



The Constitution

A Signing of the Times!



★ **Judge Rendell**
Insights & Inspirations

After School Programs
Sticky Situation. Smart Question.

★ **Committed Voices**
Say What You Mean.
Mean What You Say.



Lesson 2

Lesson 2: The Constitution

The Civics Kids interviewed the former First Lady of Pennsylvania and Third Circuit Court of Appeals Judge Marjorie Rendell as part of a homework assignment to find out how the government works.

When she was First Lady of Pennsylvania Judge Rendell traveled throughout the State to talk about the importance of citizenship. Carla remembers Judge Rendell visiting her school to conduct a mock trial with the fourth grade.



We have been studying about the Constitution. Why is a piece of paper written over 220 years ago so important?

Our Constitution establishes the duties and responsibilities of each part of our government. The government that it set up over 220 years ago still works today.

What are the duties and responsibilities of the president?

The President is the leader of the country. The President has the power to sign legislation and reject (veto) laws passed by Congress. The President also negotiates and signs treaties with other countries. These treaties have to then go to the Senate for their approval. The Constitution says a person who wants to run for President must be at least 35 years old, be born in the United States, and have lived in the U.S. for the past 14 years.

What exactly is the legislature and what do they do?

The Legislative branch - known as Congress - passes legislation, declares war, and confirms or rejects people who the President appoints. There are two groups who make up the Legislative Branch. They are the House of Representatives and the Senate. The House of Representatives is made up of 435 members who have been elected from all 50 states. They each serve a two-year term. The number of representatives from each state is determined by each state's population. The Senate is made up of two members from each state. They each serve a six-year term. In order to pass legislation and send it to the President for his signature, a bill must pass the House and Senate by majority (more than half) vote. To override a presidential veto, each branch must pass a bill with a 2/3 vote.

Are there any other parts to our government?

Yes. The final branch is the Judicial branch (my favorite). It is the branch that I am a part of. The Judicial branch includes one Supreme Court made up of nine judges and inferior courts. The courts interpret the law, determine if a law follows the Constitution, and applies the law to individual cases. According to the Constitution, the inferior courts are the United States District Courts and the 13 Appeals Courts which review District Court cases. I serve on the Third Circuit Court of Appeals which covers Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware and the Virgin Islands.

Why are there so many parts? Why can't there just be a president?

The Founding Fathers did not want the power of our government to rest with just one individual as it had under the King of England. They felt that our government should be made up of branches that each have their own role. With this system of government, there would be a balance of power. Furthermore, the Constitution gives certain powers only to the national government and certain powers only to the state government.

We are confused about the Bill of Rights: is it different than the Constitution?

The Bill of Rights is the first 10 amendments to the Constitution. These amendments were adopted a few years after the Constitution. The Bill of Rights, although just a small part of the Constitution, is a very important part.

How can I participate in my government?

The right to vote is the most important way all citizens 18 years and older participate in our government. As young people, each of you should become aware of how our government works and what our government is doing to better prepare you for voting. Also, the government makes decisions that affect each of you. The more you know, the more you can use your voice to agree or disagree with what the government is doing that involves your world.

Couldn't have
said it better myself!



* The Judicial branch includes one Supreme Court and inferior courts that are established by Congress.

Sticky Situation

On the first day of school your teacher announced that all students who were not doing well in school would have to attend an after-school support program from 3:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Wednesdays. The teacher told your class that this was a new rule that was developed by the local school board. You are having a challenging time in math but do not want to stay after school. You feel that Wednesdays from 3:30 to 5:00 is your time to play with friends.

What would you do? Why?
Do you have an alternative
to the new plan?



Civic Literacy Links The Constitution

- **A More Perfect Union: The Story of the Constitution** by Betsy Maestro
- **I Took My Frog to the Library** by Eric Kimmel
- **Library Lion** by Michelle Knudsen
- **We the Kids** by David Catrow
- **Schoolhouse Rock: Constitution Preamble:** Youtube.com
- **Constitution Day: Scholastic:**
http://teacher.scholastic.com/scholasticnews/indepth/constitution_day



Let's Hear Your Voices!

There is a lot of talk about building student voice in classrooms across the country. One way to build student voice is to get students more active on decision making committees.

Is there a committee in your school in which you would like to be an active member?
Or... is there a committee that you would like to form and on which you would like to be active that looks at school issues?

- ★ Write your idea on one of the index cards and post it on the Student Voices Bulletin Board.
- ★ We will take a look at everyone's ideas at a class meeting!

