
Our American
Heritage

BOOK ONE

*A Christian Homeschool Workbook
for Teaching the U.S. Constitution*

*“Training Tomorrow’s Disciples of Christ and
American Citizens”*

Rusty Thomas

Our American Heritage, Book One: A Christian Homeschool Workbook for Teaching the
U.S. Constitution

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THOMAS HERITAGE

A Fourth-Generation Homeschool Family

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**“The fear of the LORD is the
beginning of wisdom.”**

Proverbs 9:10





CHAPTER ONE

America is a Constitutional Republic

Why was America founded as a Constitutional Republic? Here is a simple explanation.

FOR THE PARENT OR TEACHER

This chapter is longer than the Introduction. Two sittings work well: stop after the three branches, and pick up again at how a law is made.

Imagine three different playgrounds.



In playground #1 there is one boss who makes all the rules. It is just one child who decides every game, changes the rules whenever he wants, and no one can question him. That is like a dictatorship or absolute monarchy.

In playground #2 it is the crowd who rules by emotion. Everyone votes instantly, and whatever the loudest group wants becomes the rule—even if it is unfair to a smaller group. That is democracy.



In playground #3, however, it is the people who choose their leaders, but everyone must obey the rulebook. The children elect team captains, but the captains cannot change the rules by themselves because the playground has a written rulebook that protects every child. **That is like a constitutional republic.**

The Constitution is known as the law of the land in America.

Whereas the Declaration of Independence is considered the Spirit of the Law, the Constitution is considered the Letter of the Law.

What America is not

Nations of the earth have different government models to govern its citizens. America was founded as a Constitutional Republic as explained in playground number three. This means America is not a democracy as some people are taught today (Playground number two). A saying often credited to Benjamin Franklin puts it this way:

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

“A democracy is two wolves and a small lamb voting on what to have for dinner. Freedom under a constitutional republic is a well-armed lamb contesting the vote.”

America is not a monarchy that is ruled by a king (Playground number one). After the Revolutionary War, George Washington, who later became our first President under the Constitution, was offered to become America’s first king, but being a godly, principled man, he refused.

America is not an oligarchy ruled by a small group of “special” people. Neither is America ruled by the military. In a Constitutional Republic, **the people are the source of political authority**. As a result, the people and their leaders are all duty bound to protect, defend, and follow the Constitution. That keeps those who govern and those being governed accountable to the same standard of law and justice.



This means no president, judge, congressman, or majority vote is supposed to be above the law. The American system of government strives to provide equal protection and justice under the law and that law is the Constitution of the United States.

Under our Constitution, there are three branches of government.

They are the Legislative branch, the Executive branch, and the Judicial branch of government. This compares with God's government in the earth. Isaiah 33:22, states,

ISAIAH 33:22

“For the LORD is our Judge, The LORD is our Lawgiver, The LORD is our King; He will save us.”

The God of heaven rules as Lawgiver, Judge, and King over planet earth. This is heaven's model of God's Kingdom authority. America adopted this model of governmental branches for our nation.

LEGISLATIVE

Lawgiver

EXECUTIVE

King

JUDICIAL

Judge



The Legislative Branch is Congress, which has two parts: the House of Representatives and the Senate. They are the Lawgiver branch. There are 435 House members that make up the House of Representatives. There are 100 Senators, two from each state that make up the Senate. These civil officers are responsible for making laws in our nation.

How is a law made in our nation?

1

A member of the House and/or the Senate comes up with an idea. When the idea is written down, it becomes a bill. A bill is simply a proposed law. The Representative introduces the bill in the House of Representatives, or a Senator introduces it in the Senate. The bill is given a number and shared with everyone in the House and the Senate.

2

Committees in both Houses study the bill. They must decide: Is the bill a good idea? Will it help people or harm our citizens? Will it cost too much? And most important for our system of government, does it follow the Constitution?

In the process, sometimes experts come to answer questions. Sometimes changes are made. Sometimes the committee decides the bill should go no further and will never become law in our nation.

3

If the bill passes the Committee and approves the bill, everyone in the House or Senate discusses it. Members explain why they support it or oppose it. Sometimes they suggest changes. **This is called debate.**

God teaches in His Word that wise decisions come from careful discussion. Proverbs 11:14 states,

PROVERBS 11:14

“Where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counselors there is safety.”

