

History of US Govt

Program Overview

What is the history of United States government? Throughout most of the 17th and 18th centuries, Great Britain had ultimate control over the American colonies, although colonists developed assemblies of representatives that made decisions on local matters. These colonial assemblies helped to give colonists a great deal of experience in self-government. The desire for even more control led the colonists to declare their independence from Great Britain and to fight the Revolutionary War. However, winning the Revolution was only the first part in the development of the United States; a new government had to be created to unite the colonies as one nation. The first attempt was a government under the Articles of Confederation, but because this framework did not provide for a strong central government, it presented problems for the fledgling states. State representatives met in Philadelphia in 1787 to generate a new plan. For several months, they debated and discussed political ideas that originated from philosophers such as John Locke, Baron de Montesquieu and Niccolò Machiavelli. The document that evolved became the blueprint for an entirely new form of government. The U.S. Constitution was based on the ideals of democracy, liberty and the public good, and while it answered the need for a strong central government, it also addressed the rights of individual states. The new government also included the concept of separation of powers and provided checks and balances to prevent any one branch of government from becoming too powerful. In 1791, a Bill of Rights was added to ensure that the rights of individual citizens could not be violated.

For over 200 years, Americans have lived under their unique type of government, a government that has inspired nations around the world to embark on similar experiments in freedom.

Vocabulary

government — Institutions and procedures through which a society is ruled.

democracy — A form of government in which political control is exercised by all citizens either directly or indirectly through elected representatives.

sovereignty — The highest or supreme power in a political system or state.

consent of the governed — The idea that people agree to set up and live under a government.

citizen — A member of a politically organized society or state who owes allegiance to it and is entitled to protection by and from the government.

Enlightenment — A 17th- and 18th-century movement beginning in Europe during which a group of philosophers emphasized the use of reason to better understand the world.

republic — A form of government in which power is held by the voters and is exercised by elected representatives.

civic virtue — The striving of citizens for the public good, or the good of the whole, even at the expense of their own private interests.

constitutionalism — The use of constitutions, usually written, to empower and limit government. *(Continued)*

separation of powers — The concept of dividing the power of government among groups to keep excessive amounts of power from being exercised by any one group.

liberalism — A philosophy that emphasizes individual liberty.

constitutional amendment — A change to the U.S. Constitution through a legally defined process.

Pre-viewing Discussion

- Encourage students to brainstorm a list of reasons why America needs to have a government. Which reasons do students feel are most important? Why?
- Ask students to describe the form of government in the United States. See if they can identify some of the key ideas that defined the American form of government at its 18th-century origins.
- The U.S. Constitution is the oldest written national constitution in operation. Students should generate ideas as to why the U.S. government has lasted so long.
- Probe students' understanding of what democracy is and if democratic ideals were being implemented when the United States began. Can they think of other nations with democracies? How about nations that don't have democratic governments? How do they think these governments are similar to and different from the American form of government?

Focus Questions

1. Describe the conflict between the rights of the individual and the good of the whole.
2. What does sovereignty of the people mean?
3. In practice, how can people consent to the American form of government?
4. Who were the Founding Fathers and what did they found?
5. What are some of the benefits of government?
6. What does the word "democracy" mean, and what are the origins of democracy?
7. What was the Enlightenment? How did it influence the founding of the United States?
8. What is republicanism, and what are its origins?
9. What does constitutionalism mean? How did this concept influence the development of American government?
10. What does liberalism mean? How did this idea play a role in the history of U.S. government?
11. Describe the kind of government in the colonies before the American Revolution.
12. Why was the Declaration of Independence written and issued, and what are its main ideas? *(Continued)*

13. Why did the newly independent Americans need to change their constitution in 1787?

14. What are some key features of the U.S. Constitution?

15. Why was the Bill of Rights passed? Why is this document important in the history of American government?

Follow-up Discussion

- Discuss with students how problems with American government, such as the lack of the right to vote by various groups, have been resolved in the course of U.S. history. What do students think of this process? Is it effective for resolving issues in the United States? Do students feel that America's laws have been changed enough over the course of its history to give everyone the rights they deserve, or should more changes be made? Why or why not?
- The balance between individual rights and the good of the whole is at the heart of the history of U.S. government. Help students to identify examples of this conflict in America. Discuss with them possible ways to maintain this delicate balance.
- Both Locke and Montesquieu suggested implementing limits on government. Help students to identify ways in which the U.S. government is limited. Students can also generate examples of governments that are not limited. What are some characteristics of these governments? How do they differ from the government of the United States?

