

## Creators of the Constitution

After the Revolutionary War, the thirteen former colonies joined together and in November 1777 formed a new government that was bound by an agreement called the Articles of Confederation. The representatives who wrote the Articles did not give this centralized government much power; the new states wanted to retain as much independence as possible. Later government officials realized that this confederation did not have sufficient power to rule the country properly and convened the Annapolis Convention in 1786. Delegates in Annapolis decided that they needed to seriously address the flaws in the Articles of Confederation and planned to meet the following year, this time in Philadelphia, to fix the Articles.



Fifty-five delegates from all the states except Rhode Island met in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in May, 1787 to revise the Articles of Confederation and only eight of these delegates had participated in writing the Declaration of Independence. Rhode Island refused to send delegates. The delegates selected George Washington to preside over the meeting.

Even though the convention was called to revise the Articles of Confederation, various groups brought plans for a new government. The Virginia Plan was based upon ideas from James Madison and Madison is called the Father of the Constitution because of his contributions to the document. The Virginia plan called for two levels of Congress with the number of members per state based on state population. Charles Pinckney of South Carolina brought a plan that, even though it contained two levels of Congress, was still based on the idea of a confederation of states.

William Paterson of New Jersey introduced a plan that retained the current Congress and essentially was a revision of the Articles of Confederation. Alexander Hamilton described his plan for making the U.S. government like that of Great Britain. Under Hamilton's plan, the national government could override state laws.

The Constitution that was finally adopted was a compromise among the various plans. Roger Sherman of Connecticut is credited with what is called the Connecticut Compromise which stated the House of Representatives would be based on state population while each state would have two Senators.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Creators of the Constitution - Multiple Choice Questions

Circle the correct answer.

1. The first government that the American states formed was governed by
  - a. The Declaration of Independence
  - b. The Articles of Confederation
  - c. The U.S. Constitution
  - d. None of the above
  
2. The outcome of the Annapolis Convention was
  - a. The Articles of Incorporation
  - b. The Articles of Confederation
  - c. The Constitution
  - d. None of the above
  
3. Delegates from all the states attended the Philadelphia Convention except
  - a. Rhode Island
  - b. Virginia
  - c. New Jersey
  - d. Connecticut
  
4. The Father of the U.S. Constitution is
  - a. George Washington
  - b. James Madison
  - c. Alexander Hamilton
  - d. Charles Pinckney
  
5. Alexander Hamilton's plan called for making the U.S. government like that of
  - a. France
  - b. Spain
  - c. Great Britain
  - d. Mexico
  
6. An important compromise in writing the Constitution was the
  - a. Virginia Compromise
  - b. New Jersey Compromise
  - c. Rhode Island Compromise
  - d. Connecticut Compromise

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Creators of the Constitution - Short Answer Questions

1. Explain why the government under the Articles of Confederation did not have much power.
2. What was the outcome of the Annapolis Convention of 1786?
3. Do some research and list the men who signed the Declaration of Independence and attended the Philadelphia Convention.
4. George Washington presided over the Philadelphia Convention. Can you say he was President of the United States at that point in time? Explain why or why not.
5. Do some research and write a short report about the details of Madison's Virginia plan for governing the United States.
6. Alexander Hamilton's plan for the government of the United States was not discussed much at the Philadelphia convention. Why do you think Hamilton's plan did not get more attention?
7. The Connecticut Compromise ended the debate between large states and small states over how representatives in Congress would be allocated. Explain why the compromise was successful.

## Creators of the Constitution - Answer Key

### Multiple Choice

1. b.
2. d.
3. a.
4. b.
5. c.
6. d.

### Short Answer

1. The states had just fought the Revolutionary War to gain their freedom from Great Britain and they did not want to give up their freedom to a new government.
2. Delegates in Annapolis decided that they needed to seriously address the flaws in the Articles of Confederation and planned to meet the following year, this time in Philadelphia, to fix the Articles.
3. Delaware: George Read; Pennsylvania: George Clymer, Benjamin Franklin, Robert Morris, James Wilson; Virginia: George Washington, George Wythe; Connecticut: Roger Sherman
4. He was not president. The office of president was not created until the Constitution was written and ratified.
5. Individual response
6. Individual response
7. Roger Sherman of Connecticut is credited with what is called the Connecticut Compromise which stated the House of Representatives would be based on state population and each state would have two Senators. Large states were satisfied because they had more Representatives and small states were happy because all states had an equal number of Senators.

