

# Creating a Class Constitution and Bill of Rights

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## US History 8; Utah State Office of Education Core Curriculum Standards and Objectives:

Standard 6: Students will understand the structure and function of the United States government established by the Constitution.

Objective 1: Assess the foundations and principles that led to the development of the Constitution.

Analyze the factors involved in convening the Constitutional Convention.

Objective 3: Examine the basic structure of the Constitution.

Identify the major elements of the United States Constitution.

Explore the role and functions of the three branches of government.

Determine the role of the Constitution as a living document.

Objective 4: Analyze the rights, liberties, and responsibilities of citizens.

Examine the Bill of Rights and its specific guarantees.

Enduring Understanding: People need to understand our government and be actively involved in government to safe guard their rights and laws. In addition, there needs to be an understanding of rights and responsibilities.

## Essential Questions:

Why we do we need laws?

Why do we need rights?

## Unit Objectives:

Students will:

1. Discuss philosophically the aims of government and democracy.
2. Understand the need for laws.
3. Write a class constitution that will be in place for the school year.
4. Be able to explain what a right is.
5. Become familiar with the Bill of Rights.
6. Identify the importance and application of these rights in their daily lives.
7. Develop a Classroom Bill of Rights.

Materials: The US Constitution; What It Says, What It Means  
Civic and Character Education in Utah  
Many books, picture books, and reference books  
Schoolhouse Rock – “The Constitution”  
Copies of the Bill of Rights  
Paper, pencils, pens, markers, poster board as needed

## **Lesson 1. Thomas Jefferson Quote Jigsaw**

Procedure:

1. Divide class into five groups.
2. Give each group a quote by Jefferson.
3. The group is to read the quote and decide what it means and how it applies to the creation of a constitution and a bill of rights.
4. The group presents their ideas to the rest of the class.
5. Entire class has discussion on the meaning and interpretation of the quotes and the ideas presented.

THOMAS JEFFERSON, Quote 1:

“I know of no safe repository of the ultimate power of society but people. And if we think them not enlightened enough, the remedy is not to take the power from them, but to inform them by education.”

THOMAS JEFFERSON, Quote 2:

“A democracy is nothing more than mob rule, where fifty-one percent of the people may take away the rights of the other forty-nine.”

THOMAS JEFFERSON, Quote 3:

“Whenever the people are well-informed, they can be trusted with their own government.”

THOMAS JEFFERSON, Quote 4:

“I have no fear that the result of our experiment will be that men may be trusted to govern themselves without a master.”

THOMAS JEFFERSON, Quote 5:

“The care of human life and happiness, and not their destruction, is the first and only object of good government.”

## Lesson 2. Constitution - Write a Constitution

Procedure:

1. Show Schoolhouse Rock – “The Constitution”
2. Have the students, in small groups of three to five students; complete a preamble for the classroom constitution.

Use the following or a similar format:

“We the Students of \_\_\_\_\_’s class, in order to \_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_ do hereby ordain  
and establish this constitution based on the principles of \_\_\_\_\_ (noun),  
\_\_\_\_\_ (noun) and \_\_\_\_\_ (noun).”

3. Meet as a class in order to discuss the different groups’ versions of the preamble. Decide as a class how the preamble will be written. Write the final version on a large piece of butcher paper or the board so that it can be easily seen.
4. Have the students go back into their groups to discuss the answers to the questions below and then decide on three to five important classroom rules. Have each group choose someone to record their proposed rules on butcher paper and someone to present those rules to the rest of the class when they come back together.
5. Tell the groups to answer these questions before they write their rules (post the questions on a chart or overhead for all groups to see):
  - What is respect?
  - How can we create an atmosphere of respect?
  - What are our responsibilities as students?
  - What is our teacher’s responsibility to us?
  - What are our rights in the classroom?
  - What are our teacher’s rights?
6. Tell groups to answer these questions after writing their proposed rules.
  - Do our proposed rules fit under the guidelines of school and district rules?
  - How do they fit in with class rules?
  - Will each rule agreed on be fair to all class members?
  - Do our rules pass the “Good Rules” test (developed by the Ohio State Bar Association and the Cleveland public schools)?
  - Are they:
    - Said simply?
    - Easy to follow?
    - Enforceable?
    - Not in conflict with other rules?
7. Bring all ideas back together to create and ratify a class constitution.

### **Lesson 3. Bill of Rights - Create a Bill of Rights - Our Bill of Rights**

Procedure:

1. On the board create three columns with the headings: (1) Rights in School, (2) Rights at Home, and (3) Rights in Public.
2. As a class brainstorm ten rights for each column.
3. Hand out copies of the Bill of Rights
4. Have students identify which rights correspond to the items on their own list by writing the number of the right next to them.
5. After discussing the Bill of Rights, create a class Bill of Rights.
6. The class is then given time for informal debate and discussion over the various rights proposals.
7. At this point the large group must formally debate and vote on the individual rights they want to ratify.
8. Ratify the rights and post the Class Bill of Rights.
9. Reflection:
  - Discuss the problems and advantages of committee work.
  - Have the students discuss the importance of the Bill of Rights.
  - Reflect on the role of government in guaranteeing rights.

#### **Assessment:**

Give students copies of several newspapers. Students are to go through the newspapers and find examples of laws, protection of citizens by the law, examples of the US Constitution and its effects, examples of rights of citizens being upheld or denied. Students need to decide an effective and creative way to demonstrate their understanding. They could create a portfolio, web page, podcast, video production, poster, etc.

Ideas and activities adapted from: Bryant Baird, John Wright, Mary Molton, and Janet Sanders.