

Celebrate Constitution Day September 17

Why?

Congress has declared Sept. 17 United States Constitution Day in celebration of the original ratification, Sept. 17, 1787. The purpose of a designated day is to foster in the American people a deeper reverence for and a better understanding of the U.S. Constitution. The Constitution was written to be flexible in its application but staunch in the ideology, making the document a masterpiece of thought and language, and worthy of a special place in the classroom curriculum.

How?

Congress has suggested public readings and/or class discussions of the world's oldest codified constitution. The expectation of Senate Bill 2808 is that teachers and students throughout the United States in classrooms kindergarten through higher education will celebrate the American Constitution all year but especially on Sept. 17. (The federal Department of Education states that "when Sept. 17 falls on a Saturday (2005), Sunday (2006), or holiday, Constitution Day shall be held during the preceding or following week.") For these reasons the Newsweek Education Program has teamed with National History Day and Oxford University Press to bring teachers a variety of classroom activities as well as our favorite resources to teach about the Constitution.

Ten Ways to Celebrate the United States Constitution in the Classroom

1. Read the Constitution with your students at <http://www.house.gov/Constitution/Constitution.html>. The language in the Constitution is complex. Students need time to process the information. Divide the Constitution into sections that can be read aloud, discussed and connected to the present day. Take 10 minutes each morning to read a section of the Constitution and discuss the meaning as a class.
2. Ask students to write about their weekend and then ask them, "How might your weekend have been different without the First Amendment?" or "Was freedom of expression part of your weekend? If so, how?"
3. Assign a scavenger hunt through this week's issue of Newsweek or a local newspaper to find articles that have a Constitutional connection. Ask students to bring their articles to class and explain the connection.
4. Design a survey in collaboration with students based on the Bill of Rights to administer to other students at the school. The survey will help determine the level of knowledge of the U.S. Constitution and be used to propose a plan to help increase awareness of the Constitution and the civil protection it provides for all citizens.
5. Research the framers of the Constitution. Have pairs of students create a resume and a letter of interest for one of the attendees of the Constitutional Convention. Students will

write as if the framer was submitting an application to attend the Constitutional Convention. Pay special attention to names that appear in **boldface** because they opposed the ratification of the Constitution.

Connecticut

William. Samuel
Johnson
Roger Sherman
Oliver Ellsworth

Delaware

George Read
Gunning Bedford, Jr.
John Dickinson
Richard Bassett
Jacob Broom

Georgia

William Few
Abraham Baldwin
William Houston
William L. Pierce

Maryland

James McHenry
Daniel of St. Thomas
Jenifer
Daniel Carroll
Luther Martin
John F. Mercer

Massachusetts

Nathaniel Gorham
Rufus King

Elbridge Gerry
Caleb Strong

New Hampshire

John Langdon
Nicholas Gilman

New Jersey

William Livingston
David Brearly
William Paterson
Jonathan Dayton
William C. Houston

New York

Alexander Hamilton
John Lansing, Jr.
Robert Yates

North Carolina

William. Blount
Richard. Dobbs Spaight
Hugh Williamson
William R. Davie
Alexander Martin

Pennsylvania

Benjamin Franklin
Thomas Mifflin
Robert Morris

George Clymer
Thomas Fitzsimons
Jared Ingersoll
James Wilson
Gouverneur Morris

South Carolina

John Rutledge
Charles Cotesworth
Pinckney
Charles Pinckney
Pierce Butler

Rhode Island

Rhode Island did not
send any delegates to the
Constitutional
Convention.

Virginia

John Blair
James Madison Jr.
George Washington
George Mason
James McClurg
Edmund J. Randolph
George Wythe

6. Organize the class into small groups, asking student to create a Utopian Society and then write a Constitution that guides that society, taking lessons learned from the United States Constitution. Alternatively, have students compare and contrast the school rules to the Constitution.

7. Invite a public officeholder in your state to explain the election process from the point a candidate decides to run until the person is elected. What are the rules and restriction that all candidates must adhere to?

8. Define the following words and then ask students to create a board game including the words, their definitions, and the applications of the terms.

reapportionment	duties
redistricting	imposts
gerrymandering	excises
impeachment	habeas corpus
quorum	bill of attainder
filibuster	ex-post-facto laws
cloture	direct taxes
veto	executive privilege
pocket veto	judicial review
line-item veto	judicial restraint
legislative veto	judicial activism
enumerated powers	strict construction
implied powers	loose construction
inherent powers	

9. Investigate the following famous court cases and the Constitution's impact on each. The investigations can be done individually or in small groups. Students need to be ready to report back to the class with a summary of the case, its impact on the nation, and the Constitution's role in the case's outcome.