## Changes to the Constitution

The Constitution was written over two hundred years ago and continues to serve as the framework of the American government. The authors of the Constitution wrote a short document and left out many details on purpose. The Constitution leaves some important details, like how the federal court system is organized, to the government itself. Since many of the details of the government



are left out of the Constitution, the document can focus on the principles that guide the government. Also without these details, the Constitution did not need to be changed as the country grew.

However, the Constitution was not ratified by all thirteen original states until May 29, 1790, approximately three years after it was written. Leaders in the states were concerned that the new central government would take away some of the rights and freedoms that they had just fought to obtain through the Revolutionary War. James

Madison brought twelve amendments or changes to the Constitution that spelled out the rights of American citizens and stated certain things that the federal government was not allowed to do. Congress adopted the amendments and ten of these were ratified by the states by the end of 1791. These ten amendments were added to the Constitution and together are called the Bill of Rights.

Altogether there are twenty-seven amendments to the Constitution. Important amendments follow changes in social thinking over the centuries. For example, when the Constitution was written, only white men over the age of twenty-one were allowed to vote. With amendments to the Constitution, now all citizens over the age of eighteen, regardless of race or gender, are allowed to vote. Another amendment allows the federal government to collect income tax.

All changes to the Constitution are made through amendments that are placed at the end of the document. Nothing is ever deleted from the Constitution. The Eighteenth Amendment, called Prohibition, ratified in 1919 prohibits the manufacture or sale of alcoholic beverages. The Twenty-first Amendment, ratified in 1933, repeals the Eighteenth Amendment and both will remain part of the Constitution as long as it exists.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Changes to the Constitution - Multiple Choice Questions

Circle the correct answer.

1. The Constitution defines the structure of the American government
  - a. Leaving out many of the details
  - b. Completely specifying how everything works
  - c. Completely specifying the job of president
  - d. Completely specifying how the Supreme Court works
  
2. Some state leaders were reluctant to ratify the Constitution because they were concerned about the new federal government
  - a. Taking away the rights of citizens
  - b. Interfering too much with interstate commerce
  - c. Ignoring parts of the Constitution
  - d. Changing the Constitution
  
3. The first ten amendments to the Constitution are called
  - a. Prohibition
  - b. Articles of Rights
  - c. Citizens' Rights
  - d. The Bill of Rights
  
4. Federal income tax is authorized by
  - a. The original Constitution
  - b. The Bill of Rights
  - c. An amendment to the Constitution
  - d. None of the above
  
5. What is the legal voting age today for federal elections?
  - a. 18 years
  - b. 19 years
  - c. 20 years
  - d. 21 years
  
6. After they are ratified, Amendments to the Constitution
  - a. Are numbered beginning with one
  - b. Always stay in the Constitution
  - c. Show how the Constitution has changed over the years
  - d. All of the above

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Changes to the Constitution

### Short Answer Questions

1. Explain why the Constitution does not spell out the structure of the American government in great detail.
2. Explain what the Bill of Rights is and why it was important to the early history of the United States.
3. Do some research and write a short report about history of the Thirteenth Amendment, which abolished slavery.
4. Do some research and write a short report about the history of the Seventeenth Amendment, the election of Senators.
5. Do some research and write a short report about the history of the Nineteenth Amendment, which allowed women to vote.
6. Not all countries collect an income tax. If Americans wanted to get rid of the income tax, what would they need to do?
7. The Twenty-first Amendment repeals the Eighteenth Amendment. Both amendments will stay a part of the Constitution forever. Is this a good idea? Explain your answer.

## Changes to the Constitution

### Answer Key

#### Multiple Choice

1. a.
2. a.
3. d.
4. c.
5. a.
6. d.

#### Short Answer

1. Since many of the details of the government are left out of the Constitution, the document can focus on the principles that guide the government. Also without these details, the Constitution did not need to be changed as the country grew.
2. The Bill of Rights is the name given to the first ten amendments to the Constitution. Some leaders in the country did not favor a strong central government and the Bill of Rights clearly stated the rights of citizens and limited some of the powers of the central government so more people were in favor of the new government.
3. Individual response
4. Individual response
5. Individual response
6. The collection of income tax by the federal government is allowed by an amendment to the Constitution. Another amendment to the Constitution would be needed to repeal the income tax.
7. Individual response

## Separation of Power

Some countries, especially those in the less developed parts of the world, are still ruled by just one person, a dictator who seized power by military action. There aren't many monarchies left in the world, where the ruler is a king, queen or royal prince who inherits the leadership role because of family relationships. World history is filled with the accounts of kings, queens and dictators who abused their power and inflicted cruelty on ordinary people.