Follow-up Activities

- The governments in ancient Athens and Rome provided inspiration for the American form of democracy. Encourage students to research the governments in Athens and the Roman Republic, and to compare these forms of government with that in America. Do students think they are more similar or more different? Which do students think is a more effective form of government, and why?
- The constitutional amendment process has enabled the U.S. Constitution to remain flexible and dynamic. Encourage students to select an amendment and to research its significance. Why was this amendment passed? What was the historical context surrounding the passage of the amendment? Who were the significant people involved in getting the amendment passed? How does this amendment have relevance in today's world?
- Many great thinkers inspired the development of the United States, such as Machiavelli, Locke and Montesquieu. Encourage students to imagine that they could conduct an interview with these important figures today. Students can draft questions to ask and recreate possible responses, based upon research about these scholars. What might these individuals think of American government today? *(Continued)*

Comparative Govt 2

Program Overview

Different forms of government can be understood by comparing components of their organizational structures, like legislatures, leaders and courts. The study of the similarities and differences among various governments is called comparative government. There are four main questions that can help us to understand differences in various forms of government.

The first question is: who holds the power in the government? In a democracy, people have the ultimate power, but in a dictatorship, rulers hold power over the people and do not respond to their wishes.

Secondly we can ask: where is the power to govern located? In a unitary system, all governmental powers are located in a single, central agency. Federal systems split power between a central government and multiple local governments. Confederations are voluntary associations of states in which the states try to retain as much individual power as possible and usually grant only limited power to a central authority.

Governments may also be distinguished by asking a third question: to what extent are the powers of government separated? In parliamentary systems, the powers of government are placed within a single body. The chief executive, called a prime minister, is a member of the legislature and is elected by the legislature's majority political party. In shared powers systems, by contrast, the powers of government are divided among several branches. The chief executive, like a president, is a member of the executive branch, not the legislature, and is elected by the people. Thus prime ministers are directly responsible to parliaments, while presidents are directly responsible to the people who elect them.

Finally, we can also ask: what are the limits on government? Limited governments are those that have established and respected limits on their power. Unlimited governments have no effective means for restraining power.

The United States, according to the categories listed above, can be defined as a democratic, federal, limited, shared powers system and is one of the most vibrant governments in the world!

Vocabulary

comparative government — The study of the elements that make up different forms of government.

democracy — A system of government in which political control is exercised by all citizens, either directly or indirectly, through elected representatives.

constitutional monarchy — A system of government characterized by a monarch as the head of state and limits placed on the powers of government by a constitution.

republic — A system of government characterized by elected representatives.

traditional monarchy — A system of government characterized by a powerful monarch and unclear limits on governmental powers.

dictatorship — A system of government characterized by unlimited powers of one person, group or political party and an absence of political liberty.

unitary system — A system of government in which all other government bodies, such as regional, city or other local governments, are subordinated to a central government.

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federal system — A union of associated states characterized by a central government and two or more local governments that do not have the right to withdraw at will.

confederal system — A union of associated states characterized by a central government and two or more state or local governments that have the right to withdraw at will.

shared powers system — A system of government in which the powers of government are separated among several branches. Each branch has primary responsibility for some functions, but also shares responsibility for other functions with other branches.

parliamentary system — A system of government in which all of the powers of government are placed within a single body, such as a legislature.

prime minister — The head of government of a parliamentary system who is a member of the legislature, which elects him or her as prime minister.

limited government — A system of government that has established and respected limits on its power.

unlimited government — A system of government that has no effective means for restraining power.

authoritarian system — A system of government that denies political freedoms and strictly regulates the degree to which individuals and groups have autonomy from government controls. Authoritarian governments are forms of dictatorships.

totalitarian system — A type of extreme dictatorial government that attempts to control every part of the lives of its people and suppresses any and all liberties, with no limits on governmental power. Totalitarian governments are forms of dictatorships.

universal suffrage — The right to vote for all adult citizens.

rule of law — The concept that every member of a society, including the rulers, must follow the law.

