



A More Perfect Union

Objectives

- Analyze the significance of the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution.
- Apply the ideas of the Preamble to your own understanding of our political, social, and economic systems.
- Practice democratic skills like speaking, listening, and self-advocacy during class discussion.

Overview

In this lesson, students will practice their democratic skills by participating in a class discussion that prioritizes thoughtful and compassionate deliberation. Using the guiding question, “How can the Preamble guide Americans today?”, this discussion will look at the values and ideals outlined in the Preamble and then discuss the degree to which these ideals are represented and supported in society today based on their understanding and lived experiences.

Compelling Question

How can the Preamble guide Americans today?

Materials

- Pen/Pencils
- Handout: *The Preamble of the US Constitution with Guided Questions*
- Handout: *Guidelines for Participants in a Socratic Seminar*
- Handout: *Socratic Seminar Observation Notes*

Teacher Preparation

- Depending on the size and grade level of the class, you can choose to facilitate this discussion in multiple ways. Regardless of how you choose to facilitate the discussion, the class will investigate the meaning of important terms within the Preamble to build a foundation for understanding.
 - Option #1—Every student either takes part in a whole class discussion, or the class is divided into smaller groups around the classroom to ensure that everyone has a chance to speak.
 - Option #2—Students are partnered together and will take turns in the discussion with an inner circle, outer circle format.
- Guidelines and structure are key to supporting students during this activity. You may choose to provide the guidelines that accompany this lesson, or you can provide students the opportunity to make their own with the guidance of the teacher. If you choose to have students make their own class guidelines, keep in mind to allow more time for this.

Procedure

1. Begin class by letting the students know they will be discussing how the Preamble might be able to guide Americans today. As a warm-up, ask the students, “What does the word preamble mean?” Through this warm-up discussion, create a class definition of the word.
2. Using this definition, get the class to provide examples of “preambles” in their own lives (i.e. introduction to essays and books, text scrolls on Star Wars, etc.).
3. Building on this discussion, pass out *The Preamble of the US Constitution* handout and have students identify the purpose of the Preamble and its relationship to the U.S. Constitution. As students read through the Preamble, encourage them to highlight or underline words that might be unfamiliar. After a first read, ensure that all students understand some of the challenging vocabulary.
4. Next, encourage students to complete the guiding questions on the handout. As students finish, invite them to share their thoughts to the final question. This question will help connect students’ thinking to the driving question for class today.
5. As the class develops a better understanding of the Preamble, they will begin the Socratic Discussion. Prepare students for the activity by sharing with them that they will discuss the Preamble and the role it can play in guiding civic participation and the goals of American democracy in the past, present, and moving forward.
6. Pass out the discussion expectations, response starters, and the capture sheet to the class. Give students time to look over the documents and encourage the class to ask questions about any points that might create confusion.
7. Depending on which option from the ‘Teacher Preparation’ section has been chosen, determine the next steps.

8. If choosing the first option: Have students move into either assigned groups if they are taking part in one class discussion, or into assigned groups if the teacher has students taking part in small-group discussion.
 - a. Remind them to use the Preamble sheet with the guided questions as discussion starters.
 - b. Set a timer (recommended 5 to 7 minutes) and have students begin their discussion.
 - c. When the timer has been called, have them debrief on their own using the handout. Remind them that everyone should take part in the discussion and that if there are points that they wanted to bring up in the first round, they'll have one more round of discussion to do this.
 - d. Set a timer (recommended 5 to 7 minutes) and have students begin their second round of discussion.
 - e. Once the discussion is over, have them respond to the compelling question based on today's discussion.
9. If choosing the second option: Have students meet with their assigned or chosen partner for this discussion.
 - a. They will decide who will start and, using the Preamble, identify what points they would like to bring up.
 - b. Remind students who are debating in the first round to use the Preamble sheet with the guided questions as discussion starts. For students on the outer circle, their job is only to document and not to take part in discussions.
 - c. Set a timer (recommended 5 to 7 minutes) and have students begin their discussion.
 - d. When time has been called, have them debrief with their partner using the handout. Remind them that everyone should take part in the discussion and that if there are points that they wanted to bring up in the first round, they'll have one more round of discussion to do this.
 - e. Students will switch roles for round two. Set a timer (recommended 5 to 7 minutes) and have students begin their second round of discussion.
 - f. Once the discussion is over, have them work with their partner to respond to the compelling question based on today's discussion.
10. As the discussion ends, ask students to consider the following question: "How did your discussion reflect positive civic skills like listening to others, forming opinions, and advocating for others?"

