

“WE THE PEOPLE,” THE MEANING BEHIND THE WORDS



ELEMENTARY • 4 TO 5

OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students are introduced to the Preamble to the Constitution. They examine the significance, wording, and the fundamental purposes that establish the framework for the Constitution. Students begin to discuss, who is signified in “We the People” in the context of our nation’s past as well as who is signified in the present. Students will also begin to discuss what those words mean to them as young people of the United States. Students will view a short clip from *We the People Movie* that will begin the lesson and their inquiry into the Preamble.

Compelling questions for this lesson include:

What do the words in the Preamble mean?

What is the purpose of the Preamble?

What is the importance of “We the People,” the first three words of the Constitution of the United States, and how has the meaning of the phrase changed over time?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will examine the document, discuss the meaning thought the founder’s eyes and today, and create a visual representation of what the phrase means to them.
- Students will recognize, discuss, and define the importance of the Preamble and the concepts in the Preamble.
- Students will begin to explore the significance of the three words, “We the People” and how the phrase has changed over time.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What do you think of when you read or hear the phrase “We the People?”
- What does “We the People” mean personally to you?
- What do the other words in the Preamble mean?
- What is the importance of the first three words of the Constitution of the United States, “We the People?”
- What do you think the founding fathers meant when they wrote those three words?
- What do you think the phrase means to us today?

INTRODUCTION

HISTORICAL & CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

TEACHERS NOTE

Many students may not have formally studied the history of early America prior to the writing of the Constitution. This lesson is designed to introduce students to civic education through the words, “We the People” and to help students to understand the language of our founding documents. Through the lesson and the film clip from *We the People*, an Inland Sea Productions giant screen film students will enhance their understanding of what these three words mean historically. Students will begin to make a personal connection to our nation’s history and its documents.

ESTIMATED CLASS TIME

Recommended time is two to three 30 minutes sessions.

MATERIALS

- Copies of the following (1 per student)
 - Preamble to the United States Constitution
 - Historical background that can be read as a class (optional)
 - Modified Frayer Model Vocabulary Template
 - Sample vocabulary word using the modified Frayer template
 - Preamble phrase cards (1 card for each group of 2-3 students). These can be printed on 8 x 11 paper or white card stock if available. There are 6 phrase cards included in the teacher resources.
- *We the People Movie* Clip
- Highlighters, pens/pencils, markers
- Projected image of the Constitution of the United States (optional)

VIDEO CLIP

- *We the People* Section 0-19

This segment provides the platform for discussing the historical significance of the three words “We the People” and will provide a platform for future lessons.

VOCABULARY & KEY CONCEPTS

- | | |
|---------------------|-------------|
| • U.S. Constitution | • defense |
| • Preamble | • promote |
| • “We The People” | • general |
| • justice | • welfare |
| • insure | • liberty |
| • domestic | • posterity |
| • tranquility | • ordain |

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INTRODUCTION (CONTINUED)

After years of struggle for independence from Great Britain, the men who would later be known as the founding fathers gathered in Philadelphia in 1787 to form a government that would not only strengthen the new nation but unify it. Realizing that the country needed a stronger government than the one that had been established following the Revolutionary War, the founding fathers carefully considered what that government should stand for and then wrote the words that became the Constitution of the United States. This document of democracy, along with the Bill of Rights, has guided our nation's government and people ever since.

PROCEDURE

INTRODUCING THE PREAMBLE

Provide students with copies of the historical background reading, a copy of the Preamble, and present the guiding questions to this lesson.

An image of the Constitution could be projected as you discuss.

- In the United States today, who do you think are the people in “We the People?”
- Who are the “We the People” in our school and in our own community?
- What do you feel the “we” in “We the People” should stand for?

Share with students the learning outcomes for the lesson.

FRAMING THE FILM

The film segment will serve as the anticipatory set or “hook” to the rest of the lesson. Prepare students to view the clip, *We the People, A Giant Screen Film*. Framing the film will activate students' background knowledge and also provide a framework for future discussion.

This segment lays the foundation for the lesson on the Preamble and discussion on the significance of the three words “We the People” and provides a platform for future lessons.

Ask students to focus on the phrase “We the People” as well as the images that are presented in the film clip.

VIEW: *We the People, A Giant Screen Film Excerpt OA 1-19*

After viewing, pose the following question:

Who do you think are “the people” in “We the People?” in today's United States? Ask students if there were images in the film clip that support their answer.

To better understand our history and the intent of the document, it is important to understand the Preamble.

Continue the lesson by explaining to students:

More than 225 years ago the writers of the Constitution spoke and wrote differently than we do now. In order to better understand the phrases of the Preamble to the Constitution, students will need to translate those words into words that make sense to them now or what we call our everyday language.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

Fourth Grade Common Core State Standards

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.1.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.2
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.3
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.4
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.

Fifth Grade Common Core State Standards

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.1
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.2
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.3
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.4
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.5
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.7

EXTENSIONS

In 1987, Mike Wilkins created the Preamble with license plates, Preamble. Painted metal on vinyl and wood. The work is on display in the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American Art.

Students could create a similar visual by creating a PowerPoint or Prezi presentation for each word in the Preamble. For instance “We” would be on the first slide with a visual; “the People” would be the second slide, and so on. There are no limitations or restrictions on how students can visually show their understanding of this important part of the U.S. Constitution.

MODIFICATION

Work through the Preamble phrase cards as a class

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Declaration of Independence
- Other documents found at the Charters of Freedom and the Constitution at the National Archives site.