4

Next comes the vote. After the debate, everyone votes. If most members vote yes, the bill passes that chamber. If not, the bill ends there. If the bill began in the House, it now goes to the Senate. If it began in the Senate, it goes to the House. The second chamber repeats the same process. The bill goes to another committee. There is a debate and then comes the vote. Both the House and the Senate must agree on the same wording. If they make different changes, members from both chambers meet in a conference committee to work out the differences before voting again.

This is quite a process thus far. **Why would our Founding Fathers put together such a process?** The Founders wanted laws to be considered carefully. **They believed it was better to make good laws slowly than bad laws quickly.**

5

Once both the House and Senate approve the same bill, it is sent to the President. The President has a couple of choices. He can sign it into law, or he can veto it because he doesn't think it should become law. The bill then goes back to Congress.

6

Can Congress override a veto by the President? Yes, they can. If two-thirds of both the House and the Senate vote to approve the bill again, it becomes law even without the President's signature. **This keeps one person from having all the power.**

EXECUTIVE

The next branch is the executive, which is held by a president nationally or a governor in a state. His job is to enforce the laws faithfully.

JUDICIAL

Lastly, there is the judicial branch. These are judges who interpret the laws to make sure the laws follow the Constitution and are applied fairly.

They did their homework



As you can see, our Founding Fathers took a lot of time and thought to establish a Constitutional Republic. They did their homework. They studied the Bible, history, different governmental models. Why were some successful, while others failed? Since they were Biblical in their worldview, they knew the nature of man. Jeremiah 17:9 states,

JEREMIAH 17:9

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; Who can know it?”

Because human beings are imperfect, the Founders believed no person should have unlimited power. James Madison, our 4th President, is known as the Father of the Constitution. He wrote:

JAMES MADISON

“If men were angels, no government would be necessary.”

Checks and balances

This understanding of human nature gave rise to establishing what is called checks and balances. Because our Founding Fathers believed what Lord Acton would later put into words, that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely, they sought to spread out power. The Founders designed the branches to watch each other to hold each other accountable to the Constitution.

Think of it like a three-lock treasure chest.



Congress can
pass laws.



The President
can veto laws.



The Supreme Court
can declare laws
unconstitutional.

No branch gets all the keys.

This was very wise. This system of government encourages wisdom, accountability, and cooperation.

Why is this system wise?

A Constitutional Republic tries to protect both freedom and order. **Too much government can crush liberty. Too little government can lead to chaos.** The Constitution seeks a balanced path.

Either by the Bible or by the bayonet

Robert C. Winthrop, with incredible insight, articulated these principles. Winthrop was an American philanthropist and statesman in the 1800s. He served as a congressman of Massachusetts and as a one-time speaker of the United States House of Representatives. In a speech to the Massachusetts Bible Society, Winthrop said,

ROBERT C. WINTHROP

“All societies of men must be governed in some way or other. Men, in a word, must necessarily be controlled either by a power within them, or by a power without them; either by the Word of God, or by the strong arm of man; either by the Bible or by the bayonet.”

**Because men are sinful,
we need to be governed.**

**At the same time,
man longs to be free.**

In this Fallen World, there has always been a tension between authority and liberty.

**Only One Nation under God can successfully
establish both.**

One Nation under God provides a just social order on one hand and provides maximum individual freedom to its citizens on the other hand.

Here is a picture to remember.

Think of America as a ship.

- ◆ The People are the owners of the ship.
- ◆ The Constitution is the map and rulebook.
- ◆ The Government is the crew.
- ◆ The President, Congress, and Courts are different officers with different duties.
- ◆ God is the ultimate Judge over all nations.



If the crew ignores the map, the ship can drift into danger.

If the people forget the map, they may not notice when the ship is being steered in the wrong direction, **which can take away hard-fought liberties.**

“A republic, if you can keep it”

Why should this matter to you as a young person?

One day you may vote, serve on a jury, run a business, become a teacher, pastor, soldier, judge, or even a public leader. Understanding our Constitutional Republic helps you to recognize when power is being abused, appreciate the freedoms you have, participate wisely in civic life, and protect liberty for future generations.