Pre-viewing Discussion

- Encourage students to brainstorm a definition of democracy. What does living under a democratic government mean to students? What parts of U.S. government make it democratic? What characteristics would make a government not democratic?
- Why do students think America is considered to be a free country? Ask them to make a list of opportunities and freedoms they have in the United States. What governmental structures exist to allow American citizens to maintain these freedoms?
- Ask students to name several different countries around the world. What forms of government do these countries have? Can students describe anything about these forms of government? How do students think governments of other countries are different from United States government?
- Some governments around the world are limited in how they can use their power, and some aren't. See if students can give examples of limited and unlimited forms of government. What do they see as the advantages or disadvantages of limiting a government's powers?

Focus Questions

1. How can one form of government be compared with others?
2. Provide examples of different forms of governments.
3. What is a democracy?
4. What is a republic? Can a democracy also be a republic?
5. What is a federal system?
6. Describe the role citizens play in a democracy.
7. What is the difference between constitutional monarchies and traditional monarchies?
8. What is the difference between unitary and federal systems of government?
9. What is a confederation, and how does it differ from a federation?
10. Provide some features of parliamentary systems.
11. What is the difference between limited and unlimited governments?
12. What features distinguish an authoritarian government?
13. What is totalitarianism, and how does it differ from authoritarianism?
14. What are some principal features of liberal democracy?
15. What is the rule of law, and what role does it play in a democracy?

Follow-up Discussion

- America can be defined as a democratic, federal, limited, shared powers system of government. Discuss with students what each of these terms means in the day-to-day functioning of United States government.
- Ask students what they have seen in the news during previous months that tells them about significant differences between forms of government. Discuss with students what makes these forms of government similar to and different from that in America.
- Discuss with students what they think the advantages and disadvantages are of a parliamentary system as opposed to a shared powers system of government. Would American government benefit by having a President who isn't elected by the people and who remained in office for as long as members of the legislature felt he or she was doing a good job?
- United States government consists of a complex system of powers that are separated and shared among three branches. Do students think it would be more beneficial to have a single ruler to make, enforce and interpret laws? Why or why not?
- Ask students to consider the ideal expressed by President Abraham Lincoln that government should be of, by and for the people. Are all governments based on this ideal? How does this ideal work in different governments around the world? How well does this ideal work in the United States?

Program Overview

With their ability to elect public officials, citizens have the ultimate say in America's political process and determine how U.S. government operates. Citizens are collectively known as the public, and their combined opinions are referred to as public opinion. Public opinion can be difficult to determine, as there are millions of voices in America's democracy, often with a wide variety of opinions regarding public issues. Nevertheless, public opinion is very helpful and can be used to help determine public policy, or what should or should not be done in the country.

There are many ways for citizens to become involved in the process of U.S. government, including joining a political party. American political parties, or organizations of people with similar political views, play a major role in the political process. Political parties help to unite individuals to give them a coherent voice and more influence in government affairs. To attain power, political parties must attract the public's support and elect candidates. To express their political views, they issue party platforms, which are statements of their stance on current issues.

Joining an interest group helps citizens to present their opinions about issues that are important to them. Interest groups influence the process of government through activities like lobbying and giving campaign contributions to politicians or candidates running for political office. These groups do a great deal of research and use this information to attempt to persuade public officials to support their cause.

Voting is the most influential tool citizens have to affect public policy. Voters must be at least 18 years old, be U.S. citizens and have lived in their residence for a certain period of time. In the privacy of the polling booth during each election, citizens exercise their ultimate power in a democracy. Sometimes people feel that their votes don't matter, but as the extremely close 2000 presidential election demonstrated, everyone's vote counts!

Vocabulary

political process — The ways in which decisions are made in government.

public agenda — The issues that occupy public attention at any given time.

public — The citizenry of a country as a whole.

public policy — The plan that sets national priorities and determines how they can best be achieved.

public opinion — The views of a citizenry on any of a wide range of issues at a particular time.

public opinion poll — A method used to determine the public's views of issues by using scientifically organized questioning.

political parties — Groups of individuals associated together on the basis of common political principles in order to assume the powers of government, to elect public officials and to pass legislation in support of its principles.

