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Teacher Notes

The Preamble

Objectives

- To understand the importance of the Preamble
- To be able to restate the reasons the Constitution was written

Vocabulary

more perfect union A better government

establish justice Set up a court system whereby the citizens would be assured their rights and liberties but could settle civil matters and criminal matters with fairness and impartiality

domestic tranquility The ability to keep the peace

common defense The government's ability to defend the country and the people against foreign invasions or enemies.

general welfare People's health and happiness. This means something entirely different today.

posterity Future generations

Background Information

The Preamble of the United States Constitution is one sentence long, but lays out two very important concepts. First the Preamble starts with *We the people* clearly stating that the people of the country are the sovereigns or the rulers. The implication here is that "we the people" is not a king or a monarch or God, from which the authority is derived. This is a compact or a contract between the government and the governed.

The second concept that is embedded in the Preamble is the reasoning behind why the framers wrote the 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 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."



The preamble lays out the six reasons for the Constitution:

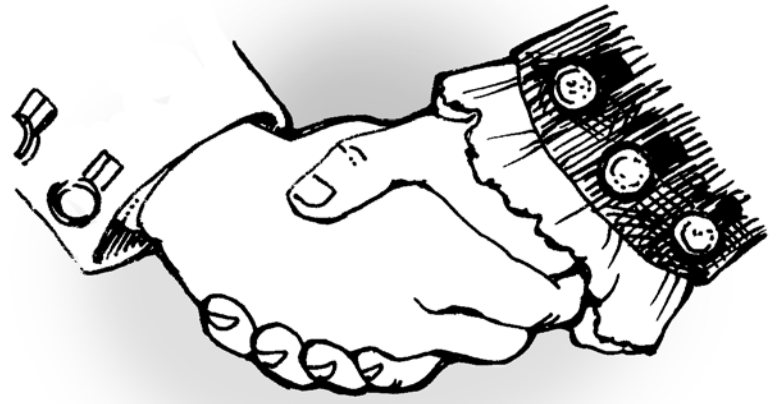
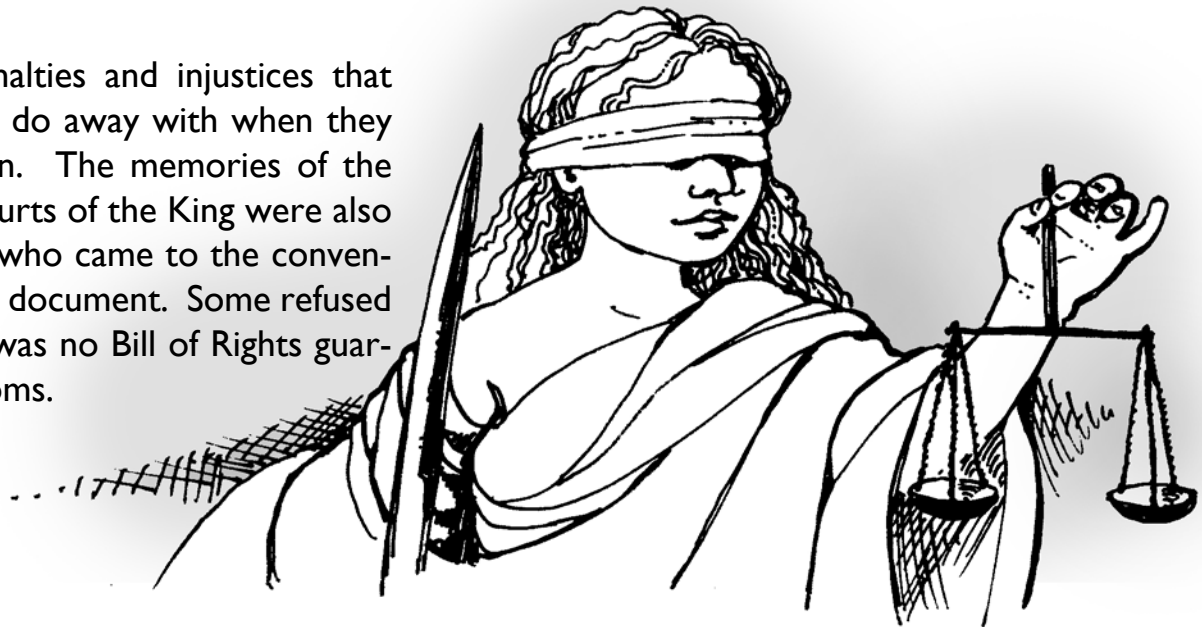
...to form a more perfect Union...