At the time America decided to become a Constitutional Republic a woman by the name of Elizabeth Willing Powel asked Benjamin Franklin at the end of the Constitutional Convention in 1787,

“Well, Doctor, what have we got, a republic or a monarchy?”

Franklin’s response, **“A republic, if you can keep it.”** That answer “If you can keep it” is the reason for writing this workbook on our American heritage.



HERE IS A FINAL THOUGHT FOR THIS CHAPTER.

A Constitutional Republic is not just a government system — it is a trust handed from one generation to the next. If we understand the Constitution, we can recognize when liberty is being protected. If we forget it, we may not recognize when liberty is being lost.

Chapter Review

- 1 The Constitution is known as the law of the _____ in America.
- 2 George Washington was offered to become America's first _____, but he refused.
- 3 No president, judge, congressman, or majority vote is supposed to be above the _____.
- 4 The three branches of government are the Legislative branch, the Executive branch, and the _____ branch.
- 5 When an idea for a law is written down, it becomes a _____.
- 6 The President can sign a bill into law, or he can _____ it.
- 7 James _____, our 4th President, is known as the Father of the Constitution.
- 8 The Founders spread out power so the branches would watch each other. This is called checks and _____.
- 9 Think of America as a ship. The People are the _____ of the ship.
- 10 Benjamin Franklin said we have "a republic, if you can _____ it."

A CONSTITUTIONAL REPUBLIC • THREE BRANCHES

You finished Chapter One! You now know what a Constitutional Republic is, and why it must be kept.

You Be the Judge

Decide together, then write your reason in your own words.

- 1** A senator has an idea for a new law. She writes it down as a bill and introduces it in the Senate.

Whose job? Is it allowed? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Why?

- 2** Congress passes a bill. The President thinks it should not become law, so he vetoes it.

Whose job? Is it allowed? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Why?

- 3** The President decides he will judge a court case himself, instead of the judges.

Whose job? Is it allowed? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Why?

LOOK BACK

- 1** The Constitution was written to create a government with limited
- 2** Our rights do not come from a or from government.
- 3** When people forget their history, they often repeat their

Family Discussion

Talk these through together before you write. There is no hurry.

1 • Why do you think the Founders divided power into three branches?

.....

.....

2 • What might happen if one branch had all the power?

.....

.....

3 • How does the Constitution help protect ordinary people?

.....

.....

4 • Why does freedom require both rights and responsibility?

.....

.....

FOR THE PARENT OR TEACHER

Question four is the one worth lingering on. Ask the child to name a freedom they enjoy, then ask what responsibility comes with it. That exchange is the whole chapter in miniature.



CHAPTER TWO

The Structure of the Constitution

The blueprint we stand on

But first let me ask you another question. Have you ever tried to build something? Maybe you built a treehouse with your dad, a LEGO castle, or even put together a puzzle.

FOR THE PARENT OR TEACHER

This chapter is a tour of the whole document before any single part of it. If the child can say what a Preamble, an Article and an Amendment each do, the rest of the book has somewhere to hang.

A Plan on a Firm Foundation

This chapter explores the blueprint of our American Constitution. We will discuss in simple terms its overall structure and foundation upon which we stand as Americans.

If you want to build in a good way, it is important to have a plan that rests on a firm foundation. Without one, our chances of failure increase greatly. Our Lord Jesus reminds us:

“Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.”

Matthew 7:24-27



The Blueprint of Our Government

The United States Constitution is the blueprint and foundation for our government and its laws. It tells us who has the power to govern, what each part of government is supposed to do, what the government is not allowed to do, and how the Constitution can be changed when necessary.

7,500

words

1787

the year it was written

The Constitution is only about 7,500 words, yet it has guided our nation since 1787!



Why a Lasting Plan Matters

Most nations change their form of government due to a variety of reasons. When the system of government constantly changes, it is hard on citizens.

It makes people uncertain about their future. It makes them insecure and unstable. It's difficult to make plans when you cannot be certain if the rules of government will last.



Three Main Parts

Our Constitution has three main parts. Think of the Constitution as a great book with three major sections.

1

The Preamble — tells us *why* the Constitution was written.

2

The Seven Articles — teach how the government works.

3

The Amendments — deal with the *changes*.



