

Module 1: Thinking and Talking about the Constitution

In this module, students begin by taking a closer look at the Constitution and exploring how citizens, scholars, lawyers, and judges engage in civil dialogue. As they explore the text, students will learn the difference between constitutional questions and political questions and explore different methods of interpreting the Constitution. Throughout the module, students will also be practicing important skills including analyzing primary sources and asking and answering questions. The Google Drive folder for this module, containing the student content guide, worksheets, a vocabulary sheet, the project overview, and transcripts for all videos is [here](#).



Vocabulary

Concept Words – These words can help students understand the big ideas.

- **articles:** separate sections of a document (for example, parts of the Constitution)
- **branches of government:** the separation of the government into three parts (legislative, executive, and judicial) whose powers are outlined and defined in the Constitution
- **civil:** polite and respectful
- **democracy:** a government in which citizens hold the ultimate power
- **political:** concepts that relate to the government or the conduct of government
- **precedent:** an earlier occurrence of something (for example, an earlier court decision)
- **prudence:** taking consequences into account when making judgments
- **tradition:** a pattern of thoughts, action, or behavior that is passed down

Learning Objectives

- Explore and describe the structure of the Constitution and the meaning of the Preamble.
- Distinguish between political questions and constitutional questions.
- Identify and define the seven methods of constitutional interpretation.
- Begin to recognize the importance of civil dialogue for American democracy.

Background Information

Below is a list of resources that may help provide you with additional background information on the important concepts presented in this lesson. These are not essential to read or watch before teaching the module, but can support with lesson administration, if necessary.

- This collection of [Interactive Constitution](#) resources from leading scholars is an interactive way to explore the text, history, and meaning of the U.S. Constitution.

- In [The Preamble: Interpretation and Debate](#), scholars talk about the common interpretation of the Preamble.
- The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History provides additional insight in [On Civil Dialogue](#).

Lesson Structure and Activities

[Student Content Guide](#)

Topic 1: Thinking Like a Judge	
1.1: Activate Prior Knowledge (5 min)	<p>Students will complete a KWL chart to identify what they know and want to know about the Constitution.</p> <p>Handout: 1.1: Activate Prior Knowledge</p> <p>Activity Type: Individual Reflection</p> <p>Implementation Tips: Students can Think-Pair-Share any portion of the KWL chart to reflect with their classmates.</p> <p>Students will watch the Unboxing the Constitution video to gain insight into constitutional conversations, civil dialogue, and how judges engage with the Constitution.</p>
1.2: Explore the Constitution (10 min)	<p>Students will read the Preamble to the Constitution and summarize the main points in their own words.</p> <p>Handout: 1.2: Explore the Constitution</p> <p>Activity Type: Individual Activity</p> <p>Implementation Tips: Check for student understanding by looking for words or phrases that students have drawn boxes around. You may choose to have students write these words or phrases on large chart paper so that all students benefit from clarification. You can also have a class discussion about their Preamble summaries.</p>
1.3: Constitutional Conversations (10-15 min)	<p>Students will explore the different methods of constitutional interpretation. Students will review different methods by looking for words that are clues to help them determine the method.</p> <p>Handout: 1.3: Exploring Methods of Interpretation</p> <p>Activity Type: Individual Activity</p>

Topic 1: Thinking Like a Judge

	<p>Implementation Tips: You may choose to have students work in partners or groups to complete the handout. Encourage students to share their answers and ask questions during a large-group share out, to ensure they can differentiate between the different methods.</p> <p>After students have completed the handout, ask them to share their answers to the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which of these methods feel similar to ways that you interpret information from text? • What do you think is the effect of having all of these different ways to interpret one document?
1.4: Closing Activity (5-10 min)	<p>Students will check in on the Key Question(s).</p> <p>Handout: 1.4: Key Question Reflection</p> <p>Activity Type: Individual Reflection</p> <p>Implementation Tips: Have students share in small groups after they have had a chance to reflect on their own.</p>

Topic 2: The Importance of Civil Dialogue

1.5: Defining Civil Dialogue (10-15 min)	<p>Students will explore several definitions of civil dialogue and create their own definitions of civil dialogue.</p> <p>Students should also watch the Inside the Constitution video to learn about norms, how the Supreme Court makes decisions, and the overall importance of civil dialogue.</p> <p>Handout: 1.5: Defining Civil Dialogue</p> <p>Activity Type: Individual Activity</p> <p>Implementation Tips: After students are finished, lead a discussion to share their answers to the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why is civil dialogue essential to the function of our government system?
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Topic 2: The Importance of Civil Dialogue

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What consequences would you expect if our government didn't depend on civil dialogue?
1.6: Civic Connection: Successful Constitutional Conversations (20-25 min)	<p>Students will participate in a civil dialogue. You may choose to use partners or teams to define and describe each of the norms for a Successful Constitutional Conversation.</p> <p>Handout: 1.6 Civic Connection: Successful Constitutional Conversations</p> <p>Activity Type: Class Activity</p> <p>Implementation Tips: Ask students to practice participating in a civil dialogue by posing a question to the class framed similarly to a constitutional question. After posing the question, give students a few minutes to take notes. Then, ask students to engage in a civil dialogue to discuss their ideas. As students talk, remind them to refer to the norms and identify examples of norms in action during the conversation. Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can a teacher decide to give homework to only certain students? Can a principal add an extra school day to the end of the year?
1.7: Reflect (5 min)	<p>Students will revisit the KWL handout and complete the Key Question Reflection.</p> <p>Handouts: 1.1: Activate Prior Knowledge and 1.4: Key Question Reflection</p> <p>Activity Type: Individual Reflection</p> <p>Implementation Tips: You may choose to have students share their answers to the Key Question(s).</p>

Module 1 Learning Project: Visual Voices: Designing Civil Dialogue

In this activity, students will design their own infographics to share information about civil dialogue. Infographics are visual design tools used to display data and information on a topic.

Students will practice using different design elements to create an effective infographic on civil discourse that will help an audience understand more about civil discourse.

[Teacher Overview](#)

[Student Instructions](#)

Activity Type: Individuals, partners, small groups

Implementation Tips: Prior to beginning the project, locate three different infographics for students to compare. Or, you may choose to have students select and compare infographics of their own. You can find many different options by searching for infographics on topics of interest to students.