The United States had been governed by a loose confederation of states in a document called the Articles of Confederation, in effect in 1777 and ratified in 1781. But under the Articles of Confederation there was no strong central government which made it difficult for the states to act in unison. The men who came together in May of 1787 to “fix” the Articles of Confederation gave that up to re-write it entirely. Their intent was to create a more perfect union.



...establish justice...

There were many penalties and injustices that the framers wanted to do away with when they wrote the Constitution. The memories of the laws and the special courts of the King were also fresh. Of the 55 men who came to the convention, only 39 signed the document. Some refused to sign because there was no Bill of Rights guaranteeing certain freedoms.

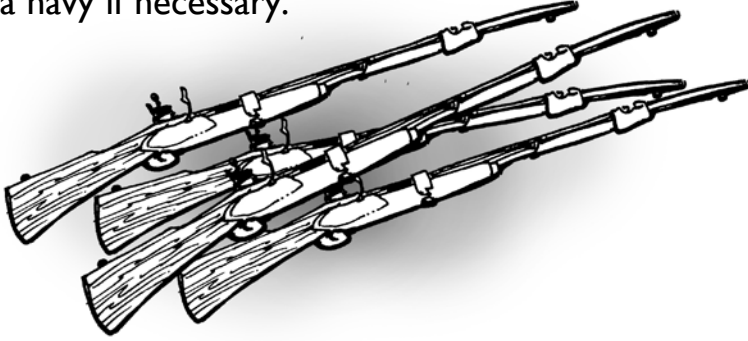


...insure domestic tranquility...

During the Shays Rebellion, the various states could not agree on how to provide for the troops to put down the rebellion. The Articles of Confederation did not provide for a standing army or the ability of the government to raise taxes or charge tariffs to pay for such an army. Because the Articles were weak, Massachusetts was left on its own to put down the rebellion. Eventually some of the money to pay for the troops to stop Shays, Day and the others was raised by some of the merchants and business people being threatened by the rebels. Over four thousand troops led by General Benjamin Lincoln put down the rebellion but leaders in all of the colonies saw the exposed weakness of the Articles of Confederation.

...provide for the common defense...

The collective states of the United States had just fought a war with Great Britain, the greatest military power of the Western world at that time. The framers were under no illusions that they may well be called upon to defend America again, and they would need the government to have the ability to raise and pay for an army and a navy if necessary.



...promote the general welfare...

This clause refers to the government's ability to create a country so every state and every citizen could benefit from the collective good that could be produced by a strong and powerful government—expansion of trade, the growth of the nation, fairness of laws and safety for industry and investment.



...secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity...

The framers were intent on forming a government that would safeguard the liberty and freedoms that had been so hard fought only a few years earlier. They also wanted to make sure that the government would provide liberty for their children and grandchildren.

Suggested Lesson Plan

1. Explain the lesson objectives. Review the vocabulary and background information with the class.
2. Read and discuss the Preamble with the class.
3. Invite students to answer the questions in "The Preamble" handout on page 24.
4. The handouts on pages 25-30 pertain to government agencies and acts and how they relate to various stated reasons in the Preamble of the Constitution.



☆☆☆☆ Re-Creating the Preamble ☆☆☆☆

Objective

Students will re-create the Preamble to the Constitution for a more meaningful experience. They will do this by incorporating old style writing techniques with a goose quill pen.

Background Information

The Preamble to the United States Constitution is a brief statement which describes the purpose and principles that the Constitution was meant to serve. It expresses the author's intentions and what the Constitution meant and hoped to achieve.

Optional

This project may also be incorporated in the overall Constitution book by using old style techniques as seen in the activity to make a *Constitution Mini Book* (page 10).

*Individual or group project

Materials

large feather—goose, turkey, crow, found in craft stores
X-acto™ blade or utility knife
newspapers for blotting
8½" x 11" white paper
bowl of warm water
India ink
safety pins
masking tape
black tea bag
shallow pan
pencil