Part One: The Preamble

Part one is the Preamble. This helps us understand the purpose of our Constitution. The Preamble is our introduction. It tells us why the Constitution was written. It begins with the famous words, “We the People...”

The Preamble does not give powers to the government. Instead, it explains the goals of the Constitution.

Here is the general outline, which will be discussed more fully in the next chapter. The purpose of the Preamble is to:

- ◆ Unite the nation
- ◆ Establish justice
- ◆ Keep peace
- ◆ Protect the country
- ◆ Promote the general welfare
- ◆ Preserve liberty for future generations

REMEMBER THIS

Think of the Preamble as the mission statement of America.



Where We Have Failed

Tragically, just like in the case of slavery, our nation is violating the last part of the Preamble. We did not grant liberty to slaves, which cost our nation a terrible civil war to end its evil practice.

And today, we do not grant life or liberty to our own sons and daughters in the womb of their mothers. Abortion is a terrible blight upon our nation as we once again are failing to live out our national creed, while violating our own Constitution.

A CHARGE TO THE YOUNG

Prayerfully, young people, when you get older you will rise to end the scourge of abortion by upholding God's law, "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13) and honor the 5th Amendment to the Constitution that specifically states, "No person shall be deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law."



★ NARRATION BREAK

What is the Preamble of the Constitution?

Part Two: The Seven Articles

The seven articles of the Constitution teach how the government works. The Articles are the main chapters of the Constitution. Each Article explains an important part of our government.

Article I as we learned in the previous chapter defines the Legislative Branch, which is Congress. They make our laws.

Article II defines the Executive Branch, which is the President. His job is to enforce our laws.

Article III is the Judicial Branch, which is the Supreme Court and other federal courts. Their job is to explain what the laws mean and make sure they follow the Constitution.

Article IV concerns the States, which number 50 in America. Together, they comprise the United States of America. This article of the Constitution explains how the states work together as one nation. It reminds each state to respect other states.



Articles Five, Six and Seven

Article V provides the means to change the Constitution. Sometimes a nation grows and faces new challenges. Article V explains how to change (amend) the Constitution. It is important to note that the Founders wanted changes to be possible — but not easy.

Article VI defines the Supreme Law of the Land. The Constitution is the highest law in America. Everyone — including the President, Congress, judges, and state governments — must obey the Constitution.

Article VII puts the Constitution into action. This article explains how the Constitution became the law of the land after enough states approved it.

Those changes that did take place are called the Amendments to the Constitution. Most were good changes, but others not so good.

Some mistakenly have taught the Supremacy clause speaks of the authority of the Supreme Court. Not so — the Supreme Court is not to make law, but make sure it follows the Constitution.



The Oath

It is a part of the oath one takes when serving our nation. The oath to defend the Constitution of the United States is as follows:

THE OATH OF OFFICE

“I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter.”

On a personal note, I took this oath when entering military service. In the Army, I served with the 101st Airborne Division as an M60 machine gunner.

THE OATH I TOOK AS A SOLDIER

“I, (name), do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. So help me God.”

★ NARRATION BREAK

What are the Constitution’s seven Articles?



Part Three: The Amendments

The Constitution has 27 Amendments. An amendment is a change or an addition to the Constitution. Think of an amendment like adding another chapter to a favorite book.

The first ten amendments are called The Bill of Rights. These protect many important freedoms.

- ◆ Freedom of religion
- ◆ Freedom of the press
- ◆ The right to petition the government
- ◆ The right to a fair trial
- ◆ Freedom of speech
- ◆ The right to assemble peacefully
- ◆ Protection from unreasonable searches
- ◆ Protection against cruel and unusual punishment



A Right Being Violated Today

One of the struggles with the advancement of modern technology and the creation of a surveillance state, some of our Constitutional rights are being violated by our government. The main one is protection from unreasonable searches.

Our government spies on its people. They examine our computers, phones, and have cameras stationed in most places to watch our activities. So far, no one in or out of government has corrected this violation.

A CHARGE TO THE YOUNG

**Perhaps, when you grow up and become a leader,
you can.**



The Other Seventeen

The other 17 amendments added new protections and improved the Constitution as the nation grew.