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Republicans — An American political party tending to favor conservative public policies, though with wide variations.

Democrats — An American political party tending to favor liberal public policies, though with wide variations.

conservative — In the context of American politics, a political orientation that tends to favor decentralization of power to the states and lower levels of public spending than those supported by liberals, especially on social programs for the poor.

liberal — In the context of American politics, a political orientation that tends to favor centralization of power at the national level and higher levels of public spending than those supported by conservatives, especially on social programs for the poor.

party platform — A set of statements that describes what a political party stands for, with the purpose of attracting electoral support from voters.

primary election — An initial election, held before the general election, in which voters of a political party determine which candidate will become the official candidate for public office in the general elections.

third party — A minor political party in the American political system.

interest group — An organization composed of those who join together for a political purpose, and who attempt to influence public policy.

lobby — To attempt to influence public policy, using methods such as providing information, making campaign contributions and drafting legislation.

polling place — The actual place where voting takes place in a given precinct.

precinct — A voting district.

Pre-viewing Discussion

- Encourage students to describe what they know about the process of American government. Help them to brainstorm a list of ways that citizens can become involved in this process.
- Discuss with students what the consequences might be for an individual citizen who never participates in the process of government. What do they think are the results for society?
- Ask students what role they think that the media have in the American process of government. See if they can identify problems with the media in relation to the process of government, such as the issue of bias. How do they think citizens can overcome these problems?
- Do students know what an agenda is? How about the public agenda? How do they think issues get on the public agenda? Why do they think it is important to place issues on the public agenda?

Focus Questions

1. What is the process of U.S. government?
2. How are elected officials able to keep their jobs?
3. What is the public agenda?
4. What is the public?
5. What is public opinion?
6. What are public opinion polls?
7. Who was George Gallup?
8. How can citizens take part in the process of government?
9. What are political parties, and what are their functions in the political system?
10. How did political parties get started in American politics?
11. Who were the Federalists and Anti-Federalists?
12. What are some examples of third parties in American history?
13. What is a party platform?
14. What is the influence of the media in electoral campaigns?
15. What are primary elections?
16. What are interest groups, and how do they operate?
17. What are the qualifications to vote, and how can one register to vote?

Follow-up Discussion

- Discuss with students the role of money in the American political system. What do students see as the potential problems of this role? Do students think the use of private money in elections should be restricted, or would this constraint limit freedom of speech?
- Ask students why they think so few young people between the ages of 18 and 24 vote. Suggest to them that older people vote far more often and that age groups like the elderly gain considerable influence in American government because of their willingness to vote. Ask students what issues important to them might become part of the public agenda if they gained political influence. What suggestions do students have that might get more young people to vote?
- Discuss with students the significance of television during political campaigns. What do they see as the particular problems and virtues of television for informing voters? Do they approve of the political ads they have seen? Students should justify their answers.
- According to students, what role do public opinion polls play in American democracy? Ask students if they think politicians should base their actions and legislative votes on opinion polls in their state of district. Why or why not?

Decl. of I 4

Program Overview

The Declaration of Independence, the document adopted by the Continental Congress on July 4th, 1776, announced the birth of a new nation, the United States of America.

Prior to the Declaration, the American colonists lived under the rule of Great Britain. This arrangement worked peacefully until George III ascended to the throne. After the French and Indian War, the British, believing the Americans should pay their share of this expensive conflict, passed the first direct taxes on the colonies. The colonists, used to taxing themselves, opposed what they called "taxation without representation" and began to rebel.

In April 1775, fighting broke out near Boston, sparking the beginnings of the American Revolution. After months of fighting, the colonies realized it was time to break away from Great Britain. In the summer of 1776, Thomas Jefferson was selected to write the document that would explain why the colonists wanted independence and announce to the world that the colonies were now "free and independent states."

The Declaration of Independence stated the fundamental principles of American democracy, in addition to clearly stating the colonists' grievances with Great Britain. The Declaration expressed the revolutionary idea that all men are created equal and that everyone has basic human rights. Among these rights are those to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It also said that governments should protect these rights and exist only with the consent of the governed. According to the Declaration, if governments do not protect these rights, the people have a right to throw out their government, by force if necessary, and install a new one.

