OVERVIEW
In this lesson, students are introduced to the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution. They examine the significance, wording and the fundamental purposes that establish the framework for the Constitution. Students discuss, who are the people in We the People, in the context of our nation’s past as well as the present and discuss what those words mean to them as young citizens of the United States. Students will analyze documents and preview a short video clip from We the People, Three Words that Changed the World. Compelling questions of the lesson center on the following:

- What does We the People mean?
- How was the phrase different in 1790’s as compared today?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
The student will understand the significance of the three words We the People, and how the words have changed in meaning over time. Students will examine historical documents, discuss the meaning through the Founder’s eyes and today, and create a visual representation of what the phrase means to them.

GUIDING QUESTIONS
- What do you think of when you read or hear the phrase We the People?
- What do you think the Founding Fathers meant when they wrote those three words and what do you think is the relevance of the phrase today?
- What significance is there to the three words We the People?
- Why is it important to understand the phrase?

INTRODUCTION
HISTORICAL & CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

TEACHERS NOTE
Many students may not have formally studied the history of early America prior to the writing of the Constitution. This lesson is designed to introduce students to civic education through the words, We the People and to help students to understand the language of our founding documents. Through the lesson and the video clip from, We the People, students will enhance their understanding of what these three words mean historically. Students will begin to make a personal connection to our nation’s history and its documents.

After years of struggle for independence from Great Britain, the men who would later be known as the Founding Fathers gathered in Philadelphia in 1787 to form a government that would not only strengthen the new nation but unify it. The Founding Fathers realized that the country needed a stronger government than the one that had been established following the Revolutionary War. They carefully considered what that government should stand before crafting the Constitution of the United States. The Constitution, the central document of our democracy, along with the Bill of Rights has guided our nation’s government and people ever since.

ESTIMATED CLASS TIME
One to two, 45 minute class periods

MATERIALS
- Video Clip: We the People Section 0-16
- Copies of the Preamble to the United States Constitution
- Highlighters
- Pens
- Documents and copies of attached materials

VOCABULARY & KEY CONCEPTS
- United States Constitution
- Preamble
- Popular sovereignty
- Republic
- Justice
- Insure domestic tranquility
- Defense
- Promote
- General
- Welfare
- Liberty
- Posterity
- Ordain

COMMON CORE STANDARDS
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.
INTRODUCING THE DOCUMENT

• INTRODUCE students to the lesson by providing them with copies of the historical background reading, a copy of the Preamble and the guiding questions to this lesson.
• Have students FOLLOW along as you read the Preamble out loud.
• DISCUSS how the preamble forms the six goals of government, and sets the purpose of our government. The six goals include:

  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

• Have students circle words they do not understand, DEFINE words that students are not familiar with and have a brief discussion about the meaning of each phrase.

INTRODUCTION DISCUSSION

• DISCUSS the following with the class before previewing the video clip. This will activate their background knowledge of the subject before it is studied.
• Ask students to focus on the words We the People.
  • In the context of 1787, who were “the people” in We the People?
  • Who do you think the Founders were describing in the document when they used that phrase?
  • How do you know?
  • What evidence can be used to back up your claim?
  • Has the definition of We the People changed over the last 200 years?
  • Why or why not?

• VIEW We the People Film Excerpt Scene 0-16
• As students watch the video clip have them record ideas of how to define We the People, or its significance over time.
• After viewing the video clip have students partner up to DISCUSS the question “Who are we in We the People?” DEBRIEF clip.
• Handout document excerpt activity. Students will ANALYZE each document for an understanding of how the Founders interpreted We the People and how it has changed over time. CITE evidence to support your answer in the graphic organizer provided.
• After students have analyzed the documents go back to the guiding questions:
  • What do you think of when you read or hear the phrase We the People?
  • What do you think the Founding Fathers meant when they wrote those three words and what do you think is the relevance of the phrase today?
  • What significance is there to the three words We the People?
  • Why is it important to understand the phrase?
  • How did your view expand from our original conversation?

DIVERSIFICATION

Simplified: Teacher can choose 1-2 documents to be presented rather than the whole collection to analyze.

ASSESSMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Students can write an essay comparing and contrasting the Founder’s impression of the phrase We the People and how it has changed over time.

Cite textual evidence from sources to defend your answer. What does the phrase mean for them as individuals in democratic society?

Students can create a visual representation of We the People, and what it represents in America.