It is the opinion of this author that one in particular needs to end and that is the 16th Amendment. It created something our Founding Fathers never wanted. When the Constitution was settled, the Founders wanted a stable money system for our nation.

They put limits on direct taxation. They warned of the risk of centralized banking control, and the potential for economic trouble. These fears reflected the Founders' distrust of concentrated power and their preference for indirect, assigned taxes that preserved economic liberty and states' freedoms.

TO LEARN MORE

To learn more about the problems with the 16th Amendment, order “The Tuttle Twins and the Creature from Jekyll Island” at TuttleTwins.com.



★ NARRATION BREAK

What is an amendment to the Constitution?



Articles, Sections and Clauses

Next, what are the sections in each article? Each of the seven Articles is divided into sections. A good way to think of this is a book. A book has chapters, headings, and paragraphs. Our Constitution has Articles, Sections, and Clauses.

Sections organize the Articles into smaller topics.

1

For example, Article I has ten sections because Congress has many responsibilities.

2

Article II has four sections. They explain the President's duties.

3

Article III has three sections about the courts.



Why → How → Changes

The following is a simple illustration of the Constitution. The Preamble tells us why the Constitution was written. The seven articles show us how our government is to work.

- ◆ Article I — Congress
- ◆ Article II — the Presidency
- ◆ Article III — the Courts
- ◆ Article IV — the States
- ◆ Article V — the Amendments
- ◆ Article VI — the Supreme Law
- ◆ Article VII — Ratification

Then we add Twenty-Seven Amendments meant to protect our freedoms and improve the Constitution, which some may not have helped in that regard, like the 16th Amendment.

AN EASY WAY TO REMEMBER ALL THIS

The Preamble explains the *why* of the Constitution. The Articles explain the *how*. The Amendments deal with the *changes*. So, the Constitution deals with **Why → How → Changes.**



Constitution Fun Facts

Here are some fun Constitution Facts:

1

Written in 1787.

2

Signed by 39 delegates.

3

Ratified by 9 of the 13 states before it took effect.

4

Only 27 amendments have been added.

5

It is the oldest written national constitution still in use today.



Wise Laws, People of Good Character

The Constitution was designed with the understanding that people are imperfect and that power should be exercised with wisdom and accountability. The Bible teaches similar principles about wise planning and justice. Proverbs 8:15, 16 speaking of God's wisdom working in civil government states:

“By me (God’s wisdom) kings reign, and rulers decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, all the judges of the earth.”

Proverbs 8:15, 16



Just as a strong house needs a solid foundation, a nation needs wise laws and people of good character. John Adams, our second President, agreed. He stated:

JOHN ADAMS

“We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, revenge or gallantry would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”

This quote shows Adams' belief that the U.S. Constitution was made to work best in a nation that is based in virtue, moral discipline, and religious principles. He saw these as vital supports for liberty and the rule of law, warning that without them, even the strongest legal framework, such as our Constitution, could be harmed by unchecked human evils.

Words to know

As we conclude this chapter here are some words to know. Your assignment is to take each word, correctly spell it, and then write it in a sentence.

Constitution The highest law of the United States.

Preamble The introduction that explains the Constitution's purpose.

Article A major chapter explaining how government is organized.

Section A smaller part of an article that explains specific responsibilities or rules.

Amendment A change or addition to the Constitution.

Bill of Rights The first ten amendments that protect many individual freedoms.

Ratify To officially approve something.



Spell each word correctly, then use it in a sentence of your own.

