

The Constitution

TOPIC SUMMARY

When the United States became an independent nation, its colonial government evolved into a federal, or national, government and individual state governments. In 1777, the Second Continental Congress approved the nation's first Constitution. This Constitution, known as the Articles of Confederation, was weak and did not allow the federal government to collect taxes. In 1787, leaders held another Constitutional Convention in an attempt to strengthen the federal government and replace the Articles. Two opposing plans—one favoring the large states and one favoring the small ones—were considered and debated. An agreement was reached with the help of a series of compromises. The Great Compromise determined that two houses would make up Congress. The Three-Fifths Compromise counted every five enslaved people as three free persons, reducing the number of representatives that would be sent from the South. The new Constitution outlined many key principles of U.S. government, including popular sovereignty, rule of law, separation of powers, and checks and balances.

FOLDABLES[™]
Study Organizer

Sequencing Information Study Foldable *This Foldable will help students analyze information about the Constitution.*

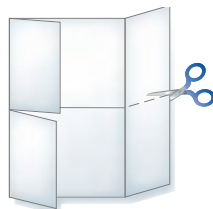
Step 1 Mark the midpoint of a sheet of paper. Then fold in the outside edges to touch the midpoint.



Step 2 Fold paper in half from top to bottom.



Step 3 Open and cut along the inside fold lines to form four tabs. Label your Foldable as shown.



Reading and Writing
Note details about the Constitution, showing each major idea of the document under the tabs.



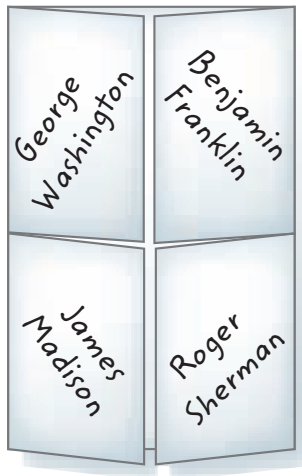
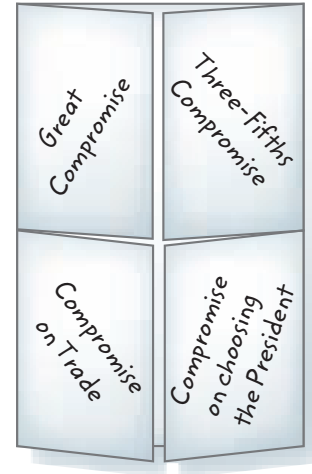
TOPIC ACTIVITY IDEAS

Organizing

Have students use the Sequencing Information Study Guide to organize facts about the Constitution. Have them label the tabs *Popular Sovereignty*, *rule of law*, *Separation of Powers*, and *Federalism*. Then have them write details about each as they study their textbook, do independent research, or take notes in class. Ask students to consider the implications of these principles and decide what life might be like without them. You may wish to have students describe an action that could or could not take place in the absence of one of these protections.

ASSESSING

Have students use the Sequencing Information Study Foldable to review the strengths and weaknesses of the compromises of the Constitutional Convention. Students should label tabs as shown. Beneath each tab, students should record details related to each compromise. Ask students to note the strong points and the weak points of each compromise.



DRAMATIZING

Ask students to organize information about some of the important representatives at the Constitutional Convention. Tell students to list details in the Foldable about the contributions of notable leaders such as George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, James Madison, and Roger Sherman. Challenge students to use reference materials to learn more about the contributions that these individuals made to the Constitutional Convention or to other events that were important to the founding of our nation's government. Ask volunteers to role-play one of the selected events.

Student Study Tip

Remind students that the Constitution has guided our country for more than 200 years. Encourage students to examine the organization of this document to better understand its meaning. Point out the Preamble, Articles, and Amendments, and help students understand the purpose of each of these sections.