



## **We the Students: Writing a Class Constitution**

### **Introduction**

The Preamble to the U.S. Constitution sets out the purposes or functions of American government as envisioned by the framers. Using the Preamble as a guide, students will identify the purposes of their own classroom and create a class “constitution.”

The lesson has three parts:

1. Students look at the words in the Preamble and translate them into everyday language.
2. Using the Preamble as a guide, students write their own preamble, “We the Students,” about the purposes and functions of their classroom.
3. Students then take part in an activity to generate possible rules for their classroom, selecting five of these rules as “articles” for their class constitution.

**Teacher Note:** The rules students develop for a good classroom will not differ markedly from what teachers normally require. Every class, however, can benefit from the democratic experience of creating and enforcing their own rules. This wise exercise of power also helps students understand and support the rules during the school year.

### **Objectives**

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Explain the purposes of government as identified in the Preamble to the Constitution
- Develop an understanding of the purposes of their classroom
- Create a preamble and constitution for governing their classroom

### **Materials and Preparation**

**Student Handout 1:** Preamble to the Constitution of the United States

**Student Handout 2:** Creating a Class Constitution

Chart paper or newsprint and markers

### **Procedure**

#### **Part 1: Putting the Preamble into Everyday Words**

1. Distribute copies of **Student Handout 1** (and project it if possible). Tell students that the Preamble, or introduction, to the U.S. Constitution is a very important document. It begins with an important phrase, “We the People of the United States.” Ask: Why are these words important? (*Because they tell us that the government’s power comes from the people.*)
2. Explain that the Preamble is also important because it outlines several purposes or functions of government. Clarify vocabulary with students or organize the students into six groups and assign each group to look up words in one phrase and come up with a “translation” of the phrase into everyday language.

## Classroom Ready Resource

### Part 2: “We the Students”

1. Ask the students to think about the most important purposes of their classroom. Conduct a brainstorm activity and create a common list.  
**For example:** “to give everyone a chance to learn”
2. Ask students to select up to six purposes for their classroom Preamble. Sequence the purposes into a single statement, beginning with the words “We the Students.”

### Part 3: Writing A Class Constitution

1. Ask the class to think about the Preamble they have just created.
2. Assign students to groups of three or four, giving each group a piece of chart paper or newsprint and a marker. Ask each group to draft up to three rules based on the ideas in the class Preamble. Each group should have a leader (responsible for encouraging everyone to participate), a recorder (responsible for writing down all the rules), a reporter (responsible for telling the class about the rules), and a checker/materials manager (responsible for making sure there are no duplicates; making sure that the rules are clear; being responsible for any paper work). Have the group decide who will do what or assign roles by number (this may depend on previous group work experience). Make sure the students understand their roles and understand that they all should have a chance to speak and listen.  
**For Example:** two rules derived from the principle “to give everyone a chance to learn” might be “Students will let others speak for themselves” or “Students will not interrupt when others are speaking.”
3. Ask each small group to prioritize the rules they feel are most important and eliminate any duplicates. Once each group has agreed on their three rules, the checkers can post the lists around the room. Each reporter can read the group’s list. The whole class should then work to consolidate the list into a total of **five** rules. These rules will become the **Articles** of the class constitution.
4. Ask the class to reflect on what changes, if any, they want to make to the rules. Try to reach a consensus and, if necessary, vote to see if a rule is acceptable. Once the process is complete for all of the rules, ask students: “As a class, can we live with these rules?”
5. Once the rules are set, ask students to write the Preamble and the Articles onto **Student Handout 2 (Our Class Constitution)**.
6. Make a copy for the classroom and have every student (and the teacher, too) sign it.

### Questions for Discussion

- How difficult was it to decide on just five rules? Is there a need for “little” rules to explain the “big” ones you selected?
- How enforceable do you think these rules will be?
- In general, were the rules positive or negative? In your view, is it better to write rules in the affirmative or the negative? Why?

**Note:** Every month, ask the students to reflect in writing on their perceptions of whether the class rules worked. Why/why not? Answer the question: Did our class rules work this past month? They may want to illustrate their writing. Problems presented may be useful as starting points for **Amendments** (Article 6), for modifying rules, and for discussing the nature and consequences of good rules.

Additional resources and information on what makes a good rule and how to evaluate rules can be found in Unit 1 of CRFC’s *Violence-prevention Outcomes in Civic Education (VOICE)* curriculum.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**Student Handout 1**

## **Preamble to the U.S. Constitution**

The Preamble is the introduction to the U.S. Constitution. It says:

*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.*

The above phrases from the Preamble describe purposes or functions of government. Translate each phrase below into everyday language:

*To form a more perfect Union* means:

*Establish Justice* means:

*Insure domestic Tranquility* means:

*Provide for the common defence* means:

*Promote the general Welfare* means:

*Secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our Posterity* means:



# *Our Class Constitution*

*We the Students of*

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*Article 1.* \_\_\_\_\_  
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*Article 2.* \_\_\_\_\_  
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*Article 3.* \_\_\_\_\_  
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*Article 4.* \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Article 5.* \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Article 6. Our class, whenever a group of students or our Teacher request it, shall propose Amendments to this Constitution. These Amendments shall be valid when two-thirds of the Class and our Teacher approve them.*

*Done on the \_\_\_\_\_ Day of \_\_\_\_\_ in the Year \_\_\_\_\_  
In Witness whereof We have hereunto subscribed our Names,*