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We the People



Grade Level 6-8, 9-12

Subject Area U.S. history

Curriculum Focus

civics, language arts, government,
political science

Duration 1 week

Objective

By gathering images from modern media (newspapers, magazines, television, and/or the Internet) students will show how the meaning of the Preamble is reflected in current American culture.

Materials

Information sources including Internet sites, magazines and books, electronic encyclopedias and databases; TV (optional), VCR (optional), videocamera (optional), presentation software (optional)

Procedure

The signing of the Constitution shows that we made ourselves. They told us to

★ Related Materials

**Energy Alternatives:
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Trying to drive a stretch
Hummer from Los Angeles to
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The framers of the Constitution chose their words carefully as they laid out a blueprint for the nation in Philadelphia in 1787. Emerging from a hard-fought struggle for independence from Britain in 1781, the United States found the Articles

of Confederation too weak. The country was in need of a new document that would unify and strengthen the fledgling nation without infringing on the rights of the people.

Follow the steps below with your students to see how the Preamble is reflected in modern American culture.

1. The Preamble Online

Have students read along as they listen to the Preamble to the Constitution and analyze its meaning. They should then answer the questions that follow.

The Constitution of the United States Preamble

We the People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

The Preamble



To hear this audio file, you need the RealPlayer plug-in. [Download it now.](#)

Questions

Why do you think the framers chose phrases like "a more perfect union" and "promote the general welfare"? What did these terms mean to the framers? What do they mean today?

How does one go about promoting general welfare?

What constitutes justice and how is it established?

What is "common defense"?

What are the "blessings of liberty" and why do they need to be secured?

2. Our Constitution Today

Students should collect images and/or sounds from media sources that represent, symbolize, or explain each phrase in the Preamble. Each phrase represents a goal for American government. The images and sounds they collect should show how these goals are being met today. For example, for the phrase "establish justice" students might collect images of courtroom scenes. Have students select from the following media sources for the images and sounds they collect:

Print Media

newspapers
magazines
posters
flyers
photocopies from books

Visual Media

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Important Notice on Copyright and Plagiarism

Students should be aware that some source material may be copyrighted, and that there can be serious ramifications for violating that copyright. Although they may use such work as part of the assignment (to be viewed only by the class), they should not make available to the general public any work for which they do not have permission from the copyright holder. It should also be stressed that any work that is not the student's original work must have a proper citation.

3. Media Presentation

Students should create a media presentation featuring the images and/or sounds they collected. For example, students who collected newspaper and magazine clippings might create a display board or a collage; students who collected TV images, or who filmed their own footage, can create a video; and students who collected images from the Internet might create a PowerPoint presentation, a HyperCard stack, or a Web page. When assembled, the images and sounds should explain the meaning and impact of the Preamble in American culture today.

Closure

Have students display their collections to the class. Note: to display it to anyone besides their classmates, students should be sure they have obtained permission for all copyrighted materials they use. Once the presentations are complete, hold a class discussion on how they compare. What do these collections say about our political culture? What do they say about our belief in the words of the Constitution?

Extension

Have students follow the procedure above to look for reflections of the Declaration of Independence in current culture by gathering images from modern media. It is recommended that students focus on the section that reads "We hold these truths to be self-evident. . . as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness."

Background

Students will be familiar with the Declaration of Independence, the Revolutionary War, the work of Enlightenment thinkers such as John Locke, and the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation before beginning this activity.

Related Links

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We The People: A [History Lesson Plan](#)

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Credits

Our thanks to Lara Maupin, a history teacher at Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology in Alexandria, Virginia, for her consultation. Audio file source: [The Constitution of the United States in Audio](#).

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