FURTHER RESEARCH

• How is each goal of government listed in the Preamble interpreted today by each political party?
• How is the preamble an example of popular sovereignty?
• How is power “loaned” from the people to elected representatives?
• What challenges do we still face as a nation concerning the phrase We the People?
• Where is power derived according to the US Constitution? List sources to back up your claims.
• How does the Constitution’s philosophy of We the People compare with governing structures in other countries of the world? Compare and contrast the United States with another country of your choice.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

Document resources (see below)

TAGS

Preamble, US Constitution
DOCUMENT A
Letter to John Adams from Abigail Adams

Braintree March 31 1776

“… I long to hear that you have declared an independancy — and by the way in the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands. Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the Lades we are determined to foment a Rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation.

That your Sex are Naturally Tyrannical is a Truth so thoroughly established as to admit of no dispute, but such of you as wish to be happy willingly give up the harsh title of Master for the more tender and endearing one of Friend. Why then, not put it out of the power of the vicious and the Lawless to use us with cruelty and indignity with impunity. Men of Sense in all Ages abhor those customs which treat us only as the vassals of your Sex. Regard us then as Beings placed by providence under your protection and in imitation of the Supreme Being make use of that power only for our happiness.”
Three-Fifths Compromise: Article 1, Sec 2 US Constitution

“Representatives and direct Taxes shall be apportioned among the several States which may be included within this Union, according to their respective Numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole Number of free Persons, including those bound to Service for a Term of Years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other Persons.”
DOCUMENT C
Letter to George Mason Jr.

From George Mason
Philadelphia
June 01, 1787

“The idea I formerly mentioned to you, before the Convention met, of a great national council, consisting of two branches of the legislature, a judiciary and an executive, upon the principle of fair representation in the legislature, with powers adapted to the great objects of the Union, and consequently a control in these instances, on the State legislatures, is still the prevalent one. Virginia has had the honor of presenting the outlines of the plan, upon which the convention is proceeding; but so slowly that it is impossible to judge when the business will be finished, most probably not before August. Festina lente may very well be called our motto. When I first came here, judging from casual conversations with gentlemen from the different States, I was very apprehensive that soured and disgusted with the unexpected evils we had experiences raised to a very anxious degree.

May God grant, we may be able to gratify them, by establishing a wise and just government. For my own part, I never before felt myself in such a situation; and declare I would not, upon pecuniary motives, serve in this convention for a thousand pounds per day. The revolt from Great Britain and the formations of our new governments at that time, were nothing compared to the great business now before us; there was then a certain degree of enthusiasm, which inspired and supported the mind; but to view, through the calm, sedate medium of reason the influence which the establishment now proposed may have upon the happiness or misery of millions yet unborn, is an object of such magnitude, as absorbs, and in a manner suspends the operations of the human understanding.

All communications of the proceedings are forbidden during the sitting of the Convention; this I think was a necessary precaution to prevent misrepresentations or mistakes; there being a material difference between the appearance of a subject in its first crude and undigested shape, and after it shall have been properly matured and arranged.
Although individuals have been identified as white or black since the 1790 census, American Indians are first enumerated in the 1870 census. (However, those in the Indian Territory or on reservations are not included in the official U.S. population count used for congressional apportionment until 1890.) The Chinese population is also counted for the first time in the 1870 census.

**DOCUMENT E**

19th Amendment

**AMENDMENT XIX**


The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.

Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.
26th Amendment
AMENDMENT XXVI


NOTE: Amendment 14, section 2, of the Constitution was modified by section 1 of the 26th amendment.

SECTION 1.

The right of citizens of the United States, who are eighteen years of age or older, to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of age.

SECTION 2.

The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.
WE the People of the States of New-Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations, Connecticut, New-York, New-Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North-Carolina, South-Carolina, and Georgia, do ordain, declare and establish the following Constitution for the Government of Ourselves and our Posterity.

ARTICLE I.

The title of this Government shall be, “The United States of America.”

II.
The Government shall consist of supreme legislative, executive and judicial powers.

III.
The legislative power shall be vested in a Congress, to consist of two separate and distinct bodies of men, a House of Representatives, and a Senate; each of which shall, in all cases, have a negative on the other. The Legislature shall meet on the first Monday in December in every year.

IV.

Sect. 1. The Members of the House of Representatives shall be chosen every second year, by the people of the several States comprehended within this Union. The qualifications of the electors shall be the same, from time to time, as those of the electors in the several States, of the most numerous branch of their own legislature.

