

2.2 AMENDING THE CONSTITUTION

Essential Question(s): What is an amendment? How does the Constitution affect people other than the Founding Fathers and who they represented at the time? Should the Constitution be easier to amend?

Overview

Imagine! The United States of America is still referencing the same Constitution that was written on September 17, 1787. What did the Constitution do for people who were not wealthy, white and male? What freedoms were left out from the original document? The Founding Fathers “recognized that, for a government to function well, the ground rules should be stable. But they also understood that the people will need to change those ground rules as new challenges and problems surface with the passage of time” (Posner, 2014). While there haven't been any amendments that have passed since 1992, many challenges and problems have come up since 1787. Understanding the amendment process is vital to understanding not only how a constitutional democracy works, but also aids in being an active community member.

Snapshot

What Students Will Learn:

In this lesson, students will learn about how the Constitution affected persons who were not of the same demographics as the Founding Fathers. They will also discuss the ease and difficulty of making amendments to the Constitution.

Standard(s):

D2.Civ.3.9-12

D2.Civ.4.9-12

Time: 50 minutes



Key Vocabulary

amend
amendment
artisans
Bill of Rights
compromise
constitution
craftsmen

Objectives

- Learn the process of amending the Constitution.
- Understand the reactions of ordinary Americans to the Constitution.
- Discuss justifications for how easy or difficult it is to make amendments to the Constitution.

Differentiation

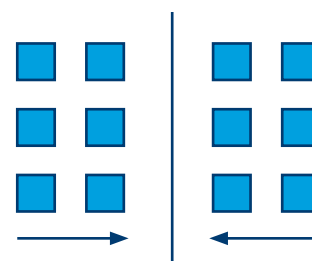
- Newsela provides articles at different lexile levels so you can differentiate to several reading levels if needed. (You will need to create a FREE Newsela account in order to access the article.)
- For advanced thinkers, students can be placed on the opposing argument of the one they initially agree with. They should be prepared to defend both sides of the conversation.

What's Needed

- Writing utensil and paper or 1:1 device
- WiFi, internet, computer, screen or projector, speakers
- White board and markers
- Make copies of the article "The New Nation: Ordinary Americans and the Constitution," (Newsela, November 8, 2016, www.adl.org/media/16112/download, one for each student).
- "Why is the US Constitution so hard to amend?" YouTube clip (2016, 2:12 min, TED-Ed, www.youtube.com/watch?v=FwREAW4SIVY&feature=youtu.be)

Classroom Setup

For this lesson, it is best to have desks or tables divided and facing each other (see illustration on the right). This allows students to choose a side for a Philosophical Chairs activity. An alternative is to have students stand on the outside of the rooms facing each other. Students need to be able to see the board/projector screen for the purposes of viewing a video.



Direct Teaching

1. Facilitate a conversation based on the following questions:
 - What are some rules that you have at home or at school that were created, but then had to change because you grew older or other circumstances changed?
 - Who decided what changes were made?
2. Explain to students that similar to those first house rules that were made and changed, we have had to consider changing the Constitution.
3. Share with students the definition of **amendment** as an official change made to a law, contract, constitution, or other legal document where the amendment adds, removes, or updates parts of the document.
4. Ask students, “Why would the Constitution need to be amended, or changed? Who do you think was left out, or excluded, from the Constitution?”

Elicit responses after giving students a few minutes to think, write and discuss with partners. Consider writing students’ answers on the board.
5. Have students read the Newsela article, “[The New Nation: Ordinary Americans and the Constitution](#),” individually, in pairs, in small groups or as a whole class.
6. Lead a discussion by asking students the following questions:
 - What themes and ideas about the Constitution did African Americans, artisans and small farmers have in common?
 - Do you believe that if the original Constitution had been sent to everyone in the United States for a vote, it would have been approved? Why or why not?
7. Ask students if, after reading the article, they would like to add to or remove any of their reasons for why the Constitution would need to be amended. Then ask students to predict how easy, or difficult, it is to make amendments to the Constitution.
8. Watch “[Why is the US Constitution so hard to amend?](#)”
9. Ask students, “Based on what you just watched, do you think the Constitution should be easier to amend? Why or why not?”
10. Explain to students that they will now participate in a Philosophical Chairs activity based on their initial thoughts on the difficulty of changing the Constitution.
11. Ask students who agree that the Constitution should be easier to amend stand on one side of the room, while students who believe it should remain the same, or more difficult, stand on the other side. As they move, explain that students who are not sure yet can stand in the middle, but they will have an opportunity to move to one side or the other based on information provided by their peers.
12. Facilitate a conversation based on their initial thoughts including the following questions:
 - Why should it be easier, or not easier, to amend the Constitution?
 - If you were to make it easier, how?
 - If you were to make it harder, how?
 - How do you think the Constitution and our lives would change if it were easier or harder to pass amendments?

13. Provide students with time to reflect on the conversation. Tell students who are standing in the middle, they must now decide their point of view and move to one side or the other.
14. Ask students did their viewpoint change after hearing their peers discuss?
15. Assign one amendment each student. Explain that they are to research the amendment, find what the amendment states, why it was created, when it was created and other important details. During the next class time, have students share what they found about their amendment.

Reference

Posner, Eric. 2014. The U.S. Constitution Is Impossible to Amend. Slate, May 5. <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2014/05/amending-the-constitution-is-much-too-hard-blame-the-founders.html>.