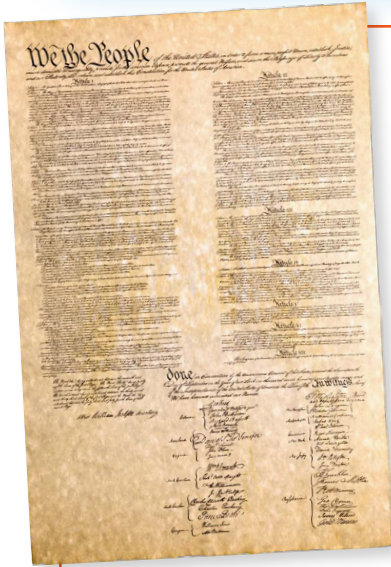


# Content Spotlight: Primary Source Text Analysis



**Britannica**  
Expedition:LEARN!



September 17 is Constitution Day and Citizenship Day, a reminder of the moment in 1787 when the U.S. Constitution was signed. At the heart of that vision is the preamble—a short but powerful statement of the nation’s goals.

Teaching students to analyze and unpack the preamble is more than an exercise in reading history; it’s about connecting with the promises of justice, liberty, and common

good that still shape the nation today. And because interpreting the preamble is a common expectation on standardized assessments, it is both a civic and academic priority. More importantly, when students learn to decipher this primary source, they gain the ability to question, reflect, and recognize their own role in carrying forward the ideals of citizenship.

Check out how Britannica experts teach the featured lesson!

**Expedition: Learn!** is an instructional platform with standards-aligned, interdisciplinary lessons that build content knowledge, reading comprehension, and critical thinking skills. Explore how our experts utilize *The Preamble of the U.S. Constitution* lesson to help students deconstruct, explain, and summarize complex primary source texts.

GRADES 6-8



The Preamble of the  
U.S. Constitution

5 Questions

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## Primary Source Text Analysis

**Instructions:** Begin by identifying key information about the source, such as the title, author, audience, purpose, and bias. Then deconstruct the primary source text into sections and define unfamiliar words by annotating the primary source text. Then explain the meaning in your own words. Finally, summarize the meaning of the primary source text.

Primary Source Text	Meaning
We the People of the United States	power and authority of the government come from the people who live in the U.S.
in Order to form a more perfect Union,	to create a better and stronger country
establish Justice,	to create a fair and legal system
insure domestic Tranquility,	to keep peace within the country
provide for the common defence,	to protect the country from outside threats
promote the general Welfare,	to support the well-being of all citizens
secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity,	to protect our freedom at the time and for future generations
do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America	officially order the creation of the Constitution

### Summary

The preamble states that power and authority of the U.S. government come from its citizens, who established the U.S. Constitution to build a stronger nation, provide fair laws, maintain peace, defend against threats, ensure citizens' well-being, and preserve liberty for generations to come. The framers made the U.S. Constitution the nation's official governing document.

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## In Practice

Use our **Primary Source Text Analysis graphic organizer** to help students deconstruct, explain, and summarize complex primary source texts.

**Check out how experts use the graphic organizer in the classroom guide and try it out with some excerpts from our favorite primary sources!**

- The Preamble to the Declaration of Independence (1776)
- The Fourteenth Amendment (1868)
- The Atlanta Compromise speech by Booker T. Washington (1895)
- The Suppressed Speech by Wamsutta (Frank James) (1970)
- Then Came the War speech by Yuri Kochiyama (1991)

Dig in on p. 4!

Learn more:  
[britannicaeducation.com/expedition-learn](http://britannicaeducation.com/expedition-learn)



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# Classroom Guide

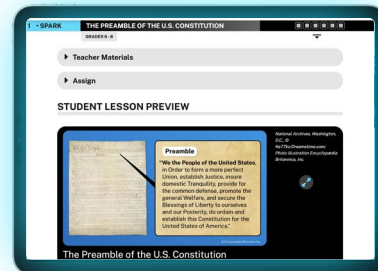
## The Preamble of the U.S. Constitution



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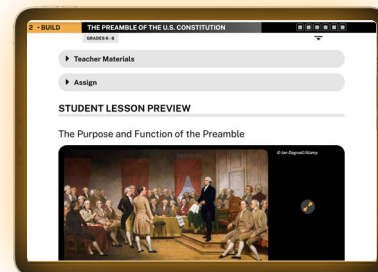
### Spark

- Distribute the Teach Britannica **Mini Lesson Note Catcher**.
- Have students look at the **Spark** image and answer the question, including notes or ideas in their Mini Lesson Note Catcher.
- Invite a few students to share answers aloud.
- Reinforce the historical context: many governments at the time were monarchies; these words shifted authority to ordinary citizens and set up the foundation of democracy in the U.S.



