

AMERICA, A CONSTITUTIONAL REPUBLIC

SS.912.CG.1.4 Analyze how the ideals and principles expressed in the founding documents shape America as a constitutional republic.

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2023 BENCHMARK UPDATES

- Updated from SS.912.C.1.3
 - Changed from “~~Evaluate~~ the ideals and principles of the Founding Documents (DOI, Articles of Confederation, Federalist Papers) that shaped ~~American~~ ~~democracy~~.” to “Analyze how the ideals and principles expressed in the founding documents shape America as a constitutional republic.”
- Depth of Knowledge Changes within Benchmark
 - Changed from “Evaluate” to “Analyze”
- Addition of Benchmark Clarifications
 - Benchmark clarifications are an addition to the 2023-2024 high school civics and government benchmarks. Benchmark clarifications are listed in the lesson summary below.

Essential Teacher Content Background Information

[Teacher Content Notes Not Appropriate For Student Use]

This section addresses the following topics:

1. America as a Constitutional Republic
2. Dissecting the Preamble of the U.S. Constitution
3. Key Founding Documents Leading to Ratification of the U.S. Constitution
4. Key Individuals Who Contributed to the Founding Documents

1. America as a Constitutional Republic

According to a journal entry by Maryland delegate James McHenry to the Constitutional Convention, on the last day of the convention, a woman approached Dr. Benjamin Franklin and asked “Well Doctor, what have we got? A republic or a monarchy?” Franklin answered “A republic if you can keep it.”

The newly drafted U.S. Constitution would become the core of everything America is. The Constitution forms the foundation of our government and puts into practice those founding principles laid out so plainly in the Declaration of Independence. As “supreme law of the land”, the Constitution serves multiple roles. It is the framework for governance establishing the structure, function, and purpose, which is laid out in the Preamble: *“We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, 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 constitution we have secures our rights and protects our philosophical foundation through the establishment of a constitutional republic, with the express purposes laid out so clearly in the Preamble.

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

The table below 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 th 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	Amendment process in the Constitution allows for change in order to respond to issues that emerge such as concerns about presidential

Phrase	Deeper Meaning	Modern Application or Example
	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.”	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 level playing field where courts were established with uniformity and would treat the people with fair and equal treatment.	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 all citizens a level playing field when they are brought to trial.
insure domestic tranquility	The purpose of ensuring domestic tranquility was to protect citizens from internal conflict. Internal conflict creates instability. Avoiding instability, such as Shay’s Rebellion (1786-1787), was needed 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 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 the 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, reinforcing 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.

Phrase	Deeper Meaning	Modern Application or Example
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.

3. Key Founding Documents Leading to Ratification of the U.S. Constitution

There are three foundational documents that played a pivotal role in America’s journey from colonial British subjects to the United States of America. Together, these documents reflect the ideals and principles we wanted when establishing a new form of government. Each one is historically significant on its own, but together, they provide insight into the “hows” and “whys” of the U.S. Constitution and serve as the ultimate reflection of who we are as a constitutional republic. The three documents include:

- A. The Declaration of Independence (1776): There are three core themes found in the Declaration of Independence. It is a common misunderstanding that the Declaration of Independence formed a government. This concept is important because the Declaration of Independence focuses instead on what the colonists found to be unacceptable governance. Power was concentrated in one place (unitary government). The concentration of power contributed to the abuse of power. The form of government that created this concentration of power was going to be avoided for this reason when the colonists formed their own government. The Declaration also focuses on “natural rights philosophy”, the notion that there are certain rights that are inalienable or God-given. Because these rights are given by God and not given by a government, any government or person cannot take them away. Natural rights supersede legal rights, those rights granted by governments. Government abused its power by denying the colonists their natural rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.
- B. The Articles of Confederation (1777): The first government of the United States following the Declaration of Independence was the Articles of Confederation (1781-1789). A confederation is a state-centered, decentralized government where the primary powers of government are held at the state level. The unitary government, one that centralized the legislative, executive, and judicial powers, was unacceptable to the colonists when they sought to create a government after declaring their independence from the British crown. Under the Articles of Confederation, states retained their freedom and independence. Each of the 13 states had a vote in the weak national Congress (appointed by the state governments), while a vote of all 9 states was required in order to pass any laws, and a unanimous vote of all 13 states was required for the Articles to be amended. The national Congress was also denied the power to tax, so it could not pay for the army and navy needed to defend the nation. The national Congress also lacked the power to regulate trade. As for the other powers of government, there was no national court system, nor was there a national executive. The result of this decentralized approach was that each state functioned in many ways as an independent country. Several states negotiated their own trade agreements with those countries that the king had previously convinced not to have a relationship with the colonies, while other states established their own militaries. The lack of a national court system meant that criminals committing crimes in one state would often seek refuge in other states where they would not be prosecuted. Without a national military, states that were attacked or suffered internal rebellion could not turn to the national government for support or resources for their defense. The result

of these state actions was that the states, despite being part of the same country, did not function as a nation. Together the lack of powers held by the weak national Congress, coupled with each state's independent and often conflicting actions, raised concerns that the Articles of Confederation were not designed in a way to protect the new nation.

