



CITIZEN ADVOCACY CENTER

The Preamble A Plan for a Country

LESSON PLAN AND ACTIVITIES

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The Preamble Lesson Plan and Activities

Grade Level: 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12

Subject(s):

- Social Studies: United States Government, State Government, Local Government; and
- Language Arts: Reading, Writing.

Duration: 1 class session

Description: This lesson explores the purpose of the Preamble to the United States Constitution, and the Constitution of the State of Illinois, and asks students to create their own Preamble.

Goals:

Illinois Learning Standards

A. Social Science: 14A, 14B, 14C, 14D, 16A, 16B; and

B. English/Language Arts: 1A, 1B, 1C, 3A, 3B, 3C; 4A; 4B.

Objectives:

1. Understand the basic history of the United States Constitution;
2. Identify the purpose and meaning of the Preamble to the Constitution; and
3. Develop a student Preamble.

Materials:

1. Paper
2. Pens

Instruction and Activities

Preamble to the United States Constitution:

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, 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.

Preamble to the Constitution of the State of Illinois:

We, the People of the State of Illinois - grateful to Almighty God for the civil, political and religious liberty which He has permitted us to enjoy and seeking His blessing upon our endeavors - in order to provide for the health, safety and welfare of the people; maintain a representative and orderly government; eliminate poverty and inequality; assure legal,

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social and economic justice; provide opportunity for the fullest development of the individual; insure domestic tranquility; provide for the common defense; and secure the blessings of freedom and liberty to ourselves and our posterity - do ordain and establish this Constitution for the State of Illinois.

Lecture

Prior to the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776, the American colonies operated as independent states answering to the greater power of Britain. However, in the Declaration of Independence, the colonies referred to themselves as “one people,” “united colonies,” and “the United States of America” for the first time. Because the colonies declared themselves united, they needed to work quickly to form a united government structure under which they could collectively operate. The resulting governmental document was known as the Articles of Confederation. The Articles gave most powers to the states, and limited authority to a weak central Congress.

As a result of the colonies’ original preference for states’ individual rights, the colonies did not establish a strong, central government to bind them. As individual states experienced extreme economic and other difficulties, discussions resurfaced about the need for a stronger central government. For example, a group of farmers in western Massachusetts formed a rebellion called Shays’ Rebellion to attempt to gain some control over personal debt and economic crisis. Also, the British disregarded individual treaties with the states, and the Spanish started making movements along the western and southern borders.

Question: What is the purpose of a preamble?

Answer: The purpose of a preamble is to establish the nature, extent and application of powers conferred within a constitution. A preamble does not create powers and is not a source of any implied powers. It is similar to an introductory paragraph to an essay.

Activity

1. Divide students into four or five groups. Discuss the difference between the contents of a state constitution versus a federal constitution. While a federal constitution would cover subjects including national defense, due process, interstate commerce, and foreign relations, a state constitution would cover subjects specific to the state such as property rights, education, and intrastate commerce.
2. Every twenty years, the State of Illinois has the opportunity to review and rewrite its constitution. The next opportunity for a constitutional convention is 2030. Have students imagine that they are either a) at a state constitutional convention; or b) at a federal constitutional convention (subject to the teacher’s discretion). Each student group is charged with rewriting the relevant preamble. The students should **not** have the relevant preamble in front of them for reference while they are writing. The students’ preamble

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must reflect the mood and intent of the country or state, and it must reflect what will be contained in the new constitution.

3. Compare and contrast the students' preambles. Work together as one large group to mesh the small group preambles into one preamble that is acceptable to all of the students.
4. Divide students into 4 or 5 groups and now have them draft a preamble for their class. What are the values to uphold in the classroom and what do the students aspire to achieve? Have students share their results.