

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# What Is the Constitution?

By Anita Kim Venegas



America was a new country after the Revolutionary War. The country needed a central government and a set of laws for people to live by in order for it to become a strong, unified nation. During the war, colonies would not send money or supplies to provide support for soldiers in other colonies. If soldiers were in battle in Pennsylvania, the government of Virginia would not send food or

supplies. After the war, each colony began to make its own laws and govern its own people.

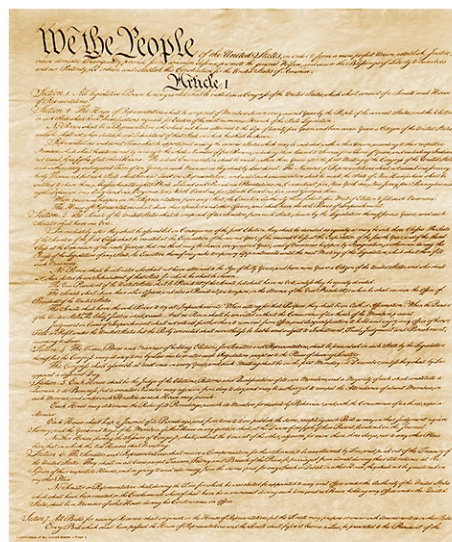
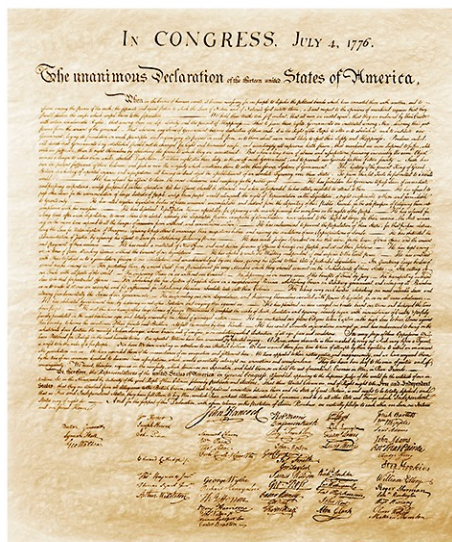
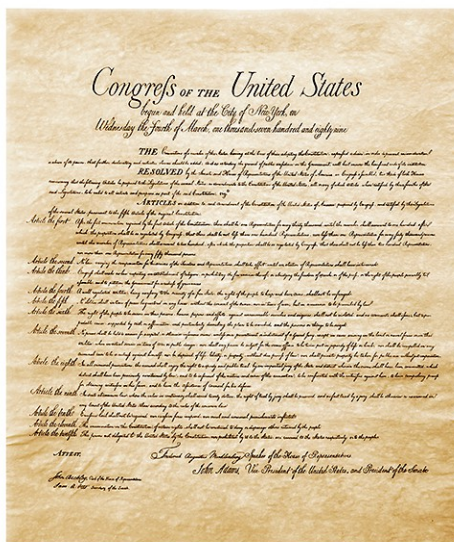


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tables to discuss how to form a republic. A republic is a type of government where the power is held by the people and their elected representatives. No other country in the world was a republic in 1787. Each colony had authority to create laws for themselves. However, representatives from each colony would work together to create federal laws that all citizens would follow.

The most important decision they had to make was how many votes each colony would have when it was time to vote on federal topics such as taxes or education. Representatives from the smaller colonies were concerned that the larger colonies would have more votes on issues in government.



Throughout the hot and humid summer, the men created a set of laws to rule the country. Everyone decided it was important to keep the meetings secret. The tall windows on both sides of Independence Hall were hammered shut with nails to prevent



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Another decision the men needed to make was to choose a leader; someone needed to lead the country and speak with leaders of other countries. They knew they did not want a king. They called this position "president". They voted for George Washington to be the first president of the United States. He represented all the citizens of the new nation.

In September of 1787, they finished writing the Constitution and proposed it to the colonies to ratify, or approve. As each colony approved the Constitution, the colony became a state. The Constitution was approved by nine colonies in the summer of 1788. The first ten amendments, or additions to the Constitution, were made in 1791. They are called the Bill of Rights.

## About the Author

Anita Kim Venegas is the author of The Adventures of Peanut and Dutch.

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1. Based on the information in the article, what immediate problem did the colonists need to solve?
  - a. The colonies were fighting among each other.
  - b. America needed a central government and laws.
  - c. The colonies did not have enough food to feed the people.
  - d. America needed to appoint a king like Great Britain had.
2. What kind of government did the colonists want to form and why?

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4. Identify the two house of Congress.  
  
\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_
5. How do the two houses of Congress represent a compromise between the larger and smaller colonies?

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# What Is the Constitution?

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Match each vocabulary word from the article with the correct definition.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. colony

a. secretly listening to a conversation

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. president

b. the legislative branch of the U.S. government

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. compromise

c. a territory under the political control



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\_\_\_\_\_ 6. govern

f. an agreement that is reached when two parties give up some of their demands to meet in the middle

\_\_\_\_\_ 7. Congress

g. the lower house of the U.S. Congress that had representation based on a colony's population

\_\_\_\_\_ 8. Senate

h. building where both the U.S. Declaration of Independence and Constitution were written

\_\_\_\_\_ 9. House of Representatives

i. the upper house of the U.S. Congress represented by two men from each colony

\_\_\_\_\_ 10. authority

j. the elected leader of a republic

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In the article, "What Is the Constitution?" you learned that it was important for the newly independent nation to develop a central government and a set of laws that applied to all the colonies. It took an entire summer and fifty-five colonists, but by September of 1787, the American Constitution was written.



On the lines below, describe several challenges the writers of the Constitution faced when drafting the document.

Base your answer on the information from the article.

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## ANSWER KEY

# What Is the Constitution?

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1. Based on the information in the article, what immediate problem did the colonists need to solve? b
  - a. The colonies were fighting among each other.
  - b. America needed a central government and laws.

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In the Senate, all colonies were represented by two men, no matter how big or small. In the House of Representatives, colonies were represented according to their population.

## ANSWER KEY

# What Is the Constitution?

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Match each vocabulary word from the article with the correct definition.

**c** 1. colony

**a.** secretly listening to a conversation

**j** 2. president

**b.** the legislative branch of the U.S.

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**e** 10. authority

**j.** the elected leader of a republic

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