- C. The Federalist Papers (1787 & 1788): The group that favored the new national Constitution was the Federalists. To help promote ratification, they published a series of essays known as The Federalist Papers. Overall, the papers focused on the following arguments favoring the new national Constitution: The separation of powers and checks and balances system protected the people-no one group could control the other two; the Constitution's lack of a specific enumeration of rights actually protected the people because a list of protected rights might suggest that rights that were not on the list could then be violated; the Constitution would more closely unite the states as one nation; a strong central government would foster the commercial growth of the new country.

4. Key Individuals Who Contributed to the Founding Documents

The list of individuals who contributed to the United States' founding documents is far too vast to list here, but critical key contributors include:

- A. Thomas Jefferson (VA), the primary author of the *Declaration of Independence*
- B. Alexander Hamilton (NY), along with Jay and Madison, one of the authors of the *Federalist Papers*.
- C. John Jay (NY), with Hamilton and Madison, one of the authors of the *Federalist Papers*.
- D. James Madison (VA), remembered as the "Father of the Constitution" for his key role in that document's drafting and design, and with Hamilton and Jay, one of the authors of the *Federalist Papers*.
- E. George Mason (VA), Anti-Federalist, whose opposition to the Constitution led to the addition of ten amendments, the Bill of Rights.
- F. John Dickinson (DE), the primary author of the *Articles of Confederation*

Lesson Summary

BENCHMARK	
SS.912.CG.1.4 Analyze how the ideals and principles expressed in the founding documents shape America as a constitutional republic.	
BENCHMARK CLARIFICATIONS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Students will differentiate among the documents and determine how each one was individually significant to the founding of the United States.Students will evaluate how the documents are connected to one another.Documents include, but are not limited to, the Declaration of Independence, Articles of Confederation, Federalist Papers (e.g., No. 10, No. 14, No. 31, No. 39, No. 51) and the U.S. Constitution.Students will identify key individuals who contributed to the founding documents (e.g., Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, James Madison, George Mason).	
FLORIDA CIVIC LITERACY EXAM COMPETENCY CONNECTION	
<p>Competency 1: Understanding of the basic principles and practices of American democracy and how they are applied in our republican form of government</p> <p>Competency 3: Knowledge of the founding documents and how they have shaped the nature and functions of our institutions of self-government</p>	
OVERVIEW	
In this lesson, students will analyze the United States' founding documents to see how their ideals and principles reflect the purposes of our constitutional republic.	
ESSENTIAL QUESTION	
How did the ideals and principles expressed in founding documents shape America as a constitutional republic?	
GOVERNMENT CONTENT VOCABULARY	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Anti-Federalists, Articles of Confederation, constitutional republic, Declaration of Independence, Federalists, Federalist Papers, limited government, natural rights, ordain, posterity, Preamble, tranquility, U.S. Constitution, welfare	
INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES	
Document analysis	Close reading
MATERIALS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Shaping America slidesPreamble to the Constitution video (external link)Preamble Principles in the Founding Documents Graphic Organizer	

- The Declaration of Independence reading
- The Articles of Confederation reading
- The Federalist Papers reading

B.E.S.T. STANDARDS

The grade in which this lesson is taught will determine the specific B.E.S.T. standards correlation.

Thematically, this lesson aligns to:

