

The Purpose of a Constitution – Grade Four

Ohio Standards Connection:

Government

Benchmark B

Give examples of documents that specify the structure of state and national governments in the United States and explain how these documents foster self-government in a democracy.

Indicator 3

Explain the purpose of a democratic constitution:

- a. To provide a framework for a government;
- b. To limit the power of government;
- c. To define the authority of elected officials.

Lesson Summary:

Students will investigate how the Ohio Constitution serves as our plan of government. They will participate in cooperative learning activities, including a role play, research and a vocabulary game. Using the Ohio Constitution as an example, students will be able to explain how a constitution provides a framework for government, limits the power of government and defines the authority of elected officials.

Estimated Duration: Four hours

Commentary:

This lesson uses the Ohio Constitution as an example of a democratic constitution. Students will use a graphic organizer as they read the text of the Ohio Constitution to identify how it serves as a plan of government and protects our freedoms. Students will participate in a role play comparing rules in sports games with the rules and laws followed in a democratic society. The post-assessment challenges students to demonstrate their understanding through four short-answer responses.

Pre-Assessment:

Distribute Attachment A, *Pre-Assessment*. Have students work individually to fill in the blanks with the correct words.

Scoring Guidelines:

The answers, in order, are: “Constitution,” “laws,” “branches,” “power,” “vote” and “democracy.” Use the pre-assessment to determine prior knowledge of students. Any students who show that they have strong prior knowledge should be challenged to complete extension activities.

Post-Assessment:

See Attachment E, *The Purpose of a Constitution*. Instruct students to answer the questions using proper grammar, spelling and complete sentences. Allow students to use their graphic organizers as resources.



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Scoring Guidelines:

Each question is worth 10 points:

8 points for correct content

2 points for complete sentences, spelling and grammar

Total = 40 points

Answers will vary but should be close to the following:

1. The students in the class would vote on some of the decisions that need to be made.
2. To organize our government, protect our rights and tell what elected officials should do.
3. People are an important part of the government. Ordinary people voted for those who wrote the Constitution and those who are in power today.
4. The Constitution gives a framework for our government and lists rules to help us govern ourselves. Power is divided between branches so that one branch does not gain too much power. Government officials are elected by the people and can be replaced at the next election.

Instructional Procedures:

Day One

1. Conduct the pre-assessment.
2. Tell the students you are considering having a “Dictator Pizza Party.” Tell the students that you will be ordering pizza for the whole class, and it will be your favorite kind: pineapple with anchovies, black olives, extra onions and broccoli (or anything else that strikes you as unlikely to appeal to fourth-grade tastes).
3. When they complain, explain that the idea behind a dictatorship is one person making the rules for many. Tell them that you realize more than one person should help decide. If you have a phone in your room, call your secretary or a team member (or if you don’t have a phone, talk to a team mate or your principal about conveniently showing up at the time you are teaching this lesson) and, in front of the class, explain that you *were* going to have a Dictator Pizza Party, but since the class complained, you are going to involve more people in the decision and it is going to be an Oligarchy Pizza Party. Ask the person on the other end of the line to “poll” the people around him/her to see if they wouldn’t like to order a pineapple pizza with anchovies, black olives, extra onions and broccoli. Naturally, they will respond yes, and you can explain to the class that they should feel better about more people being involved in the decision because, after all, an oligarchy is a government where a few rule and benefit from it.
4. When the students complain, ask them how they think the class should decide on what to put on the pizza. Guide the students to an understanding that the people who are going to eat the pizza should be the ones to make the decision.
5. Ask students, “How should group decisions be made?” Write ideas on the board, and guide them toward the idea of one vote per person and the formation of a democracy.
6. Have students work in pairs to write their own definition of democracy. (It is not necessary for students to define the terms dictatorship and oligarchy at this grade level.)
7. Conduct a class discussion of definitions. Lead the class to the definition for democracy found in the social studies academic content standards - “a system of government in



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which political control is exercised by all the people, either directly or through their elected representatives.”

