

THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION

OBJECTIVES:

1. Students will identify a prominent person who influenced the founding of America and one thing they did.
2. Students will recall at least two important facts about the Constitutional Convention.

MATERIALS:

- Picture of Independence Hall,
- umbrella,
- candle holder,
- various portraits of founding fathers,
- hammer,
- calendar, and
- Constitution

ACTIVITY SEQUENCE

INTRODUCTION: Choose a prominent person in the founding of America and show their portrait. Share interesting facts and stories about them. Ask the students to guess who it is. Call on a few students, repeat their guess and try to link it to the character. Give clues as needed.

- OR -

Have someone dress up as a founding era character; George Washington, James Madison, Abigail Adams, etc. The character will be in costume and speak in 1st person by talking about themselves and sharing interesting facts and stories about his/her life. The following story is for Abigail Adams:

I was born in 1744 in Massachusetts. That means I was born 279 (recalculate as needed) years ago. I lived at the same time as George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. In fact, my husband and Thomas Jefferson were good friends for many years. When I was a child, I lived on a farm in a small town. My grandparents lived close by, and I loved spending time with them. They had a large room full of books. My parents also had a lot of books, but I liked reading my grandparents' books better. I would sit for hours and read and read.

I used to be sick a lot, and back then we didn't have the medicine and fancy hospitals that you have today. My grandma would sit by my side and read to me for hours. I remember thinking that when I grew up, I wanted to be just like her.

My mom wouldn't let me go to school because I was sick so much of the time. I thought that was unfair, because my sisters got to go to school, and I didn't. Sometimes I would get jealous of my sisters. My dad taught me to read and write and I was grateful to him for that.

I continued to love reading books and poetry throughout my life. I was 15 when I met John Adams, who I would marry a few years later. After we got married, I kept very busy while my husband tended the farm and studied law. I spent my days sewing clothes, baking, feeding my ducks and chickens, and making butter. Shortly after our marriage I gave birth to a girl that we named Abigail. We nicknamed her Nabby. Two years later I had a second baby boy named John Quincy. I later had another girl, and two more boys, Charlie and Tommy.

My husband, John, was a lawyer and was away from home a lot. We didn't have cell phones, computers or even e-mail. How do you think we communicated? We wrote letters, and I wrote thousands and thousands of them throughout my life. My husband was often away making our country a better place to live. He helped to establish and organize our country. Sometimes it was scary having my husband so far away from home. One night I could hear cannons blasting right by our home. While my husband was away, I was in charge of the farm: feeding and taking care of the animals, paying the bills, raising and teaching our children and often feeding and housing soldiers.

Later my husband became the 2nd President of the United States and my son John Quincy Adams became the 6th President of our Country. The White House wasn't built when George Washington was president, so my husband and I were the first ones to live in the White House. My husband and I sacrificed a lot for our Country and for the freedoms that we all have and enjoy today."

PROCEDURES: (show objects at appropriate time)

- a) Ask: "What document explains the rules for the president of the United States?" (Show a picture of the United States Constitution)
Ask: "Where are some places we have rules?" (Home, school, playground etc.)
Ask: "Why do we have rules in the classroom?" (Keep people safe, learn better, protect people's stuff, etc.)

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Pretend tomorrow your teacher walked in the classroom and said, 'Boys and girls today we will have no rules.' What do you think would happen? How would your classroom be? (Kids would get hurt, couldn't learn, there would be confusion everywhere, kids' stuff would get stolen....)

- b) I am going to tell you a true story about rules and laws. I brought my basket to help me tell the story, so make sure you are watching to see what I pull out of it. Almost 250 years ago we didn't have rules for our Country. We weren't part of Britain anymore because we had declared our independence. The independent states worked together to create new rules that they called *The Articles of Confederation*. These rules were not very good, and the states ended up fighting a lot. Finally, they decided to meet together again and make better rules.
- c) (OBJECT: picture of Independence Hall) A few knowledgeable men decided to have a meeting and make some rules and laws for our Country. They met in Philadelphia (show on map) in a building called Independence Hall. You can visit it today – it looks about the same as it did 250 years ago.
- d) (OBJECT: umbrella) When most of the men arrived in Philadelphia it was a rainy day, the streets were muddy. When George Washington came to the meeting, people stood on the streets and cheered and clapped. Many of the men traveled far from home, so they stayed in hotels while they were in Philadelphia.
- e) (OBJECT: candle holder) The room they met in was called the Assembly Room. They sat around rectangle tables covered with green tablecloths. On each table were candles and quill pens.
- f) (OBJECT: show portraits) There were usually between 30 to 40 men there throughout the convention. Men like George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and James Madison. George Washington was asked to be president of the convention and he sat in the front of the room.
- g) As the men talked about the rules and laws for our Country, do you think they agreed on everything? No, they disagreed about many things. They talked to each other and each explained their point of view. They had to work out their differences just like we do sometimes.
- h) (OBJECT: hammer) During the meeting they agreed to keep everything they talked about in confidence because they didn't want rumors and gossip spreading until they all agreed on the new rules. They even put boards over the window so people couldn't see into the room. There weren't any fans or air conditioning; you can imagine how hot and stuffy it must have been.
- i) (OBJECT: calendar) The meeting lasted much longer than they thought it would. It lasted 4 months! Now, we call that special meeting the Constitution Convention.
- j) George Washington, Benjamin Franklin and the other men had a huge job, they wrote the rules and laws that tell how our government is to work. (show the Constitution). After they were done writing the Constitution most of the men signed it (point out familiar signatures. For example, Washington's signature).
- k) The Constitution is the rules and laws for our government. (explain "government") For example, one rule that is in the Constitution is that if you want to run for president you have to be at least 35 years old. "Why do you think that rule is in the Constitution?"
- l) Ask: "Can the Constitution be changed?" Yes, the Constitution can be changed through an amendment. For example, shortly after the Constitution was established the states added 10 amendments.
Ask: "What are the first 10 amendments called?" (The Bill of Rights)
Ask: "What are some of the Rights that are listed in The Bill of Rights?" (Freedom of speech, right to bear arms, etc.)
Without the Constitution, there would be confusion, just like a classroom with no rules or the streets with no laws.
- m) Tell where the original copy of the Constitution is located and explain the display case.

ASSESSMENT

Use follow up questions to see what was learned.

- What is one thing you learned today about Abigail Adams or George Washington?
- What was the purpose of the Constitutional Convention?
- Where did the Constitutional Convention take place?