Sect. 2. Every Member of the House of Representatives shall be of the age of twenty-five years at least; shall have been a citizen of the United States for at least three years before his election; and shall be, at the time of his election, a resident of the State in which he shall be chosen.

Sect. 3. The House of Representatives shall, at its first formation, and until the number of citizens and inhabitants shall be taken in the manner herein after described, consist of sixty-five Members, of whom three shall be chosen in New-Hampshire, eight in Massachusetts, one in Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations, five in Connecticut, six in New-York, four in New-Jersey, eight in Pennsylvania, one in Delaware, six in Maryland, ten in Virginia, five in North-Carolina, five in South-Carolina, and three in Georgia.

Sect. 4. As the proportions of numbers in the different States will alter from time to time; as some of the States may hereafter be divided; as others may be enlarged by addition of territory; as two or more States may be united; as new States will be erected within the limits of the United States; the Legislature shall, in each of these cases, regulate the number of representatives by the number of inhabitants, according to the proportions herein after made. In one of every forty thousand inhabitants in the State of New-Hampshire, one of every eighty thousand inhabitants in the State of New-York, one of every one hundred thousand inhabitants in the State of New-Jersey, one of every one hundred and twenty thousand inhabitants in the State of Pennsylvania, one of every one hundred and forty thousand inhabitants in the State of Delaware, one of every one hundred and sixty thousand inhabitants in the State of Maryland, one of every one hundred and eighty thousand inhabitants in the State of Virginia, one of every one hundred and ninety thousand inhabitants in the State of North-Carolina, one of every one hundred and thirty thousand inhabitants in the State of South-Carolina, and one of every one hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants in the State of Georgia.

Sect. 5. All bills for raising or appropriating money, and for fixing the salaries of the officers of government, shall originate in the House of Representatives, and shall not be altered or amended by the Senate. No money shall be drawn from the public Treasury, but in pursuance of appropriations that shall originate in the House of Representatives.

Sect. 6. The House of Representatives shall have the sole power of impeachment. It shall choose its Speaker and other officers.

Sect. 7. Vacancies in the House of Representatives shall be supplied by writs of election from the executive authority of the State, in the representation from which they shall happen.

Original draft of the U.S. Constitution Preamble page 1 only
http://www.gilderlehrman.org/sites/default/files/content-images/00819.01.jpg
### Document Graphic Organizer: The Preamble of the U.S. Constitution - Who are “We”?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document</th>
<th>Background: When was it written? Who is the author? What is the purpose of the letter?</th>
<th>What evidence or quotes in the letter help define who “we” are in “We the People?”</th>
<th>Summarize findings in your own words. What knowledge did you gain from the quotes you listed above in the document concerning the definition of “We the People?”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DOCUMENT A</td>
<td>Abigail Adams</td>
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<tr>
<td>DOCUMENT B</td>
<td>Three-Fifths Compromise</td>
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<tr>
<td>DOCUMENT C</td>
<td>George Mason</td>
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<tr>
<td>DOCUMENT D</td>
<td>Federal Census 1790</td>
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<td>DOCUMENT E</td>
<td>19th Amendment</td>
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<td>DOCUMENT F</td>
<td>26th Amendment</td>
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<tr>
<td>DOCUMENT G</td>
<td>Original Draft of the U.S. Constitution Preamble only</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Essay:** Write an essay comparing and contrasting the founder’s impression of the phrase “We the People” in the 1790’s and how it has changed over time. Cite textual evidence from sources listed above to defend your answer.

(Expansion: **Furthermore, analyze what the phrase means to you as an individual in a democratic society.**
THE PREAMBLE TO THE U.S. CONSTITUTION “WHO ARE WE?”

Guiding Questions:

• What do you think of when you read or hear the phrase “We The People?”

• What do you think the Founding Fathers meant when they wrote those three words and what do you think is the relevance of the phrase today?

• What significance is there to the three words WE THE PEOPLE? Why is it important to understand the phrase and its significance?

Historical Background:

After years of struggle for independence from Great Britain, the men who would later be known as the Founding fathers gathered in Philadelphia in 1787 to form a government that would not only strengthen the new nation, but unify it. The Founding fathers realized that the country needed a stronger government than the one that had been established following the Revolutionary War. They carefully considered what that government should stand before crafting the Constitution of the United States. The Constitution, the central document of our democracy, along with the Bill of Rights has guided our nation’s government and people ever since.
Preamble to the United States Constitution

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.