Day Two

8. Ask students why they think rules are important. Conduct a class discussion, and record student responses on chart paper or the board. Direct the discussion by asking:
 - What if there were no rules for our classroom?
 - What if there were no rules for our school?
 - What if there were no rules for a game?
9. Divide the class into five groups, and assign each group a sport/game as their topic: soccer, baseball, basketball, volleyball, football (or another sport/game students are interested in). In their groups, instruct students to do the following:
 - List the rules of the game.
 - Plan a skit that shows how the game is played with the rules.
 - Plan a skit that shows what would happen if there were no rules.
10. Allow groups time to complete their preparation. Ask each group to present its work to the class in five to ten minutes, explaining how to play the game and performing both skits. Allow time for discussion and additional information from the class.
11. Have students return to their groups. Challenge them to list all of the places/activities in our society that have rules (for example, a school, swimming pool, library or park). Allow groups five minutes to write their lists.
12. Have groups report one response at a time. Move from one group to another, with each group adding a new response.

Day Three

13. Ask students to think about the government. Discuss why we need rules in order for it to run smoothly.
 - What should the laws be?
 - Who makes the laws?
 - Who carries out or enforces the laws?
 - Who decides if the laws are acceptable?
14. Divide the class into heterogeneous groups. Distribute a copy of the Ohio Constitution to each group.

Instructional Tip:

Students do not need the complete text of the Ohio Constitution. They will only need to review the preamble, articles and sections listed on Attachment B, *Graphic Organizer*. To cut down on photocopying, create packets for each group containing just the necessary portions of the Constitution.

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15. Briefly explain the organization of the document. Point out the preamble, articles, sections and amendments. Ask students what they think the purpose of this document is. Why do we have a constitution?
16. Read the opening of the preamble, “We, the people of the State of Ohio.” Discuss with students why it begins with the phrase, “We, the people.” What does that tell us about the government of Ohio? Who has the power? What type of government is this?
17. Distribute Attachment B, *Graphic Organizer*. Have students work in groups to complete the graphic organizer with information from the Ohio Constitution. As groups work, have them make a list of words with which they are unfamiliar.
18. After groups have completed their graphic organizers, have them use classroom resources to find definitions of the unfamiliar words. Encourage them to use textbooks, dictionaries or online resources to define the words.
19. Conduct a class discussion of the unfamiliar words. Create a list of new words and definitions to post. These can be added to the “Vocabulary Mix” activity on Day Four.
20. Review the completed graphic organizer and discuss student answers. Allow students to correct their answers as necessary.

Day Four

21. Distribute the pre-cut cards from Attachment D, *Vocabulary Mix*. Give one card to each student. Attachment D includes 12 words and definitions for a total of 24 cards. Create additional cards from Day Three activities as necessary.
22. Ask students to take out a pencil and a piece of paper (or dry erase boards).
23. The cards are divided into two groups: those with answers (I am the...) and those with the questions (What is the...). Ask the student that has a one on his/her card to stand up and read his card out loud.
 - 1) *I am a system of government in which everybody has a say, either directly or through voting for representatives.*
24. Ask the whole class to think about the correct answer silently. Explain that one person has the answer on his card (democracy) and he should quietly stand up, concealing his card. Monitor this process to be sure the student with the correct card stands up. Everyone else should write the answer on their papers or dry erase boards. After an appropriate amount of wait time, ask the standing student to reveal the answer and have students check themselves.
25. Continue this process with cards two through 12. See *General Tips* for variations of this activity.
26. Review any words or concepts with which students are having difficulty.

Day Five

27. Conduct the post-assessment. Follow up with a lesson that helps students understand the three branches of state government.



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Differentiated Instructional Support:

Instruction is differentiated according to the learner needs, to help all learners either meet the intent of the specified indicator(s) or, if the indicator is already met, to advance beyond the specified indicator(s).

- Allow students to work individually, in pairs or in heterogeneous groups.
- Instruct students to create illustrations to reinforce vocabulary definitions.
- Challenge students to create rules for a board game that helps students practice the vocabulary words for this lesson.