As soon as the Declaration was passed, it was printed and sent throughout the colonies. Colonists who favored independence celebrated enthusiastically, parading and ringing church bells by day, and lighting candles and bonfires by night. A new nation was born.

Vocabulary

Declaration of Independence — A document adopted by the Continental Congress on July 4, 1776, stating the reasons for the American colonies' separation from the government of Great Britain. Congress had already passed the resolution that claimed American independence on July 2nd.

colonial charters — Legal documents of British rulers giving permission for colonists to inhabit a certain territory under certain stated conditions.

consent of the governed — The idea that people agree to set up and live under a government.

Parliament — The British legislature.

Stamp Act — The 1765 Act of British Parliament seeking colonial payment of a portion of the cost of the French and Indian War, which was bitterly resented by colonists. The Stamp Act Congress was formed by colonists in protest.

Continental Congress — The American legislature from 1774 to 1789.

Boston Tea Party — In reaction to the Tea Act of 1773, colonists disguised as Native Americans stole aboard ships carrying tea in Boston Harbor and threw the cargo into the water.

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Committee of Five — The committee appointed by Congress to write a declaration of independence. The Committee appointed Jefferson, one of its members, to write a draft declaration.

Enlightenment — A 17th- and 18th-century movement beginning in Europe during which a group of philosophers emphasized the use of reason to better understand the world.

unalienable rights — Rights that are inherent in human beings and for that reason cannot be taken away.

Pre-viewing Discussion

- As British subjects, most American colonists loved their mother country of Great Britain. Discuss with students if they think the Declaration of Independence was too extreme a document in view of this attachment to Britain. Why or why not?
- Find out what the students think about the famous statement from the Declaration of Independence, "All men are created equal." Do students feel that the wording of this statement (i.e., "all men") accurately reflected its intent at the time it was created, or did the Founding Fathers mean to include "all people"? Discuss with students the relevance of this statement in today's world — are all people created equal?
- The Declaration of Independence states that people are born with "certain unalienable rights." Ask students to discuss what might make a right "unalienable." Encourage them to generate a list of rights that they feel are unalienable, and discuss their reasoning.

Focus Questions

1. How is the Declaration of Independence "the very essence of American government"?
2. Why did Britain wish to tax the colonists?
3. What is Parliament?
4. Why did the colonists think it was a problem to be taxed without representation?
5. What and when was the Stamp Act and what was the colonists' reaction to it?
6. What led to the Boston Tea Party?
7. When and why did the First Continental Congress meet?
8. Why was the outbreak of the American Revolution called "the shot heard 'round the world"?
9. Why was Thomas Paine an important person in 1776?
10. What did John Locke have to do with the Declaration of Independence?
11. What importance does "the consent of the governed" play in the argument of the Declaration? How do people today "consent" to American government?
12. Why was Jefferson's passage regarding slavery taken out of the Declaration by Congress?

Follow-up Discussion

- Ask students if they would have behaved differently if they had been members of the Continental Congress in 1776. What do students think might have happened if the U.S. had not declared its independence in the 18th century? How about if the colonists had lost the American Revolution?
- John Adams thought that about a third of the colonists were in favor of declaring independence, another third were opposed, while the remainder were neutral or undecided. Discuss with students if they think the Continental Congress had the right to declare independence if it did not know if the majority of the colonists wanted to do so and if it also knew that a sizable number opposed it.
- Great Britain paid a great deal of money to defend the American colonies and therefore felt that the colonies should be taxed to help pay for a service that benefited them. Discuss with students if they think it was unfair of the British to tax the colonists. Why or why not?
- Brainstorm a list of reasons that the American colonists sought independence. Encourage students to prioritize this list. Which reason do students feel was the most important, and why?