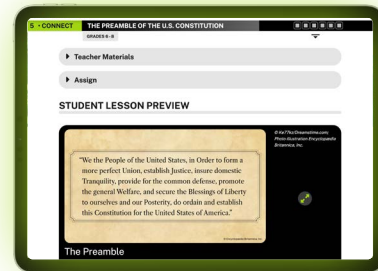
### Build

- For **Build** page 2, initiate a shared reading strategy by having students read the article out loud, taking turns section by section. Pause after each section to discuss the main point. Invite students to jot down key ideas and terms in their Mini Lesson Note Catchers.
- Complete the assessment item as a class and review the correct choices.
- For Build page 3, use the Teach Britannica **Jigsaw instructional strategy** using the first four lines of the preamble. Remind students to record notes in their Mini Lesson Note Catchers. Invite students to answer the assessment question independently. Use the same Jigsaw instructional strategy on Build page 4 using the final four lines of the preamble. Review the correct choices for the assessment item after students answer it independently.



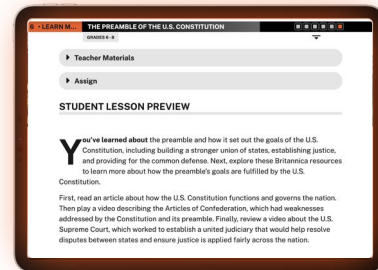
### Connect

- Read the short answer assessment question prompt as a group.
- Distribute the **Primary Source Text Analysis** graphic organizer. Students will use it as a pre-writing tool to outline their thinking and use the Summary to answer the short-answer assessment question.
- Read the instructions and fill out the Primary Source Text column with the eight lines of the preamble. Then, model how to complete the Meaning column using the first line of the preamble (see teacher sample). Students can use their Mini Lesson Note Catcher to complete the rest of the graphic organizer as needed.



### Learn More

- After students submit their short answer assessment responses, lead a short class discussion connecting the preamble's goals to the role of amendments.
- Invite students to consider how amendments build on, extend, or fulfill the goals of the preamble over time. For example, the Fifteenth and Nineteenth Amendments strengthened the idea of "we the people" or "secure the blessings of liberty" by expanding voting rights to Black men and to women.



GRADES 6 - 8



The Preamble of the  
U.S. Constitution

5 Questions

Keep the exploration going!  
Discover these resources and  
more in Expedition: Learn! on  
Teach Britannica.





## Illustrate the Preamble

- Students choose one line or phrase from the preamble (such as “establish justice” or “promote the general welfare”). They will design individual posters that visually depict the meaning of each key term in the preamble.
- After completing the posters, invite students to participate in a gallery walk to view each other’s work and leave feedback about the interpretations.
- To build on this activity, students can collaborate to create a large mural or collective art piece that incorporates all of their posters into a single representation of the preamble, illustrating how each individual concept contributes to the whole.

## Create a Class Preamble

- Assign or allow each group to choose a different goal from the U.S. preamble (e.g., justice, peace, defense).
- Groups will rewrite their assigned goal in their own words, connecting it to classroom life (e.g., “establish justice” → “make rules that are fair for everyone in our class”).
- After drafting their line, put all the group lines together in the same order as the U.S. preamble to create one whole “Class Preamble.”
- Display the completed class preamble in the classroom as a reminder of shared goals. Revisit their class preamble at the end of the school year to reflect on how well students met their goals and whether they would make any amendments based on their experiences.

## You Be the Justice

- Assign each group a specific phrase from the preamble to act out silently for the class. After each performance, the rest of the class can guess which phrase is being represented.
- Once the phrase is identified, ask the group to explain how they interpreted the meaning of that phrase in their charade. Rotate until each phrase of the preamble has been performed.
- After the charades, encourage students to reflect on how they might visually represent the entire preamble in a short play or skit, incorporating all of its goals. Students can work in groups to write and perform their skits, with an emphasis on creative interpretations.

## Continue the Expedition with these related lessons!

GRADES 6 - 8



Ideas and Grievances in the Declaration of...

10 Questions

GRADES 6 - 8



Crafting the Constitution

10 Questions

GRADES 6 - 8



The Bill of Rights: Safeguarding...

10 Questions

GRADES 6 - 8



The Emancipation Proclamation

10 Questions

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## Primary Source Text Analysis

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Primary Source Text	Meaning

### Summary



Name:

Date:

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do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America	officially order the creation of the Constitution

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