Extensions:

- Instruct students to create illustrations of locations/activities on their list of places that have rules. Create a bulletin board of student pictures.
- Challenge students to create a constitution for the class. Have students vote on each article to ratify the constitution. Have students vote for representatives to illustrate the constitution for posting in the classroom.

Homework Options and Home Connections:

Have students and their families keep a list of all the places they visit that have rules for people to follow. If possible, have students bring in examples of these rules. For example, a day care center or an amusement park might have rules posted.

Interdisciplinary Connections:

English Language Arts

- **Acquisition of Vocabulary**

Benchmark A: Use context clues and text structures to determine the meaning of new vocabulary.

Indicator 1: Determine the meaning of unknown words by using a variety of context clues, including word, sentence and paragraph clues.

- **Reading Process**

Benchmark A: Determine a purpose for reading and use a range of reading comprehension strategies to better understand text.

Indicator 6: Select, create and use graphic organizers to interpret textual information.

Materials and Resources:

The inclusion of a specific resource in any lesson formulated by the Ohio Department of Education should not be interpreted as an endorsement of that particular resource, or any of its contents, by the Ohio Department of Education. The Ohio Department of Education does not endorse any particular resource. The Web addresses listed are for a given site's main page, therefore, it may be necessary to search within that site to find the specific information required for a given lesson. Please note that information published on the Internet changes over time, therefore the links provided may no longer contain the specific information related to a given lesson. Teachers are advised to preview all sites before using them with students.



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For the teacher: Vocabulary cards, copies of the Ohio Constitution, chart paper.

For the students: Copies of the Ohio Constitution, dictionaries, drawing paper, textbooks, wipe-off boards and markers.

Vocabulary:

- democracy
- vote
- law
- citizen
- constitution
- article
- section
- preamble
- amendment
- separation of powers
- judicial
- executive
- legislative

Technology Connections:

- Have students use Ben’s Guide to U.S. Government for Kids to find information on the national government and the U.S. Constitution: <http://bensguide.gpo.gov/index.html>.
- Access state government resources, including the Ohio Constitution, at Ohio.gov: <http://ohio.gov/index.stm>.
- Have students view the Ohio Constitution online while completing their *Graphic Organizer*.

Research Connections:

Marzano, R. et al. *Classroom Instruction that Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2001.

Nonlinguistic representations help students think about and recall knowledge. This includes the following:

- Creating graphic representations (organizers);
- Making physical models;
- Generating mental pictures;
- Drawing pictures and pictographs;
- Engaging in kinesthetic activity.



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General Tips:

- In creating a unit, this lesson would work well with Government indicators 1, 2 and 4, as well as Citizenship Rights and Responsibilities indicators 1 through 4.
- When assigning the sports role play on Day Two, be sure to remind students that skits should not include any rough activity that might cause an injury. To minimize this, role-plays should be done with pantomime, not with real equipment. Assign sports or games in which your students are interested.
- Prepare for Day Four of instruction by cutting out the cards from Attachment D, *Vocabulary Mix*, ahead of time. For sturdier cards, laminate them or glue them onto index cards.
- In order to have all students participate in the “Vocabulary Mix,” the number of cards can be increased or decreased as necessary. Words and definitions students are already familiar with can be eliminated. Words and definitions can be added from student reading of the Ohio Constitution on Day Three.
- The “Vocabulary Mix” activity can be implemented using a variety of methods.
 - Conduct the activity as directed in the instructional procedures, then repeat the game with the vocabulary words being read first and students writing definitions for each word. This can be repeated (without the writing) at a quicker and quicker pace until students can complete the activity in “record” time.
 - Distribute vocabulary cards to students, both the questions and answers, and have students move around the room to find their “partner.”
 - Create five (or more) sets of cards for students to use in cooperative groups. Distribute the sets of cards in envelopes to each group. Have the groups race to see which group can match the vocabulary words with the definitions first.
- When reading the Ohio Constitution, it is not necessary for students to understand the entire passage. Encourage them to focus on the main points, usually within the first sentence or clause of the section.