Follow-up Activities

- Divide the class into two sides to conduct a debate between American colonists — those who are for independence, and those against. In small groups, students should develop the arguments for either side. After the debate is over, discuss with students which arguments were most persuasive, and why.
- Share Thomas Jefferson's original draft of the Declaration of Independence with your students (www.loc.gov/exhibits/declaration_draft.html). Help students to compare this version with the final version that was adopted by the Continental Congress on July 4, 1776. How much did Congress change Jefferson's draft? Do the students approve of all of the changes? Does reading this document change their impression either of the final document or of Jefferson? If not, why not? If so, in what ways?
- Ask the class to imagine they are colonists who have decided to separate from their mother country. Ask them to write a "declaration of independence." What sort of arguments would they use to justify such a step? What rights do they have in their relations with the mother country? How did they acquire those rights? Do they have obligations to the mother country? If so, how did they acquire those obligations, and why are they not obliged to continuing fulfilling them? When they are finished, ask them to compare the main arguments of their declaration with those of the 1776 Declaration of Independence. Which version is more persuasive? Why?

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#5 Constitution + Bill of Rts

Program Overview

In 1783, the Revolutionary War was officially over, but the task of forming a new nation had only just begun. The United States still operated under the Articles of Confederation, which had not provided the country with a strong central government. The Articles contained no method of resolving disputes between states, states still coined their own money and transportation systems connecting states were poor. The states were not quite "united" yet.

In 1786, leading individuals called a meeting in Maryland to attempt to remedy the problems faced by the United States. Few states sent representatives, however, and the meeting produced few results. But its organizers called for another meeting to begin the following May in Philadelphia to "fix" the Articles of Confederation. For several months during the summer of 1787, the 55 delegates to the Constitutional Convention met secretly to negotiate a new plan for U.S. government. The framers of the Constitution had to overcome many disagreements about the structure of government, especially between large and small states, and between advocates of a strong central government and those in favor of the rights of states. To ensure that one branch would not have too much power, the final plan included a sophisticated system of checks and balances among the three branches of the national government. The new government also adopted a federal system that gave some powers to the central government, others to the states and other powers shared between the two.

The Constitution faced still more opposition to its passage from those who feared that a strong central government endangered individual liberties. In 1788, after a promise was made by James Madison to draw up a bill of rights to ensure the protection of individual liberties, the Constitution was ratified. True to his word, James Madison solicited suggestions for a bill of rights. Ten additions or amendments to the Constitution passed the Congress, were ratified in 1791 and became known as the Bill of Rights. The Constitution is one of the most important political achievements in world history and continues to not only serve as the foundation for the government of the United States, but as a model of democracy for the rest of the world.

Vocabulary

U.S. Constitution — The written plan of American government and the highest law in the land. The Constitution empowers and limits U.S. government.

Bill of Rights — The first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution guaranteeing rights, including those of religion, speech, press and privacy.

inalienable rights — Rights that are inherent in human beings and, for that reason, cannot be taken away.

citizenship — Membership in a politically organized society.

confederation — An association of states that delegates power to a central government.

Articles of Confederation — America's first national constitution that was ratified in 1781 and governed the United States until 1789.

Annapolis Convention — A meeting held in Annapolis, Maryland, in 1786, to discuss problems with the Articles of Confederation. *(Continued)*

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republic — A form of government in which power is held by the voters and is exercised by elected representatives.

Constitutional Convention — A meeting held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, from May to September 1787, which resulted in the drafting of the U.S. Constitution.

Virginia Plan — The plan of government introduced by James Madison at the 1787 Constitutional Convention, calling for legislative representation based on population.

New Jersey Plan — The plan of government introduced by James Paterson at the 1787 Constitutional Convention, calling for equal legislative representation among states.

Connecticut Compromise — Also known as the Great Compromise, this compromise, introduced to the Constitutional Convention of 1787 by William Sherman, called for legislative representation according to population in the House of Representatives and equal representation in the Senate.

Three-Fifths Compromise — A plan agreed to by the delegates to the Constitutional Convention of 1787 by which state populations would count 3/5 of their slaves for the purpose of determining the number of representatives in the House of Representatives.

popular sovereignty — The idea that the supreme power of government rests with the people who create and have the power to abolish the government.

limited government — A government that has restraints on its power.

rule of law — The concept that every member of a society, including the rulers, must follow the law.

checks and balances — The system of sharing powers among the three branches of the national government so that no branch can abuse its powers.

federalism — The system in which power is divided between a national government and a number of state governments, giving some powers exclusively to the national government, some exclusively to the states and other powers shared among them.

constitutional amendment — A change to the U.S. Constitution through a legally defined process.