The authors of the United States Constitution, also called Framers of the Constitution, clearly wanted a government where every citizen could participate in the government by electing representatives who would control the government. While we look to the President of the United States to speak for the country and provide leadership, the Framers of the Constitution were careful to limit the powers of the president so that the president could never become a dictator, king or queen.

The Framers of the Constitution devised a government that has separation of power. The Constitution also contains checks and balances so no one person or group can take over the government or become so powerful that it dominates the other branches. Separation of power means that the responsibilities of government are divided among the three branches of the United States government: legislative, executive and judicial.

The legislative branch is the Congress. Congress has authority over the executive branch because Congress must approve the spending requests of the president and the Congress can impeach, or remove from office, the president. The Congress also has authority to define the jurisdiction of federal courts.

At the same time, the president has the power to veto, or stop, bills that the Congress has passed. However, Congress can override the veto by a two-thirds vote in the House of Representatives and the Senate.

The judicial branch, especially the Supreme Court, has the power to determine that a law passed by Congress or an executive order of the president is unconstitutional, that is, not allowed under the Constitution. Members of the Supreme Court are appointed by the president and approved by Congress.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Separation of Power - Multiple Choice Questions

Circle the correct answer.

1. The authors of the Constitution are also called
  - a. Farmers
  - b. Framers
  - c. Frontiersmen
  - d. Founders
  
2. The president of the United States is the same as a
  - a. Dictator
  - b. King
  - c. Queen
  - d. None of the above
  
3. Which branch of the U.S. government includes the Supreme Court?
  - a. Executive
  - b. Legislative
  - c. Judicial
  - d. None of the above
  
4. Congress controls the power of the presidency by
  - a. Having the power to impeach the president
  - b. Approving presidential spending
  - c. Both a. and b. above
  - d. None of the above
  
5. The president has the power to stop a law enacted by Congress through
  - a. Debates
  - b. Veto power
  - c. The Supreme Court
  - d. All of the above
  
6. Members of the Supreme Court are appointed by
  - a. The President
  - b. The House of Representatives
  - c. The Senate
  - d. The other members of the Supreme Court

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Separation of Power - Short Answer Questions

1. Explain how a king or queen is chosen and how long they rule.
2. A few times in the history of the United States the son or grandson of a previous president has been elected president. Do you think this should be allowed or forbidden because it is too much like having a royal family?
3. What does separation of power mean with respect to the U.S. Constitution?
4. Explain why the Constitution has checks and balances built into the structure of government.
5. If a president vetoes a bill that the Congress passed, does the Congress have any other course of action?
6. What does unconstitutional mean and who decides if something is unconstitutional?
7. Do some research and write a report about one of these famous Supreme Court justices: John Marshall, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sandra Day O'Connor or Thurgood Marshall.

## Separation of Power - Answer Key

### Multiple Choice

1. b.
2. d.
3. c.
4. c.
5. b.
6. a.

### Short Answer

1. A king or queen rules for life. Their successor is usually one of their children or some other relative, a member of the royal family.
2. Individual response
3. Separation of power means that the responsibilities of government are divided among the three branches of the United States government: legislative, executive and judicial.
4. The Constitution also contains checks and balances so no one person or group can take over the government or become so powerful that it dominates the other branches.
5. Congress can override the president's veto by a two-thirds vote in the House of Representatives and the Senate.
6. The judicial branch, especially the Supreme Court, has the power to determine that a law passed by Congress or an executive order of the president is unconstitutional, that is, not allowed under the Constitution.
7. Individual response

# Checks and Balances

The writers of the Constitution wanted to ensure that no one branch of the government would have too much power. To prevent this, they build in ways for each branch to have some control over the other two branches of the government. These controls are the checks and balances.



Explain what checks and balances each branch has on the other two branches of the United States government.

## Legislative Branch

Checks on the Executive Branch

Checks on the Judicial Branch

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## Executive Branch

Checks on the Legislative Branch

Checks on the Judicial Branch

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## Judicial Branch

Checks on the Legislative Branch

Checks on the Executive Branch

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# Checks and Balances Answers

## Legislative Branch

Checks on the Executive Branch

Override vetos

Confirm nominates

Can impeach President

Power to collect taxes

Checks on the Judicial Branch

Can impeach judges

Can initiate amendments

## Executive Branch

Checks on the Legislative Branch

Veto bills

Vice President is President of the Senate

Checks on the Judicial Branch

Nominates Supreme Court justices

Has power to pardon

## Judicial Branch

Checks on the Legislative Branch

Declare laws unconstitutional  
unconstitutional

Checks on the Executive Branch

Declare Presidential orders