



Unit: The Constitution

Subject Area: Social Studies	Course: Civics		
Unit Title: The Constitution	Grade(s): 8	Start: February	End:
Unit Summary: Students learn how our Constitution was created and what some of its key characteristics are. They also explore key amendments to the Constitution and their application in protecting citizens' rights.			

Stage 1: Desired Results

Massachusetts Learning Standards

Topic 3. The institutions of United States government [8.T3]

1. Distinguish the three branches of government (separation of powers):
 - Congress as the legislative branch
 - the Presidency and the executive agencies as the executive branch and
 - the Supreme Court and other federal inferior courts as the judicial branch
2. Examine the interrelationship of the three branches (the checks and balance system).
 - Congress: enumerated powers, general powers, limits on power, checks on other two branches; roles of political parties in the organization of Congress; roles within the legislative branch, such as the Speaker of the House, the President of the Senate, minority party leaders; the system for accomplishing legislation, including committees, hearings and legislative procedures
 - the Presidency: roles, powers and limits, checks on other two branches, role of the Cabinet, such as the Vice President, Attorney General and Secretaries of State, Defense, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security; executive departments and agencies (such as the Department of Education, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, or the Food and Drug Administration), and branches of the military
 - the Supreme Court: role and powers, checks on other two branches, lower courts
3. Describe the respective roles of each of the branches of government.
4. Explain the process of elections in the legislative and executive branches and the process of nomination/confirmation of



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individuals in the judicial and executive branches.

- Elections: running for legislative office (U.S. Representative – unlimited two-year terms, U.S. Senator – unlimited six-year terms), or executive office (President – two four-year terms and Vice President – unlimited four-year terms) and the function of the Electoral College in Presidential elections

- Nomination by the President and confirmation by Congress: Supreme Court Justices and Secretaries/agency heads in the executive branch)

5. Describe the role of political parties in elections at the state and national levels.

Transfer (Authentic, relevant application of learning to new situations)

Students will be able to independently use their learning to... explain the structure, function, and powers of the U.S. government as established in the Constitution, identify the roles of the three branches of government, describe the constitutional amendment process, and interpret the intentions of the Preamble of the Constitution.

Meaning

Enduring Understandings

Students will understand how...

- The U.S. Constitution is a living document that has been interpreted and applied in different ways throughout history to meet the changing needs of society.
- The Constitution is open to interpretation and is subject to ongoing debate and discussion, which allows it to adapt to new circumstances and challenges over time.
- The process of interpreting the Constitution is complex and involves multiple actors, including the Supreme

Essential Questions

Students will consider...

- How is the Constitution a living document?
- Who gets to interpret the Constitution?



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<p>Court, lower courts, executive branch officials, legislators, and citizens.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Supreme Court is the ultimate arbiter of constitutional interpretation and has the power to strike down laws and policies that violate the Constitution. • Different approaches to constitutional interpretation, such as originalism, textualism, and living constitutionalism, reflect different views on the role of the judiciary and the importance of historical context and evolving societal norms in interpreting the Constitution. • Citizen engagement and advocacy play a critical role in shaping constitutional interpretation and ensuring that the Constitution reflects the values and needs of the people it serves. 	
<h3>Acquisition</h3>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Knowledge</p> <p>Students will know...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain how the U.S. Constitution creates a federal system of government, including the principles of federalism and the division of powers between the federal government and state governments. • Analyze the ways in which the Constitution was designed to guard against tyranny, including the separation of powers, checks and balances, and the Bill of Rights. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Skills</p> <p>Students will be skilled at...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain the powers that the Constitution gives Congress • Explain the reasons why the Framers were uncertain about how much power to give the three branches of the national government • Describe the arguments in the debate over congressional power • Explain how these arguments shaped the way the Constitution was written



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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evaluate the effectiveness of these measures in preventing tyranny throughout U.S. history, and identify examples of times when these measures have been tested or challenged.• Describe the process by which official laws and decisions are made in the U.S. government, including the roles and responsibilities of different branches of government and the procedures for passing legislation and making appointments.• Analyze the ways in which different groups and individuals can influence the government and shape policy outcomes, including through lobbying, voting, public opinion, and the media. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explain the powers of the executive and judicial branches• Explain the process for electing the president of the United States• Explain what a federal system is and how it differs from other forms of government• Explain what powers the Constitution gives to the federal government and what powers it gives to the state governments• Describe the two original political parties, their leaders, and the issues that divided them• Explain why the Framers opposed the development of political parties |
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