Attachments:

Attachment A, *Pre-Assessment*

Attachment B, *Graphic Organizer*

Attachment C, *Graphic Organizer Suggested Answers*

Attachment D, *Vocabulary Mix*

Attachment E, *The Purpose of a Constitution*



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Attachment A Pre-Assessment

Name: _____

Directions: Fill in each blank with the word that completes the sentence.

The plan of government for our state is called the Ohio
_____. This plan describes the rules or _____ that all
people should follow. The plan separates the government into three
_____ so that one person or group does not gain too much
_____. The plan also explains that the citizens have the right to
_____ for their government officials. This type of government is
called a _____.



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Attachment B Graphic Organizer

Name: _____

Directions: Look carefully at the Ohio Constitution to complete this graphic organizer. Look for the part of the Constitution listed in the first column. In the second column, explain in your own words what that part of the Constitution says. In the third column, explain what this part of the Constitution does.

Part of the Ohio Constitution	What does it say?	What does it do?
Preamble		
Article I, Section 1		
Article I, Section 6		
Article II, Section 1		
Article III, Section 1		
Article IV, Section 1		
Article V, Section 1		
Article XVII, Section 1		



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Attachment C Graphic Organizer Suggested Answers

Part of the Ohio Constitution	What does it say?	What does it do?
Preamble	<i>The people establish this constitution to secure our freedom and promote the good of all people.</i>	<i>It explains the reasons for the constitution.</i>
Article I, Section 1	<i>All men are free and independent, with rights that cannot be taken away.</i>	<i>It protects citizens' rights.</i>
Article I, Section 6	<i>There will not be slavery or involuntary servants in the state.</i>	<i>It makes slavery and involuntary servitude illegal.</i>
Article II, Section 1	<i>The legislative branch will be called the General Assembly and will be divided into the Senate and the House of Representatives. But the people have the right to propose, adopt and reject laws.</i>	<i>It gives the General Assembly and the people the power to make laws.</i>
Article III, Section 1	<i>The executive branch will have a governor, and lieutenant governor and other officers who will be elected on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November.</i>	<i>It identifies the state's executive officers and states when they will be elected.</i>
Article IV, Section 1	<i>The judicial branch will be made up of the Supreme Court and other lower courts.</i>	<i>It gives the power to decide the meaning of laws to a system of courts and allows other courts to be created by law.</i>
Article V, Section 1	<i>Citizens of the United States who are 18 and state residents must register to be able to vote.</i>	<i>It lists the requirements for voting in Ohio.</i>
Article XVII, Section 1 (elections)	<i>Elections for state and county offices will be on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November on even years, and on odd years we will have elections for all other offices.</i>	<i>It tells us when elections will be held for different kinds of offices.</i>



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Attachment D Vocabulary Mix

1) I am a system of government in which everybody has a say, either directly or through voting for representatives.	What is a democracy?
2) I am a plan of government.	What is a constitution?
3) I am the three parts of our government: the legislative, the executive and the judicial.	What are the three branches of government?
4) I am the part of the government headed by a chief leader, with the power to carry out the laws.	What is the executive branch?
5) I am the law-making part of the government, made up of elected representatives.	What is the legislative branch?
6) I am the part of the government that decides the meaning of the laws.	What is the judicial branch?
7) I am the process of choosing elected representatives.	What is voting?
8) I am the system of dividing the powers and duties of a government into different branches.	What is separation of powers?
9) I am a rule enforced by government that citizens have the responsibility to follow.	What is a law?
10) I am a person born in a country or who chooses to become a member of that country by law.	What is a citizen?
11) I am the opening statement that explains the purpose of a document.	What is a preamble?
12) I am the parts of a constitution.	What are articles and sections?



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Attachment E The Purpose of a Constitution

Name: _____

Directions: Answer the following questions using complete sentences.

1. Describe how a democratic classroom would make a decision.

2. Explain why our state needs a constitution or plan of government.

3. Why do you think the Ohio Constitution begins with the words, “We the People...”?

4. How does the Ohio Constitution limit the power of the government?
