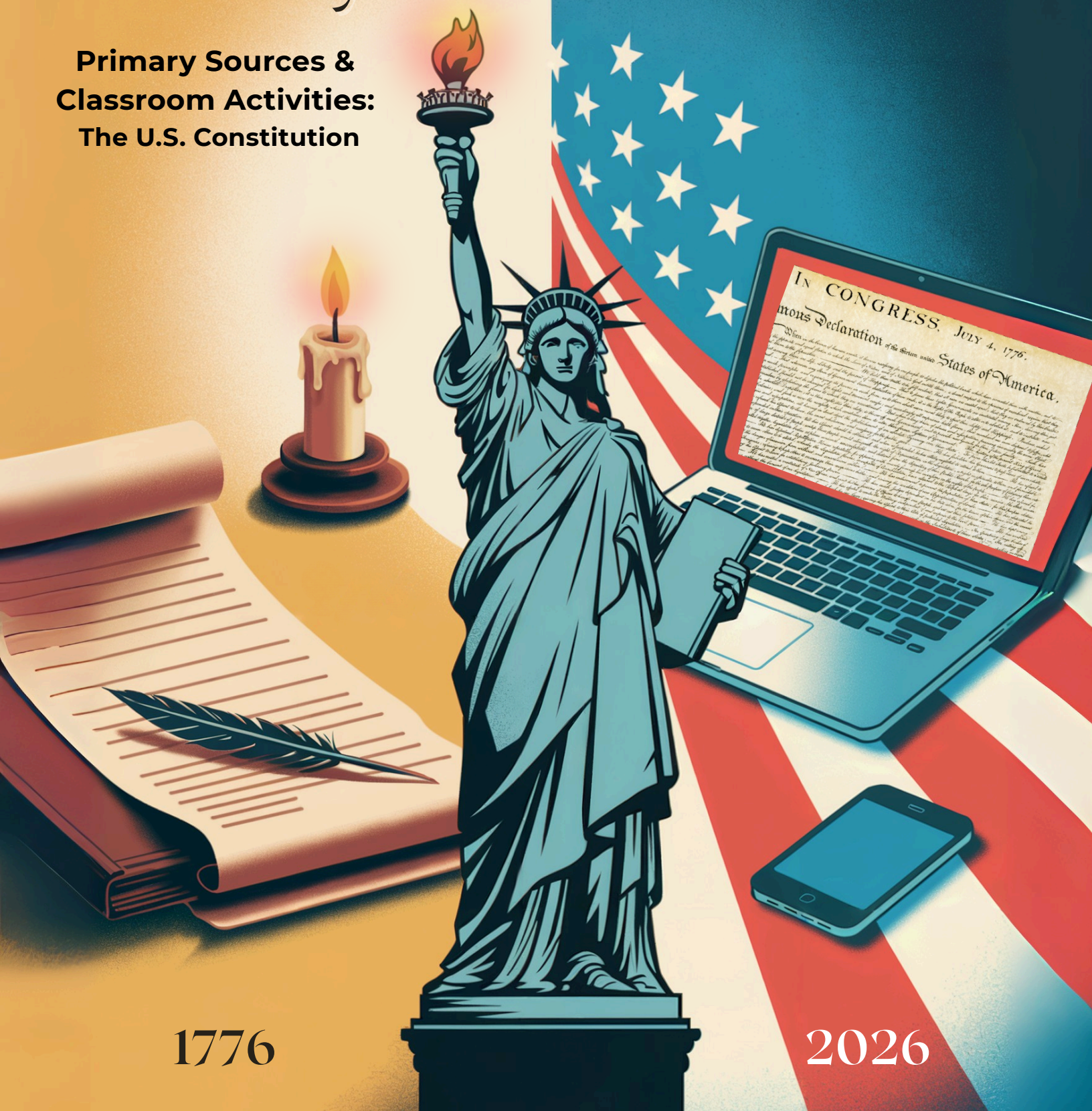


Voices of Liberty

**Primary Sources &
Classroom Activities:
The U.S. Constitution**

Stossel
IN THE CLASSROOM



1776

2026

Engage Students • Debate Ideas • Celebrate Liberty



To Educators

As we celebrate America's 250th birthday, this resource is dedicated to you—the educators guiding the next generation. Whether you teach in a public school, private school, or homeschool, your role is vital in helping students understand the ideas that built our nation and the responsibilities that keep it free.

President Ronald Reagan reminded us:

"Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same."

That is why this resource exists—to engage students with the words, ideas, and debates that shaped America, and to inspire them to reflect on their own role in protecting liberty for the future.

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THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION

To read the full transcript of the Constitution:

<https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript>

For additional Constitution resources, including images of the original parchment:

<https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution>

THE PREAMBLE



Historical Background

After winning independence, the United States needed more than just freedom from Britain—it needed a system for governing itself. The first attempt, the Articles of Confederation, created a weak central government that struggled to collect taxes, resolve disputes between states, or defend the new nation.

In 1787, delegates from twelve states (all except Rhode Island, which declined to participate because it opposed creating a stronger central government) gathered in Philadelphia to create something better. Among them were George Washington, who was chosen to preside over the meetings; James Madison, often called the “Father of the Constitution”; Benjamin Franklin, the oldest delegate at age 81; and Alexander Hamilton, a strong supporter of a powerful national government.

The result of their work was the Constitution—a bold plan to unite the country under a strong but limited government. The very first sentence, the Preamble, explains the purpose of this new government: to build a better union, ensure justice, keep peace at home, defend the nation, promote prosperity, and secure liberty for all Americans.

Did You Know?

The original draft of the Preamble didn't begin with "We the People." It listed each of the 13 states by name. But the final version chose one united voice instead—"We the People"—to show that power came not from the states, but from the citizens themselves.

Why It Matters Today

The Preamble is just one sentence—but it tells us what the government is supposed to do. It's like a mission statement for the United States. Each phrase reflects a core purpose: justice, peace, defense, prosperity, and freedom—not just for the present, but for the future.

Today, we still debate what it means to form "a more perfect Union" or to "promote the general welfare." These words remind us that

government exists to serve the people—not the other way around. As we celebrate America's 250th birthday, the Preamble challenges us to ask: Is our government still living up to these goals?

Did You Know?

The phrase "*promote the general welfare*" has been debated since the earliest days of the Republic. In 1794, James Madison objected to giving money to French refugees, saying he could not find any clause in the Constitution that allowed Congress to spend taxpayer money on acts of charity. Nearly a century later, President Grover Cleveland vetoed the Texas Seed Bill, which would have given drought relief to struggling farmers. Cleveland wrote: "*I can find no warrant for such an appropriation in the Constitution... The lesson should be constantly enforced that though the people support the government, the government should not support the people.*"

Both examples show that leaders believed "general welfare" meant creating fair conditions for everyone, not using federal funds for individual aid programs.



Primary Text: 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.

Discussion Questions

1. The Constitution begins with "We the People." What do you think that says about who holds power in the United States?
2. Which phrase in the Preamble stands out to you the most and why?
3. Do you think the U.S. government today is doing a good job of fulfilling the goals listed in the Preamble? Why or why not?
4. The Preamble says the government should "promote the general welfare." Leaders such as James Madison and Grover Cleveland argued this meant creating fair conditions for everyone, not giving direct aid to individuals. Today, many people believe it should include programs such as disaster relief, welfare, or healthcare. Which view do you think is closer to what "general welfare" should mean? Why?

Writing Prompt

The Preamble lists six goals for the U.S. government, including justice, peace, defense, and liberty.

Choose one of these goals and explain whether you think the government is succeeding or failing at it today. Use examples to support your answer.

ARTICLES OF THE CONSTITUTION OVERVIEW

After the Preamble, the rest of the Constitution is divided into seven Articles. These lay out how the government works and how power is shared. Here are the highlights:

Article I – The Legislative Branch

Creates Congress, the lawmaking branch of government. It includes two parts:

- The House of Representatives, where representation is based on population
- The Senate, where each state has two votes, no matter its size

This system was part of the Great Compromise, balancing the interests of large and small states. Article I also explains how laws are made, the powers Congress has (for example, taxing and declaring war), and limits on government power.

Did You Know?

Why Congress Looks the Way It Does: Two Big Compromises

When the Constitution was written in 1787, the biggest fights weren't just about laws—they were about power.

The Great Compromise: Big States vs. Small States

Large states such as Virginia wanted Congress to be based on population—more people, more votes.

Small states, for instance New Jersey, feared being overpowered and wanted each state to have equal votes, no matter how many people lived there.

The solution? A new Congress with two houses:

- The House of Representatives would be based on population
- The Senate would give every state two votes, equally

This was called the Great Compromise, and it helped balance power between big and small states. Without it, the Constitution might never have been approved.

The Three-Fifths Compromise: North vs. South

But another fight was brewing—this time over slavery.

Southern states had large populations of enslaved people, but they didn't give them any rights. Still, they wanted to count enslaved people when deciding how many seats they got in the House of Representatives.

Northern states, which were already moving towards abolition, pushed back. They said: If people can't vote or have freedom, you can't use them just to gain power.

Once again, a deal was struck: only three-fifths of the enslaved population would be counted for representation and taxation. This became the Three-Fifths Clause.

This clause did not mean that enslaved people were "three-fifths of a person." It was a political compromise—one that gave the South more influence in Congress, while keeping slavery in place.

Together, these compromises show how the Constitution was built with hard trade-offs to keep the states united. They also remind us that questions about fairness, power, and representation have been part of American life since the beginning—and still matter today.



Article II – The Executive Branch

Creates the presidency and explains how the President is elected, what powers the President has (such as leading the military and enforcing laws), and how the President can be removed from office.

Article III – The Judicial Branch

Creates the Supreme Court and gives Congress the power to set up lower courts. It explains what kinds of cases federal courts can hear and guarantees trial by jury in most criminal cases.

Article IV – States and the Union

Explains how states work together, how new states can join, and how the federal government must protect every state.

Article V – Amending the Constitution

Outlines how the Constitution can be changed, requiring approval from both Congress and the states. This allows the Constitution to grow over time—but only when there's broad agreement. The Founders believed the rule of law mattered too much to allow easy or frequent changes to the nation's foundation.

Article VI – The Supreme Law of the Land

Says that the Constitution is the highest law, and that federal law outweighs state law. It also requires all officials to swear an oath to uphold the Constitution.

Article VII – Ratification

Explains how the Constitution would go into effect once nine of the thirteen states approved it.

Checks and Balances

The Constitution doesn't just divide power, it creates a system of checks and balances, so that no one branch becomes too powerful.

- Congress makes laws, but the President can veto them.
- The courts can declare laws or executive actions unconstitutional.
- The Senate must approve many presidential appointments and treaties.
- Congress can impeach the President or federal judges.

While the President leads the military and enforces the laws, the Founders gave Congress and the courts tools to keep executive power in check.

Today, debates about executive orders, emergency powers, and presidential authority show how important this balance still is.

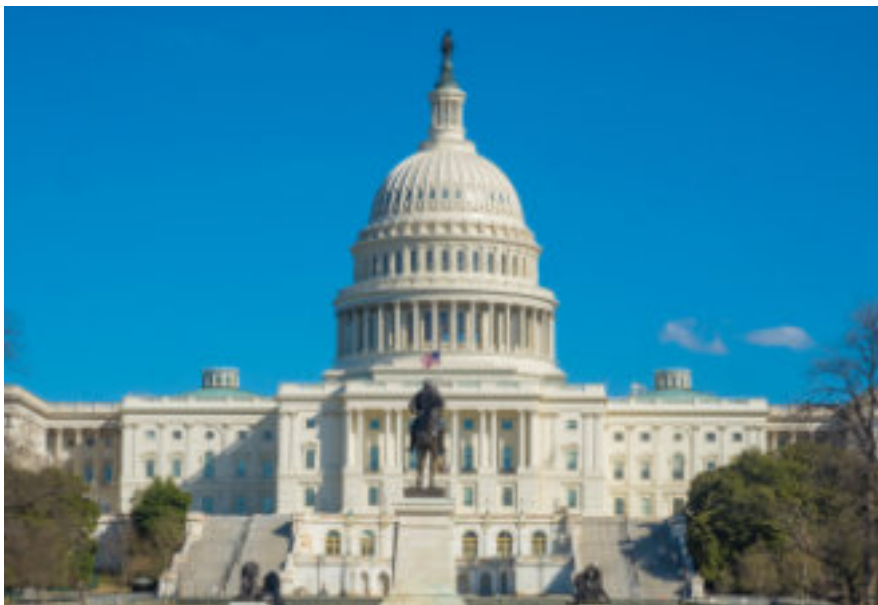
Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think the Founders divided the government into three branches instead of giving power to just one group?

2. How does the Great Compromise help explain the way Congress is structured today? Do you think this structure still works? Why or why not?

3. The Constitution allows for amendments, but it's hard to make changes. Why do you think the Founders made it that way? Do you think it should be easier—or even harder—to change the Constitution? How has this impacted the importance of the Supreme Court?

4. How do checks and balances help protect liberty? Can you think of any times when one branch has tried to gain more power than it should?



Writing Prompt

The Constitution was written to limit government power, divide authority, and protect liberty. It's been amended over time, but its structure has stayed the same for over 230 years.

Choose one part of the Constitution's design, such as separation of powers, the amendment process, or how Congress is structured, and explain whether you think it still serves the country well today and why or why not. Use examples to support your opinion.

BILL OF RIGHTS

Historical Background

When the Constitution was first written in **1787**, it didn't include a list of personal rights. Some delegates believed the Constitution already limited the federal government enough. But many Americans disagreed. They didn't want to leave anything to chance.

They believed that people are born with natural rights—for example, freedom of speech, religion, and self-defense—and that government exists to protect those rights, not to grant them. So they demanded stronger, written guarantees.

These concerns nearly blocked the Constitution from being approved. To win support, the Founders promised to add a Bill of Rights—not to give people new freedoms, but to clearly limit government power from interfering with individual's liberties.

In **1791**, just four years later, the first ten amendments were ratified. These are known as the Bill of Rights, and they are meant to serve as a permanent shield between the people and the government.

Why It Matters Today

The Bill of Rights makes something very clear: our rights come first—before government. These ten amendments are not a gift from the government; they are a list of protections against government power.

Even today, we still debate how these rights apply to modern issues:

- Does free speech include social media posts or student protests?
- How do we balance privacy with security?
- What are the limits of government power in a crisis?

As we celebrate America's 250th birthday, the Bill of Rights challenges us to remember that freedom doesn't survive by accident. It must be understood, defended, and passed on.

Did You Know?

The original Bill of Rights actually had **twelve** proposed amendments. Only ten were ratified at first. One of the original twelve wasn't approved until **1992**—more than **200 years later**! It became the 27th Amendment, limiting how Congress can raise its own pay.



The First 10 Amendments

Primary Text: Amendment I

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

What It Means

Congress can't make any law that:

- Establishes a national religion
- Stops people from practicing their own religion
- Limits what people can say
- Censors newspapers or other media
- Stops people from gathering peacefully
- Prevents people from asking the government to fix problems

These rights help protect freedom of thought, belief, and expression—and give people a voice in how they are governed.

Primary Text: Amendment II

A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms shall not be infringed.

What It Means

Because a well-prepared citizen militia is important for keeping a free country safe, people have the right to own and carry weapons, and that right cannot be taken away by the government.

This amendment is often debated today, but at its core, it was written to protect people's ability to defend themselves and their communities—especially against tyranny.

Primary Text: Amendment III

No Soldier shall, in time of peace be quartered in any house, without the consent of the Owner, nor in time of war, but in a manner to be prescribed by law.

What It Means

The government can't force people to let soldiers live in their homes during peacetime. Even during war, soldiers can only be housed in private homes if Congress passes a specific law that allows it.

This was a big concern after British soldiers had been forced into colonists' homes. Today, it's rarely tested but it still stands as a reminder that your home is your private space, even in times of national crisis.

Primary Text: Amendment IV

The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.

What It Means

You have the right to privacy. The government can't search you, your home, your belongings, or your personal records without a good reason. If they want to search or take something, they usually need a warrant, which is approved by a judge, based on real evidence, and limited to a specific place or thing.

Today, these protections apply not just to physical spaces, but also to digital data like texts, emails, and GPS locations. Many people are concerned about how private companies collect personal data and how that data is sometimes shared with the government without a warrant. The debate continues over how far these protections should go in a connected world.

I PLEAD THE 5TH!

Primary Text: Amendment V

No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a Grand Jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces... nor shall any person be subject for the same offence to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation.

What It Means

If you're accused of a serious crime, the government must follow strict legal rules.

You can't be:

- Put on trial twice for the same crime (double jeopardy)
- Forced to testify against yourself (Where "I take the 5th" comes from)
- Punished or have your rights taken away without due process (a fair and legal process)
- And if the government takes your property for public use, they must pay you a fair price.

This amendment protects both your legal rights and your property rights, and it still plays a major role in court cases today—from criminal trials to land disputes to debates about government overreach.

Primary Text: Amendment VI

The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.

What It Means

If you're accused of a crime, you have the right to:

- A fair, public trial that happens quickly
- A jury of everyday citizens from your area
- Know exactly what you're being charged with
- See and question witnesses who speak against you
- Call your own witnesses
- Have a lawyer to help you defend yourself, even if you can't afford one

This amendment helps make sure criminal trials are open, honest, and not stacked against the accused—a key part of justice in any free society.

Primary Text: Amendment VII

In suits at common law, where the value in controversy shall exceed twenty dollars, the right of trial by jury shall be preserved, and no fact tried by a jury shall be otherwise re-examined in any Court of the United States, than according to the rules of the common law.

What It Means

If you're involved in a civil case (a legal dispute over money, property, or contracts—not a crime), and the amount is big enough, you have the right to have your case decided by a jury of your peers, not just a judge. Once a jury decides the facts, a higher court can't just change that decision without good reason.

However, many companies today require people to sign arbitration agreements—contracts that waive your right to a jury trial and send disputes to private arbitrators instead. These deals often favor corporations and can make it harder for individuals to get justice.

This amendment reminds us that the right to a civil jury trial exists—but we must understand it, protect it, and think twice before signing it away.

Did You Know?

Have you ever clicked “**I Agree**” on an app, job contract, or website terms of service?

If so, you may have given up your right to a jury trial in a civil case without even realizing it.

Many companies insist on arbitration agreements, which require you to settle any dispute in private—no jury, no public trial, no appeal. These agreements often favor big corporations, who can afford to keep using the same arbitrators (which you and they must pay for!) over and over again.

That's one reason why understanding your rights—and reading the fine print—matters more than ever.

Primary Text: Amendment VIII

Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.

What It Means

The government can't require huge amounts of money for bail or fines that don't match the crime. It also can't use punishments that are cruel, abusive, or shocking to human dignity.

This amendment is often debated in cases involving the death penalty, prison conditions, and unfair financial penalties. It reminds us that justice should never become vengeance, and that even people who break the law still have rights.



Primary Text: Amendment IX

The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people.

What It Means

Just because a right isn't written down in the Constitution doesn't mean you don't have it. The government can't say you have only the rights listed because people also keep other basic freedoms.

This amendment protects natural rights such as the freedom to make personal decisions about your life, your family, or your beliefs, even if those rights aren't spelled out word-for-word. It reminds us that our liberty is bigger than a list.

Primary Text: Amendment X

The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.

What It Means

If the Constitution doesn't give a power to the federal government, and it doesn't ban it from the states, then that power belongs to the states or the people.

This amendment is about limiting federal power and protecting local control. It supports the idea that government should be close to the people whenever possible—and that most decisions should be made by states, communities, or individuals unless the Constitution says otherwise.



Discussion Questions

1. Where do our rights come from—government, or somewhere else? How does the Bill of Rights help clarify that?
2. The Bill of Rights was written to protect people from government power. Do you think it still does that effectively today? Why or why not?
3. Some people argue that freedom of speech doesn't protect "harmful" ideas or "hate" speech. How would the Founders respond to that? Should unpopular speech be protected?
4. The 4th Amendment protects us from unreasonable searches. But what counts as "unreasonable" in a digital age? Is tracking your location unreasonable? Should your phone or data have the same protection as your house?
5. The 7th Amendment guarantees jury trials in civil cases, but many people now sign arbitration agreements that give up that right. Why do so many people give up rights without realizing it—and should that be allowed?
6. The 10th Amendment reserves powers to the states or the people. When should a decision be made at the national level, and when should it be left to states or individuals? Who decides?
7. Many modern debates (gun control, surveillance, speech online) involve trade-offs between safety and freedom. What's the risk of giving up too much liberty for safety? What's the risk of refusing any limits on liberty?
8. Some people say that certain rights—for example, free speech or the right to bear arms—should be "reconsidered" for today's world. Can a society stay free if it keeps redefining or narrowing its rights? If we want to stay free, what would be the best way to do so?
9. Which right in the Bill of Rights do you think is most threatened today? Which one do you think people take most for granted?
10. The Founders wrote these protections over 230 years ago. What does it say about the Bill of Rights that it still applies in 2026? What has changed—and what hasn't?

ADDITIONAL U.S. CONSTITUTION AMENDMENTS

Primary Text: Amendment XIII - Ratified 1865

Section 1.

Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.



Section 2.

Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

What It Means

Slavery is completely outlawed in the United States—except as a punishment for someone legally convicted of a crime.

Congress has the power to pass laws to make sure this ban is enforced.

Although President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation (1863) declared enslaved people free in Confederate states, it did not apply to the entire country. The 13th Amendment, ratified in 1865, permanently ended slavery everywhere in the U.S., once and for all.

Slavery had been a source of deep conflict since the Constitutional Convention in 1787, where it was left unresolved for the sake of unity. The Civil War forced the nation to confront it. This amendment ensured that freedom became the law—not just a wartime order.

Primary Text: Amendment XIV - Ratified 1868

Section 1.

Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

Section 2.

Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

What It Means

The 14th Amendment says that people born in the United States and subject to its jurisdiction (under the authority of its laws) are U.S. citizens. States are not allowed to take away your basic rights, treat you unfairly, or punish you without due process. Everyone must be treated equally under the law.

When it was passed in 1868, just after the Civil War, the amendment was designed to make sure formerly enslaved people were recognized as full citizens with the

same legal rights as everyone else. It was a major step in fulfilling the promises of the Declaration of Independence.

But over time, courts have applied the amendment in ways that go beyond its original purpose. One ongoing debate involves birthright citizenship: the text says people born in the U.S. are citizens if they are “subject to its jurisdiction.” At the time, this excluded groups such as children of foreign diplomats, invading armies, and people not legally part of the country. Today, some argue the clause has been misread to grant automatic citizenship even to children of foreign nationals here illegally or temporarily, a practice that continues to raise constitutional questions.

The 14th Amendment remains central to many legal battles over fairness, equality, and the reach of government, and its meaning continues to be shaped and debated by courts, scholars, and citizens alike.

Primary Text: Amendment XV - Ratified 1870

The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

What It Means

The government can’t stop citizens from voting because of their race, skin color, or because they were formerly enslaved.

Congress has the power to pass laws to make sure this protection is enforced.

This amendment was ratified in 1870, five years after the Civil War ended. It aimed to secure full citizenship rights, including the vote, for black men. Women, regardless of race, still did not have the right to vote.

Many states later used poll taxes, literacy tests, and other tricks to get around it, which led to the fight for civil rights laws nearly a century later.

Did You Know?

The **13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments** are often called **the Reconstruction Amendments**, because they were added soon after the Civil War during a time of rebuilding and reckoning.

Together, they:

- Abolished slavery
- Guaranteed equal rights and due process
- Protected voting rights for black men

They were meant to complete the promise of freedom, but as history shows, changing laws is one thing; changing attitudes and institutions takes much longer.

Primary Text: Amendment XIX - Ratified 1920

The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.

Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

What It Means

The government can't deny someone the right to vote just because she is a woman.

Congress can make and enforce laws to protect this right.

Ratified in 1920, the 19th Amendment came 50 years after black men were granted voting rights under the 15th Amendment. It finally ensured that women were also included in equality under the law—at least when it came to the ballot box.

The amendment was the result of decades of activism by women's suffrage leaders. But even after it passed, many women of color still faced local laws and barriers that made voting difficult.

It's a reminder that liberty often expands slowly—and only when people demand it.

Primary Text: Amendment XXII - Ratified 1951

No person shall be elected to the office of the President more than twice, and no person who has held the office of President, or acted as President, for more than two years of a term to which some other person was elected President shall be elected to the office of President more than once.

(This amendment includes additional procedural text not included here for clarity.)

What It Means

A person can only be elected President two times.

If someone takes over as President and serves more than two years of another President's term, he or she can only be elected once more.

This amendment was passed after Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected four times, breaking the tradition set by George Washington.

It was designed to prevent too much power from staying in one person's hands and to protect the idea that presidents are public servants—not permanent rulers.

Did You Know?

Washington Set the Example

George Washington voluntarily stepped down after serving two terms as President—even though the Constitution didn't require it at the time.

His decision created a powerful tradition: no President should hold power for too long.

This tradition lasted for over 140 years—until Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected to four terms during the Great Depression and World War II.

The 22nd Amendment, passed soon after his presidency, turned Washington's example into law.

Primary Text: Amendment XXVII - Ratified 1992

No law, varying the compensation for the services of the Senators and Representatives, shall take effect, until an election of Representatives shall have intervened.

What It Means

If Congress votes to give itself a raise (or a pay cut), that change can't take effect until after the next election.

In other words, members of Congress can't immediately benefit from voting to increase their own salaries.

This amendment was originally proposed in 1789—yes, the same year the Bill of Rights was introduced—but it wasn't ratified until 1992.

It reinforces the principle that public servants should answer to the people, and that power should not be used for personal gain.

Did You Know?

The Amendment That Took 202 Years

The **27th Amendment** was originally **proposed in 1789**—as part of the very first group of amendments—but it wasn't ratified at the time. Most people assumed it was long forgotten.

Then in the 1980s, a college student named Gregory Watson discovered that there was no expiration date on its ratification. He wrote a paper about it, got a C (yes, really), and then decided to prove his professor wrong by launching a national letter-writing campaign to state legislatures.

Thanks to his persistence, the amendment was finally **ratified in 1992**—over 202 years after it was first proposed. One determined student made constitutional history.

How the Constitution Gets Amended

The Constitution is designed to be enduring—but not unchangeable. The Founders believed that the people might need to correct, improve, or clarify the law over time—but they also wanted to make sure it wouldn't be changed lightly or in the heat of the moment.

So they created a two-step process:

- **Proposal:** An amendment can be proposed by either
 - A two-thirds vote in both the House and Senate, or
 - A constitutional convention called by two-thirds of the states (this has never happened).
- **Ratification:** To become law, it must be approved by three-fourths of the states (currently 38 out of 50).

Why It's Hard to Change

This process was meant to be deliberate, careful, and rare. The Founders knew that government power should not shift easily—and that changing the foundation of law should require broad agreement from across the country.

Out of over 11,000 amendments proposed in U.S. history, only 27 have been ratified.

Did You Know?

Prohibition, and the Power to Reverse It

In **1919**, the **18th Amendment** launched **Prohibition**, banning the manufacture and sale of alcohol across the country. It was the only time a constitutional amendment was passed to prohibit a common personal behavior nationwide.

But the backlash was intense. Organized crime grew, black markets thrived, and enforcement mostly failed. Just **14 years later**, the **21st Amendment repealed the 18th**, making it the only amendment ever overturned by another amendment.

Together, they show that even the Constitution can be corrected or reversed but only through a long, careful process that requires widespread national agreement.

Discussion Questions

1. The 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments came after the Civil War to expand freedom. Why do you think it took a war to bring about these changes? What does that say about how difficult it can be for a nation to live up to the words of the Declaration of Independence—especially the idea that “all men are created equal”?
2. The 14th Amendment has been used in many court cases far beyond its original purpose. Who should decide what the Constitution means—judges, legislators, or the people? How should it be decided?
3. Why do you think the 15th and 19th Amendments came 50 years apart? What does that timeline tell us about how change happens in a democracy?
4. The 22nd Amendment limits how long a president can serve. Do you think term limits are a good idea? Why or why not?
5. Should members of Congress also have term limits? What are the pros and cons of limiting time in office?
6. The 27th Amendment says Congress can't vote itself a pay raise that takes effect immediately. Why might the Founders have seen this as important—even 200 years before it was ratified?
7. Some amendments (for example, the 13th and 19th) expanded liberty, while others (such as the 18th) restricted it. Should the Constitution ever be used to limit personal choices? Why or why not? What are the risks of letting government decide what individuals can or can't do?
8. The Prohibition and Repeal Amendments show that even major national decisions can be reversed. What does this tell us about how the Constitution balances stability with the

will of the people?

9. Why do you think it's so hard to amend the Constitution? Does that make it stronger, or does it make it harder to adapt to new times?

10. Which of the amendments you've studied (outside the Bill of Rights) do you think has had the biggest effect on your life today? Explain your answer.

Writing Prompt 1: Citizenship, Rights & Responsibility

The 14th Amendment defined what it means to be a U.S. citizen, but being a citizen isn't just about having rights. It also involves responsibilities.

Choose one amendment (outside the Bill of Rights) you studied and explain how it protects liberty but also requires people to act with care, knowledge, or responsibility. Use examples to show how freedom can only last if people use it wisely.

Writing Prompt 2: When the Constitution Changes

The Prohibition Amendments (18th and 21st) are a powerful example of using the Constitution to make a sweeping national change—and then reversing it.

Do you think it was a good idea to use the Constitution to enforce a ban on alcohol? What lessons can we learn from how this law was added and later removed? Are there issues today where people might try to do the same thing?

Writing Prompt 3: Congress and Incentives

The 27th Amendment prevents Congress from immediately benefiting from a pay raise but members are often reelected anyway, even if they vote for unpopular perks.

Research whether Congress has ever voted to cut its own pay. Why do you think the Founders believed it was important to delay pay changes until after an election?

How does this amendment show that incentives matter? What does it say about how we hold elected officials accountable?

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