- ELA.R.2.1 Structure
- ELA.R.2.2 Central Idea
- ELA.R.2.4 Argument

Suggested Student Activity Sequence & Pace

DAY	ACTIVITY SEQUENCE
DAY 1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Begin the lesson by projecting slide 2 of the “Shaping America” slides. 2. Ask students if they can identify any features of the forms of government pictured on the slide. <i>Teacher Note:</i> Use the bullets in the speaker notes section to guide the discussion. 3. Point out to students that the United States is not any of these forms of government. Ask students: What form of government did our Founders establish? 4. Lead students to an understanding that we are a constitutional republic. Use slide 3 to review with students what that means, having them take notes on looseleaf paper or in notebooks. 5. Ask students: What or who influenced the Founders/Framers when it came to establishing the American government? 6. Lead students to an understanding that the Founders/Framers were influenced by ancient civilizations (Greece and Rome), Judeo-Christian tradition, English Common Law, colonial governments, other historical documents, and the work of Enlightenment philosophers. <i>Teacher Note:</i> If you have already taught SS.912.CG.1.1 and SS.912.CG.1.2, this may be used as a review. 7. Explain to students that after evaluating all they knew related to government, the Framers developed a list of principles and created a form of government to ensure those principles were protected. 8. Play for students “The Preamble to the Constitution” video from Schoolhouse Rock on slide 4. Instruct them to take notes on the principles they hear. 9. Review the principles of our constitutional republic using slide 5. 10. Explain to students that in this lesson, they will look for evidence in some of the United States’ founding documents that supports the idea that these principles shaped America into a constitutional republic. 11. Distribute the “Preamble Principles in the Founding Documents Graphic Organizer” to each student. 12. Explain to students that they will complete the first one together as a whole class. Pass out copies of “The Declaration of Independence” reading. 13. Preview the text together, noting the structure of an introduction essay followed by document excerpts. Read aloud together, modeling text-marking strategies as you go. 14. After reading, work together to fill out the first row of the graphic organizer with <u>one</u> example of how the Declaration of Independence shaped and reflects America’s principles of government. <i>Teacher Note:</i> Use the sample answer key provided to help guide discussion. 15. As an exit ticket, ask students to identify one additional example/excerpt from the Declaration and explain which Preamble principle it connects to and how/why.
DAY 2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Begin class by having students take back out their “Preamble Principles in the Founding Documents Graphic Organizer”. 2. Place students into pairs.

3. Explain to students that today, they will analyze two additional founding documents in order to look for evidence that supports the idea that these principles shaped America into a constitutional republic.
4. Distribute the “The Articles of Confederation” reading to half of the pairs and the “The Federalist Papers” reading to the other half. (Example: If you have 14 pairs, 7 of them will receive the Articles reading and 7 will receive the Federalist Paper reading)
5. Instruct students to work with their partners to read and mark the text. After, they should work to fill in the corresponding row of their graphic organizer.
6. While students work, circulate the room, checking in with each pair to ensure engagement and understanding.
7. Once all pairs have completed their assigned text, instruct each pair to find another pair that has a different text than theirs, forming a group of four.
8. Each pair should take turns sharing with the other the information they learned from their assigned text. Missing information from the graphic organizer should be filled in.
Teacher Note: You may leave today’s activity more unstructured or use a timer for each step in the process.
9. Bring the class back together and review the two documents examined today.
Teacher Note: Use the sample answer key provided below to help guide discussion.
10. Provide students time to complete a formative assessment by creating a first-person narrative paragraph.
 - Students must select to write from the perspective of Thomas Jefferson, John Dickinson, or James Madison.
 - In one paragraph, write to explain how the ideals and principles in the founding document you were the primary author of helped shape America as a constitutional republic.

Government Content Vocabulary

Word/Term	Definition
Anti-Federalists	opponents who argued against of the 1787 Constitution of the United States
Articles of Confederation	the first constitution of the colonies, in effect from 1781 until 1787
constitutional republic	a form of government in which there is democratic voting, but governmental power is limited by the existence of a constitution that protects the rights of citizens
Declaration of Independence	document that provided a justification for independence, including a list the grievances of the colonies against the King of England
Federalists	proponents who argued in favor of the 1787 Constitution of the United States
Federalist Papers	a series of 85 letters or essays written in 1787-1788 pseudonymously by James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay arguing in favor of ratification of the Constitution
limited government	a government that has been limited in power by a constitution, or written agreement
natural rights	individuals are born with basic rights that cannot be taken away by governments
ordain	to establish something by law
posterity	future generations
Preamble	the introduction to the U.S. Constitution
tranquility	peace
U.S. Constitution	a document that set up the government for the United States, establishing it as a republic, with three branches
welfare	well-being

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Florida Department of Education: Florida Civic Literacy Exam Homepage](#)

Florida Department of Education's Civic Literacy Reading List

- *Federalist Papers* by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay
- *Notes on the Constitutional Convention* by James Madison
- *The Republic* by Plato

ANSWER KEYS

Sample Answers: Preamble Principles in the Founding Documents Graphic Organizer

Written Response: Sample Scoring Rubric

SOURCES

Franklin Quote:

<https://blogs.loc.gov/manuscripts/2022/01/a-republic-if-you-can-keep-it-elizabeth-willing-powel-benjamin-franklin-and-the-james-mchenry-journal/>

The Preamble to the Constitution video from Schoolhouse Rock:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4TX2Mmd42yI>

The Declaration of Independence: <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>

The Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union:

<https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/spotlight-primary-source/articles-confederation-1777>

The Federalist Papers: <https://guides.loc.gov/federalist-papers/full-text>

The Constitution of the United States: <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript>