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*American Principles: Introduction to the  
Constitution  
Elementary School Lesson Plans*

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Written for the National Student/Parent Mock Election

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# Overview

In this lesson students create their own class Bill of Rights to make connections between the values and rules of the classroom and the values and laws of government.

## Big Idea

**American Principles**, as articulated in the Charters of Freedom, provide the basis of our democratic society. The shared values and principles within these Charters provide the framework for the rights and responsibilities of American citizens. An inherent struggle between the ideals of democracy and the reality of democracy require shared civic values, understanding and action.

## Essential Questions for Students

- What rules do we follow in the classroom?
- What rules do citizens follow?
- What are founding principles and values?
- Where do our founding American principles come from? What are they?
- Why is it important for our community and our democratic society to share common values and principles?
- What role do we, as citizens, play in sustaining and promoting the values and principles of our democratic society? What role does government play?

## Outcomes

- Students will realize the necessity of shared values and principles.
- Students will work as part of a team.
- Students will develop written and oral communication skills.
- Students will create class Bill of Rights, illustrating or writing their own amendments.
- Students will make connection between class Bill of Rights and Charters of Freedom.
- Students will make connection between shared class values and principles and those within our democratic society.

## Targeted Content Standards

- [McREL Civics Standards](#):
  - What is Government and What Should it Do?
    - Understands the concept of a constitution, the various purposes that constitutions serve, and the conditions that contribute to the establishment and maintenance of constitutional government
  - What are the Basic Values and Principles of American Democracy?
    - Understands the importance of Americans sharing and supporting certain values, beliefs, and principles of American constitutional democracy
- [Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts](#):

- English Language Arts: Speaking & Listening, Comprehension and Collaboration (SL1.1, SL2.1, SL3.1, SL4.1, SL5.1)
- English Language Arts: Writing, Text Types and Purposes, and Range of Writing (W1.2, W2.2, W3.1, W3.10, W4.2, W4.10, W5.10)

## Community Connections

- Research local and/or online organizations that work toward advancing an American principle

## Preparation

- Gather materials for writing, drawing and illustrating.
- Prepare age appropriate excerpts of the Constitution.
- Review Web Resources, specifically:
  - Center for Civic Education Glossary ([http://www.civiced.org/index.php?page=stds\\_glossary](http://www.civiced.org/index.php?page=stds_glossary))
  - Ben’s Guide to U.S. Government for Kids [K-2](#) and [3-5](#)
  - [Schoolhouse Rock! / The Preamble](#)
  - [The National Archives online exhibit on Charters of Freedom](#)

### Concept Vocabulary

- Liberty – freedom
- Tranquility – peace, no fighting
- Justice – fair and reasonable
- Rights – authority to be able to do something
- Shared principles or values – a shared code of conduct, something important

For complete definitions of additional terms relating to the Constitution (e.g. Preamble, amendments, etc.), please refer to the [Center for Civic Education glossary](#).

## Anticipatory Set (1/2 class period)

**Discussion** — Ask students what is *liberty* or *freedom*? What are they free to do as a student or as a child? Brainstorm the concept of rights. What rights do they have as a student, and as a child? Ask students to determine whether or not everyone has the same rights in their class, community, around the world. How might this affect the well-being and happiness of each student? Is it important to respect the rights of others? Discuss.

## Guided Instruction (1/2 class period)

Constitution Show & Tell – Share age-appropriate excerpts of and/or web links to the Constitution. Share key concepts about the Charters of Freedom with students. Make connections between the values and rules in the school and the values and laws of our nation. Key ideas to discuss include:

- The Constitution is a document that was created when our country was formed and is often referred to as “the highest law of the land”.
- The Constitution’s Preamble discusses Liberty, or freedom for Americans. Students may enjoy both the historical nature (circa 1975) and the upbeat and entertaining Schoolhouse Rock! video, Preamble to the Constitution.
- The Bill of Rights, the first 10 Amendments to the Constitution, lists guaranteed rights for Americans.

Share with students that they will create their own class Bill of Rights. What values or principles should their classroom Bill of Rights protect? What laws and shared values need to be in place for students to have a good day at school (freedom, safety, etc.)? Capture student comments on board or overhead.

## **Collaborative Learning (one to two class periods)**

Illustration of Classroom Bill of Rights – In small groups, have students use poster paper to illustrate the principles that they hold important for their classroom community. Have each student group illustrate one principle. Ask older students to write amendments for their selected concept, in the manner of the actual Bill of Rights amendments. After student groups have worked on their principles, compile. If time allows, write a brief Preamble. Publish finished document or post student work somewhere in school for student body and parents to see.

## **Independent Learning (time varies)**

**Journal Writing** — Have students reflect upon their learning. Why are established rights and rules necessary for our class? Our nation?

## **Student Assessment**

Review student Preambles and Bill of Rights. Does student work reflect understanding of key concepts?

## **Extension Activities & Service Learning Opportunities**

- Create a class constitution.
- Promote one of the American principles (e.g. justice) by researching community members in need and helping them.

## **Suggestions for Differentiated Instruction**

- Pair younger students with older students (or with parent volunteers) for collaborative and independent activities.
- Have students play the online treasure hunt “Pirates of the Preamble” [http://www.texaslr.org/PiratePreamble/pirates\\_game.html](http://www.texaslr.org/PiratePreamble/pirates_game.html)
- (3-4) Have students play the [Bill of Rights game](#) where students test their knowledge of the application of the Amendments to real-life situations

- Invite students to research the Constitution on their own, using the suggested websites. Have students create a report to share their learning with class.

## **Family Connection**

- Send an informative letter or email to students' families outlining key concepts of the Bill of Rights students are learning.
- Suggest students ask their family members if they recall the Schoolhouse Rock! video, Preamble to the Constitution. The series' original run lasted from 1973 to 1985, and was later revived with both old and new episodes airing from 1993 to 1999.
- Invite families to make their own Family Preamble and Bill of Rights.
- Ask parents to volunteer for student collaborative activities.
- Share copy of class constitution (if applicable).

## **Lesson Evaluation**

Did students master the stated outcomes? What evidence of learning can you cite? How might you alter lesson for next time to increase effectiveness?