

Creating a Classroom Constitution

Lesson Estimated Time: 60 minutes

Essential Question

- What role does a constitution play in establishing a framework for governing a community, and how does it protect the rights and responsibilities of its members?

Guiding Questions

- What are the foundational principles and virtues that should be included in a constitution to ensure a fair and just society?
- What are the essential elements of a positive and productive classroom environment, and how can a classroom constitution promote these qualities?
- How can collaboration and compromise be utilized to create a classroom constitution that reflects the diverse perspectives and needs of the student body?
- How can the principles and lessons learned from creating a classroom constitution be applied to broader societal contexts and the understanding of larger-scale constitutions in the world?

Objectives

- Students will explain the importance and purpose of a constitution.
- Students will identify and compare essential structures of the U.S. Constitution and the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- Students will collaborate to create a classroom constitution that reflects the values, rules, and responsibilities they want to uphold for a positive learning environment.

Resources

Student Resources

- [U.S. Constitution](#)
- [U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)

Teacher Resources

- Whiteboard, chalkboard, larger poster board, or digital whiteboard
- Markers

Teacher Resources *(continued)*

- Blank sheets of paper or poster boards for group work
- Sticky notes (four per student)
- Writing materials (pens, pencils)

Engage

- In small groups, have students quickly review the Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Ask each group to discuss and identify key components of the documents. What do they notice each document includes? What similarities and differences do they notice in the structure of the documents? What principles and/or virtues do the documents include? What is not included? Why?
 - **Scaffolding Note:** Depending on the needs and abilities of students, additional constitutions from around the world could also be added to the activity, such as the 1949 India Constitution. If using the 1949 India Constitution, focus on the Preamble and Parts II, III, V, and VI.
- Each group should share out at least two reflections from their review.
- Lead a class discussion based on the group findings, focusing on the principles and values that are commonly present in constitutions.

Explore

- Divide the board into four sections and title the sections: Rules, Expectations, Rights and Responsibilities of Students, and Rights and Responsibilities of Teachers.
 - Alternatively, use poster paper set up around the classroom, or use a digital whiteboard.
- Provide time for students to independently brainstorm the essential elements of a positive and productive classroom environment. Encourage them to consider rules, expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of both students and teachers. Students should write one idea per sticky note.
- Once students have completed their brainstorm, have them post their notes on the board under each category.
- Allow time for students to review their classmates' notes. As they review the notes, encourage them to group similar ideas together. Have students label or summarize the groups of ideas in each category.

- After students have viewed and grouped their brainstorming notes, read out the labels or summaries for each category. Discuss the reasoning behind each suggestion and the potential impact on the learning environment.
- After identifying the key elements, divide the class into small groups and assign each group to focus on specific aspects, such as rules, rights, responsibilities, consequences, and amendment procedures.
- Have each group work on their designated aspect of their constitution. Provide guidance and support as needed but encourage students to think independently and collaboratively.
- Once the groups have completed their sections, bring the class together to compile the components into a comprehensive classroom constitution. Allow students to debate and discuss various ideas while emphasizing the importance of compromise and consensus.
- As a class, revise and finalize their constitution. Make sure it reflects the shared values and principles that emerged during their discussions.
- Once the constitution is complete, have each student sign it as a symbolic gesture of their commitment to uphold the rules and values outlined in the document.
- Display the finished constitution in the classroom as a reminder of the collective commitment to maintaining a positive learning environment.

Assess & Reflect

- Reflecting on the process of creating the classroom constitution, how do you think the values and principles we incorporated in it align with the type of learning environment you want for yourself and your peers? In what ways do you believe the classroom constitution will positively impact your interactions, responsibilities, and overall experience in this class? How can each of us contribute to upholding the values outlined in their constitution and ensure that it remains a meaningful document throughout the school year?

Extend

- To deepen their understanding, students can research and compare different real-world constitutions, such as those from other countries or historical periods. They can analyze the similarities and differences between these constitutions and their classroom constitution, identifying the underlying values and societal priorities. Students can present their findings in a group presentation or written report.