- Brown v. Board of Education (1954)
- Marbury v. Madison (1803)
- McCulloch v. Maryland (1819)
- Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)
- Dred Scott v. Sanford (1857)
- Miranda v. Arizona (1966)
- Gideon v. Wainwright (1969)
- Roe v. Wade (1973)
- Tinker v. Des Moines School District (1969)
- Gibbons v. Ogden (1824)
- Schenck v. United States (1919)
- United States v. Nixon (1974)
- Bakke v. Board of the Regents of California (1978)

10. Explore and report on the Supreme Court activities by going to www.supremecourtus.gov and reading the latest "slip opinions" or the oral argument transcripts of cases brought before the Court.

Favorite Resources for Teaching the Constitution

- The first book we would like to recommend is **The Words We Live By** (Hyperion) written by *Dr. Linda Monk*. Dr. Monk, a Constitutional scholar, has done an outstanding job of making the Constitution accessible for fifth-grade students through adults. The format of the book supports the readers as the Constitution is examined paragraph by paragraph and translated into concise language. Following the translations are examples of seminal court cases that rest on the interpretation of the Constitution that further illustrate the meaning.
- Oxford University Press also has published a “hip pocket” booklet, **The United States Constitution: What it Says, What it Means**. Classroom sets can be ordered with a bulk discount by contacting David Bowers at fax 212-726-6448.
- Another book that every school library should own is **A Kid’s Guide to America’s Bill of Rights** (Avon Books) by *Kathleen Krull*. Krull describes the Bill of Rights as 462 words that help you make sense out of your everyday life. The writing is engaging and teenagers will identify with the Bill of Rights as topics such as curfews and censorship are presented. Her book also appeals to the middle-school audience with interesting trivia.
- *Patricia McKissack* and *Arlene Zarembka* have collected civil rights cases that both validate and challenge the Supreme Court’s rulings in **To Establish Justice** (*Knopf*). This book will provide a different perspective and supplement any traditional American history book.
- **A History of Us: From Colonies to Country, Book 3** (*Oxford University Press*), by *Joy Hakim*, tells how the people in 13 small colonies beat a great and very powerful nation, became free, and went on to write some astounding words that inspired the whole world.
- **The Bill of Rights: A History of Documents** (*Oxford University Press*) by *John J. Patrick*, depicts the fight to defend civil liberties and examines through history the triumphs of the Bill of Rights.

Web Resources

- www.firstamendmentschools.org

The First Amendment Schools project’s Web site for educators, presented by the First Amendment Center.

- <http://www.teachfirstamendment.org/>

A teaching resource presented by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

- www.constitutionday.us

The National Constitution Center’s official Constitution Day Web site.

- www.nara.gov

The official site of the National Archives and Records Administration, featuring historic primary-source documents.

- www.nhd.org

The Web site of National History Day.

- www.newsweekeducation.com

The home page of the Newsweek Education Program.

- <http://www.oup.com/us/companion.websites/umbrella/k12/?view=usa>

Oxford University Press Web site for K-12 Resources.

- www.gilderlehrman.org/teachers/module2/index.html

A module on the Constitution for teachers and students, prepared by the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History.

- justicel.bootnetworks.com/ConstitutionDay/index.asp

Online and satellite broadcast Sept. 16, 2005 of “Justice Talking: Free Speech in the Digital Age” (1:30 p.m. EDT) and “Conversations with Supreme Court Justices” (noon and 3 p.m. EDT).

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About National History Day

National History Day (NHD) is not just one day, but a nationally acclaimed history education program that is promoting the study of history among the nation’s students and teachers. NHD engages students in grades 6-12 in the process of discovery and interpretation of historical topics through a national competition and provides teachers with classroom ready models to meet standards and use primary sources. National History Day received the National Endowment for the Humanities Charles Frankel Prize for public programming. The theme for National History Day 2006 is Taking a Stand in History. Students start their projects in the fall; to find out more, visit www.nhd.org.

About the Newsweek Education Program

The Newsweek Education Program provides educators with discounted classroom subscriptions to Newsweek magazine — a real-world text that encourages active learning — along with free weekly lesson plans, curriculum guides and teaching resources to make planning easier. For more information on the Newsweek Education Program, write P.O. Box 919, Mountain Lakes, NJ 07046-0919, call (800) 526-2595, e-mail classroom.service@newsweek.com or visit www.newsweekeducation.com.

About Oxford University Press

As the world's oldest university press, Oxford remains committed to providing students with the highest quality historical scholarship. It is our goal to equip all students with the

analytical and literary skills that will enable them to succeed in their continuing education and future careers and ultimately to become the informed and involved citizens that a strong democracy requires.