

Promise Of Liberty

Class Constitution: We The Students

Overview

This lesson introduces the US. Constitution and helps students explore how a class constitution can be used as a tool for creating a collaborative environment.

Students are encouraged to take an active role in creating a classroom that represents what they want their learning environment to look like (actions), sound like (words), and feel like (values).

Goals

Students will be able to:

- Learn more about why the U.S. Constitution was created
- Identify student attitudes and behaviors they want in a classroom community
- Collaborate with classmates
- Think critically about what they want their classroom to look like

Recommended Grades

Adaptable for K-12

Illinois Social Science Standards Identified

SS.K-12.IS.1.

SS.K-12.IS.11.

SS.K-5.CV.1-2.

SS.6-12.CV.5.

SS.9-12.CV.8

Teacher Reading

Early understanding level:

In 1787, the Founding Fathers of the United States gathered to create a nation ruled by laws. This set of rules is called the Constitution. These rules prevent one person from gaining too much power and protect individual freedoms. The Constitution describes our rights and responsibilities as citizens. The Founding Fathers also created a process to change, or amend, the Constitution. Changes, called amendments, can add rights, explain government rules, and solve problems. To become part of the Constitution, changes require a majority vote.

Expanded understanding level:

In 1787, the Founding Fathers of the United States gathered together to define who and what they wanted the new country of the United States to be. Their aim was to establish the safety, strength, and prosperity of the independent nation.

The Constitution represents the principles of the country and serves as a guide for running

our country. It is a framework for government defining the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. The branches provide checks and balances that make sure power is divided equally across each group. The Constitution also protects individual freedoms and ensures the rule of law. The rights and responsibilities outlined in the Constitution reflect our core values.

To address new issues, the Founding Fathers developed a process for amending the Constitution. Amendments allow for the expansion of rights and freedoms, clarify government processes, correct injustices, and enhance democracy.

It is difficult to amend the Constitution, and the process begins with a two-thirds majority vote by Congress. Then the vote goes to the states. Three fourths of the states must vote in favor of the amendment before it can become part of the Constitution. Nearly 12,000 amendments have been proposed, but only 27 have been ratified.

Comprehension Questions

1. What is the Constitution?
2. Why did the Founding Fathers create the Constitution?
3. How can the Constitution be changed?

Class Discussion:

Countries use constitutions to describe the rights and responsibilities of citizens. How could we use a constitution to describe the rights and responsibilities in our class?

Brainstorming an ideal classroom environment:

Draw the following chart on the board.

What do you want our classroom to be?		
Do? (Actions and Behaviors)	Sound/ Look like? (Words)	Feel? (Values and Attitudes)

Ask students to think about their ideal classroom environment. What helps them learn best? Tell students they will create an individual graphic organizer to answer the question, "What do you want our classroom to be?"

Procedure

Emphasize things students do (actions and behaviors), see/hear (words), and feel (values and attitudes) in the classroom. Ask students to draw the chart in their notebook.

- 1) Together, put one example in each column on the board. Then direct students to spend 5-7 minutes completing the chart on their own paper.
- 2) Ask students to share their completed chart with their partner or group. Invite them
- 3) When ready, ask students to share their top 1-2 ideas for each category. As students add to the column, they should compare their ideas to their classmates' ideas. Continue until students have added notes for each category. (This can also be done in stations around the room, reconvening and voting to add goals to the board).
- 4) After reviewing all the ideas, ask students to identify the top 3-5 most important ideas overall. These topics will become the rights students will explore.
- 5) Emphasize: What is a right?
 - a) A right is a guaranteed agreement or promise, usually decided by a group or government for its people.
 - b) *Example of a classroom right: "Keep the classroom clean".*
- 6) Explain that all class members should contribute to creating an ideal classroom environment. To demonstrate the task, ask questions to help students understand their responsibilities as class members in upholding these rights. For example, "How will you help classmates learn? What will you do to create that environment for others?" Add an example of a responsibility to your model on the board. Explain that each group will create a list of responsibilities for one right. Encourage groups to think about what they want the class to do, see, hear, and feel.
 - a) *Example: Right- Keep the classroom clean. Responsibility- Pick up my garbage.*
- 7) It is time to edit and finalize the constitution for voting. This step can be done as a large group, or in small groups that represent a government. If large group, follow step 7a. If small groups, follow steps 7b-d.
 - a) Create a list of responsibilities for their assigned rights. Ensure as many students participate as possible in this conversation.
 - b) Place the class into small groups of 3 to 4 students. Designate roles such as recorder (writes answers), timekeeper (monitors time), reporter (shares with large group), and moderator (makes sure all group members contribute). Assign each group one of the rights on the board. Each group will create a list of responsibilities for their assigned right so all class members can experience it.
 - c) Tell the students they will work in groups for 10 minutes to determine their role in creating an ideal classroom environment and what this looks, sounds, and feels like: these are their responsibilities to uphold the rights of all class members.

- d) When time is up, ask each group's reporter to share ideas with the whole class. If each group is working with poster paper, display the rights and responsibilities as the class constitution in the classroom as a reminder all year.
- 8) End the lesson by inviting students to vote to uphold the class's rights and responsibilities.
- 9) Once the vote has been decided, read the finalized constitution as a class.

Constitution outline for Early Understanding Levels:

Our Class Constitution:

We the students of _____ *share the goals of*
(class name, room number, or educator name)

_____.
(a positive behavior right), (positive speech right), (positive value/ attitude right).

To succeed at these goals, we will: _____
(responsibility 1) (responsibility 2)

_____.
(responsibility 3)