Chapter Review

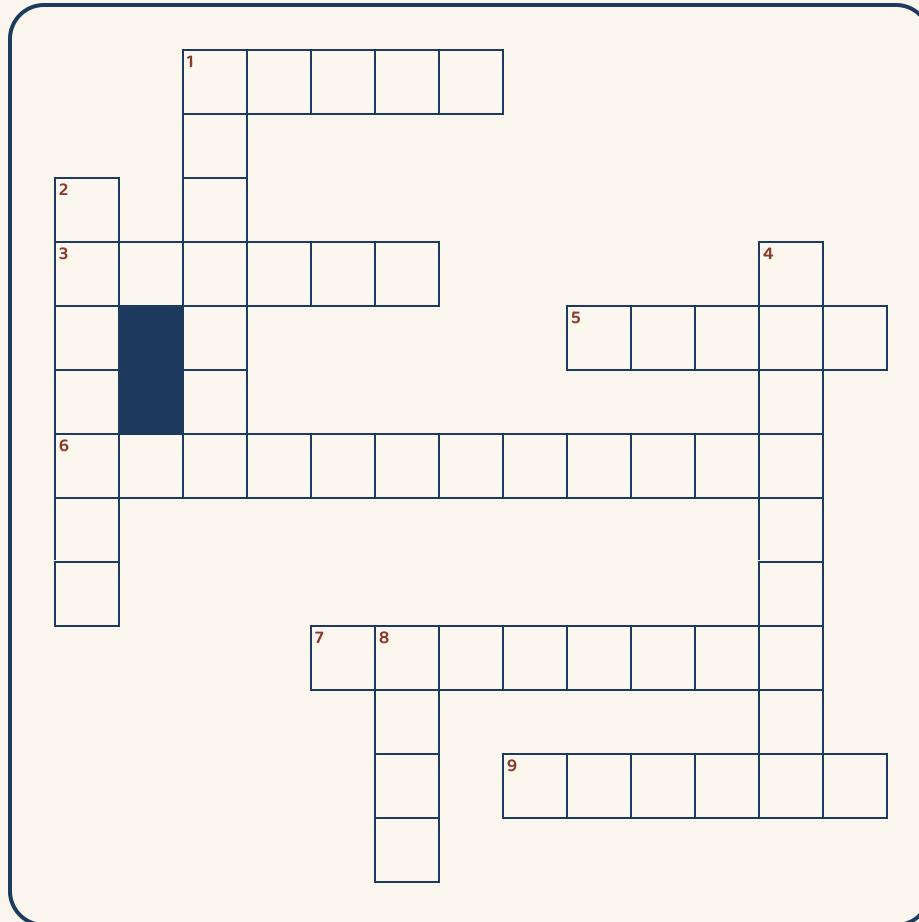
- 1 The highest law of the United States is the _____.
- 2 The introduction that explains the Constitution's purpose is the _____.
- 3 A major chapter explaining how government is organized is an _____.
- 4 A smaller part of an article is a _____.
- 5 A change or addition to the Constitution is an _____.
- 6 To officially approve something is to _____.
- 7 The first ten amendments are called the Bill of _____.
- 8 The Constitution has _____ articles.
- 9 John _____ said our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people.
- 10 Jesus said the wise man built his house on the _____.

THE CONSTITUTION • THREE PARTS

You finished Chapter Two! You now know the *why*, the *how*, and the *changes*.

Structure of the Constitution Crossword

Every answer comes from this chapter. Write one letter in each white square.



ACROSS

- 1 The Constitution has this many Articles.
- 3 To officially approve something.
- 5 John _____ said our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people.
- 6 The highest law of the United States.
- 7 The introduction that explains the Constitution's purpose.
- 9 The first ten amendments are called the Bill of _____.

DOWN

- 1 A smaller part of an article that explains specific responsibilities or rules.
- 2 A major chapter explaining how government is organized.
- 4 A change or addition to the Constitution.
- 8 Jesus said the wise man built his house on the _____.

Family Discussion

Talk these through together before you write. There is no hurry.

1 • Why do you think the Constitution begins with a Preamble instead of jumping straight to the rules?

.....

.....

2 • Which Article do you think is the most important, and why?

.....

.....

3 • Why should changing the Constitution be possible but difficult?

.....

.....

4 • What freedoms in the Bill of Rights are you most thankful for?

.....

.....

5 • If you were writing a “constitution” for your family, what three values would you include?

.....

.....

FOR THE PARENT OR TEACHER

Question five is the one that turns the chapter into something they own. Let them argue for their three values before you offer yours.

Make Your Own Family Constitution

A family activity. Another fun assignment is to make your own “Family Constitution.”

1

As a family, write a short preamble that begins, “We, the _____ Family...”

2

Write three simple family rules and then one amendment you could add later if your family grows or your needs change.



WHY IT MATTERS

This activity can help young people understand that, like the Constitution, good rules should have a purpose, provide order, and protect the well-being of everyone they serve.

★ NARRATION BREAK

How is the Constitution put together?