Pre-viewing Discussion

• The delegates to the 1787 Constitutional Convention were supposed to amend the existing frame of government under the Articles of Confederation. If this was the mission, do students think delegates were justified in scrapping the Articles of Confederation altogether and creating a brand new constitution? Why or why not?

• The U.S. Constitution is the oldest written constitution still in operation. Why do students think that the U.S. Constitution has lasted so long with so few changes? Discuss with students if it's time for a new constitution. Why or why not?

• The U.S. Constitution provides the framework for the functioning of American government. Encourage students to brainstorm a list of ways in which this important document influences their everyday lives.

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Focus Questions

1. What was the condition of the United States in 1787?
2. What is a constitution, and what does it do?
3. Describe what makes a right inalienable. Provide some examples of inalienable rights.
4. What is citizenship?
5. What is a confederation? Why was the United States considered a confederation under the Articles of Confederation?
6. What were the powers of the central government under the Articles of Confederation?
7. What is a republic? Explain how the United States can be both a republic and a democracy.
8. What was the 1787 Constitutional Convention? Name some of the people who attended this important meeting.
9. What were the Virginia Plan, the New Jersey Plan and the Connecticut Compromise?
10. What was the Three-Fifths Compromise?
11. What is the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution, and why is it important?
12. What are the main features of the U.S. Constitution? What are checks and balances?
13. What is the Bill of Rights, and why is it important?
14. Who were the Anti-Federalists, and why did many of them eventually accept ratification of the U.S. Constitution?
15. How does the U.S. Constitution function as a higher law in America?

Follow-up Discussion

- If a constitutional convention were held today, what do students think the outcome would be? Students should explain their reasoning.
- Ask students to discuss what they would have done if they had been present at the 1787 Convention. What suggestions might they have had for the development of the American system of government?
- Which one of the Bill of Rights do students think is the most important? Why?

Follow-up Activities

- Divide the class into groups and ask each group to think about what changes might improve the Constitution. Ask them to choose one potential amendment and to write a list of reasons defending the amendment. Then have each group tell the class the amendment it suggests and conduct a group discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of each. Perhaps the class would like to vote on each proposal.
- Have the class conduct a research project on the life and work of the "Father of the Constitution," James Madison. The class could be divided into groups and assigned a portion of Madison's life up to and including his preparation of the proposed constitutional amendments that became the Bill of Rights. (See www.jmu.edu/madison/madison.htm#Purpose for an informative Web site about James Madison.) *(Continued)*

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US Foreign Policy #6

Program Overview

The United States is a powerful country, and American words and deeds have a great impact on various countries around the world. Foreign policy consists of the complex interactions planned and deliberately carried out by American government with other nations. Although many U.S. citizens pay little attention to foreign policy, events beyond American shores affect everyone.

Foreign policy is planned and carried out by the executive branch of American government, but Congress plays a pivotal role as well. Congress as a whole exercises power by controlling the federal budget, and the Senate has the power of approving treaties and important foreign policy appointments, such as ambassadors and the secretary of state.

Presidents have the primary responsibility for formulating foreign policy. The secretary of state and the secretary of defense, in addition to other cabinet members, also have a role in developing and carrying out foreign policy. The everyday responsibility of carrying out United States foreign policy falls upon specially trained officials working in U.S. embassies in nearly 180 countries. Other players in the foreign policy arena are the intelligence agencies, the best known of which is the Central Intelligence Agency, which gathers and evaluates information from around the world. There are many organizations that play roles in international life as well, including the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the United Nations.

There are many ways for citizens to make their voices heard about foreign policy issues. These means include creating organizations or joining existing ones, writing letters and speaking personally to congressional representatives. And Americans should never forget that when they travel abroad, they are citizen-ambassadors of their country.