Frameworks and Standards

Educating for American Democracy

- How has our geographic, political, social, and economic landscape changed over time?
 - What principles and values do Americans invoke in our debates about these issues?
- Who are “We the people of the United States” and how has the nation’s population changed over time?
 - Why does constitutional democracy depend on the idea of “the people”?

The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework

D2.Civ.10.6-8: Explain the relevance of personal interests and perspectives, civic virtues, and democratic principles when people address issues and problems in government and civil society.

D4.7.6-8: Assess their individual and collective capabilities to take action to address local, regional, and global problems, taking into account a range of possible levers of power, strategies, and potential outcomes.

D2.Civ.14.6-8: Compare historical and contemporary means of changing societies, and promoting the common good.

D2.Civ.10.9-12: Analyze the impact and the appropriate roles of personal interest and perspectives on the application of civic virtues, democratic principles, constitutional rights, and human rights.

D2.Civ.14.9-12: Analyze historical, contemporary, and emerging means of changing societies, promoting the common good, and protecting rights.

D4.7.9-12: Assess options for individual and collective action to address local, regional and global problems by engaging in self-reflection, strategy, identification, and complex causal reasoning.

Common Core English Language Arts

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.5: Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

“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.”

Guided Questions for Discussion

1. What is the purpose of the Preamble?

2. According to the Preamble, what are the SIX goals of the Constitution? Can you think of examples of the six goals?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____

3. Which THREE do you believe are the most important goals of the Constitution as identified by the Preamble? Why?

4. Which goal or goals do you believe might be the toughest for Americans to achieve today? Why?

1. Please refer to your notes and reference material during the discussion.
 2. It's OK to "pass" when asked to contribute. (Just not every time)
 3. Do not stay confused; ask for clarification.
 4. Stick to the point currently under discussion; make notes about ideas you want to come back to.
 5. No need to raise your hand; practice taking turns speaking to build on the conversation.
 6. Listen carefully.
 7. Speak up so that all can hear you.
 8. Talk to each other, not just to the leader or teacher.
 9. Discuss ideas rather than each other's opinions.
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Academic Language Scripts for Socratic Seminars

CLARIFYING

- Could you repeat that?
- Could you give us an example of that?
- I have a question about that...?
- Could you please explain.
- I'm not sure I understand that. Could you please give us another example?
- What did you mean when you said...?
- Where in the text can we find...?
- I understand... but I wonder about...?

INVITING OTHERS INTO THE DIALOGUE

- Does anyone agree/disagree?
- What gaps do you see in my thinking?
- What different conclusions do you have?
- We haven't heard from many people in the group. Could someone new offer an idea or question?
- Who has another idea/question/interpretation?

BUILDING ON THE STATEMENTS OF OTHERS

- I agree with what _____ said because...
- That is an interesting point, and I also think...
- That's an interesting idea. I wonder...? I think... Do you think...?

EXPRESSING AN OPINION

- I think/believe/predict/imagine that... What do you think?
- In my opinion...
- It seems to me that...

DISAGREEING

- I don't really agree with that because...
- I see it another way. I think...
- My idea is slightly different from yours. I believe that... I think that...

Directions: Complete the handout below to document today's discussion and keep track of any points made about today's compelling question.

Compelling question: <i>How can the Preamble guide Americans today?</i>	
Write down any comments or ideas you want to share in case there is not time.	
What comments or ideas were shared that relate directly to today's question: <i>How can the Preamble guide Americans today?</i>	
In your own words, and based on today's discussion, how can the Preamble be used as a set of guidelines for Americans today?	