition
<b>defence [defense]</b>	method of protecting oneself
<b>domestic</b>	referring to something at home, not foreign
<b>insure [ensure]</b>	to make sure
<b>justice</b>	a system of establishing what is legal and illegal by fair rules
<b>ordain</b>	to establish something by law
<b>posterity</b>	future generations
<b>Preamble</b>	the introduction to the U.S. Constitution
<b>tranquility</b>	peace
<b>union</b>	something formed by combining parts, such as states into one country
<b>welfare</b>	well-being

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### [Civics 360 Resources](#)

Florida Department of Education's Civic Literacy Reading List

- *Words We Live By: Your Annotated Guide to the Constitution* by Linda R. Monk

## ANSWER KEYS

Sample Answers: The Preamble to the U.S. Constitution activity sheet

Written Response: Sample Scoring Rubric

## SOURCES

Text image of the U.S. Constitution from the National Constitution Center:

<https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/constitution>

Constitution Preamble from Schoolhouse Rock video: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8\\_NzZvdsbWI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8_NzZvdsbWI) or <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=30OyU4O80i4>

Additional Preamble Content adapted from:

[https://kids.kiddle.co/Preamble\\_to\\_the\\_United\\_States\\_Constitution](https://kids.kiddle.co/Preamble_to_the_United_States_Constitution), Accessed April July 2020

The SLAP Strategy: <http://lareading.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/04/slap.pdf>, Accessed July 2020