Vocabulary

diplomacy — Formal government-to-government negotiations among nations.

foreign policy — The positions and actions that a nation takes in its interactions with other nations.

executive branch — The branch of American government that carries out, or executes, the law.

legislative branch — The branch of American government that makes the law.

secretary of state — The head of the U.S. Department of State who is charged with carrying out formal relations with other governments.

ambassadors — Representatives of the United States who are appointed by the President and are stationed at American embassies in countries around the world.

embassy — A U.S. sovereign territory in a foreign country where diplomats and other government officials carry on their work.

diplomat — An official charged with carrying out formal contact with other governments or international organizations.

European Union (EU) — Political organization of most Western European and some Central European nations seeking to unify economic relations and some political functions.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) — A mutual defense alliance founded in 1949 among the United States, Canada and the Western European democracies as a form of collective security against the threat of communism. Still exists in a much enlarged form in the post-communist world.

United Nations (UN) — The organization formed in 1945, whose original purpose was collective security among signatory states.

Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) — The most publicly known of a number of intelligence-gathering organizations of the federal government. The CIA is charged with carrying out a variety of covert foreign operations.

isolationism — America's foreign policy for much of its early history, which embodied a desire to avoid involvement in foreign affairs and conflicts.

Monroe Doctrine — A declaration in 1823 by President Monroe that emphasized the importance of America's isolationism. According to the Monroe Doctrine, the U.S. would stay out of Europe's affairs, and Europe should stay out of America's affairs.

League of Nations — Collective security organizations composed of nations established under the Treaty of Versailles of 1919. The League of Nations was never effective due to the lack of U.S. membership.

communism — An economic system in which all goods are owned jointly by the government and its people. In the former Soviet Union, communism developed into a government in which all social and economic policy decisions were made by a single party.

containment — The foreign policy of the United States designed to stop the growth of communism.

Truman Doctrine — A 1947 pronouncement by President Truman that offered aid to the governments of Greece and Turkey to help them resist communist takeover.

Marshall Plan — The program of financial aid by the United States for Western European nations to enable them to achieve economic stability to avoid communist takeover in the aftermath of World War II. This plan was first proposed by Secretary of State George C. Marshall in June 1947.

Cold War — A hostile rivalry during the second half of the 20th century between communist nations, particularly the former Soviet Union, and the democratic nations of the world, led by the United States.

Pre-viewing Discussion

- Discuss with students how foreign policy affects them and their communities. Ask students why they think it might be important to become interested in foreign policy. Brainstorm ways they make can make their voices heard both now and in the future in the foreign policy arena.

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- Ask students to discuss what it means for America to be the world's sole superpower. How do they think that position affects America's foreign policy?
- For much of America's early history, its foreign policy was marked by a desire for isolation, or avoidance of the affairs of other nations. However, in the years following World War II, America has become much more involved in world affairs. What are students' opinions about how involved America should be in the affairs of other countries? Do they support isolationism or involvement, and why?

Focus Questions

1. Name some of the ways in which nations interact with each other.
2. What is foreign policy?
3. Who conducts American foreign policy?
4. What is the role of the executive branch of American government in foreign policy? How about the legislative branch?
5. What foreign policy powers are given by the U.S. Constitution to the President and Congress, respectively?
6. How do ambassadors gain their offices?
7. What executive branch officials, in addition to the President, are important in foreign policy?
8. What are embassies?
9. Who are diplomats, and what are their foreign policy roles?
10. What are some prominent international organizations whose members are governments?
11. What is the CIA, and what is its role in American foreign policy?
12. What is isolationism?
13. What was the League of Nations, and why did it fail?
14. What are some important episodes in the Cold War?
15. How can citizens become involved in foreign policy issues?

Follow-up Discussion

- Have students brainstorm what problems involving foreign policy they expect to be most pressing during their lifetimes. What opinions do students have about these issues? What advice would they provide to the formulators of U.S. foreign policy about these issues?
- Ask the students if they think that Congress has enough, not enough or too much power in the formulation and oversight of foreign policy. Should Congress be less involved in foreign policy unless some grave crisis arises, or should it exercise energetic and detailed oversight at all times?
- U.S. foreign policy can be implemented in many ways, including the use of diplomacy and military strength. Ask students to discuss their opinions about these two strategies. Which do they prefer, and why? Help students to brainstorm situations in which each type of strategy could be used.

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