



**We the People Programs Rhode Island  
Literacy Integration  
*A More Perfect Union: The Story of Our Constitution*  
by Betsy and Giulio Maestro**



This lesson can be used to celebrate National Constitution Day and as a supplement to the We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution curriculum. Activities are integrated across the reading, writing, mathematics, and social studies curricula. Teachers can choose to do all of the activities or select them individually for inclusion.

**Expectations:**

- Students will understand the factors that led to the convening of the Constitutional Convention of 1787.
- Students will identify the key leaders who attended the Constitutional Convention of 1787.
- Students will compare and contrast the Virginia Plan and the New Jersey Plan.
- Students will understand the significance of the Connecticut Compromise (Great Compromise) and explain how it exists in our government today.
- Students will be able to discuss why some delegates signed the Constitution and others did not.
- Students will explain the ratification process for the new Constitution.
- Students will understand the reasons which led to the addition of the Bill of Rights.

**Book Summary:** Describes how the United States Constitution was drafted and ratified.

**Essential Questions:**

- Why did the Continental Congress, established as part of the Articles of Confederation, call for a Convention in Philadelphia in 1787?
- Who attended Philadelphia Convention?
- What were the key issues faced by the delegates attending the Convention?
- How did the delegates to the Philadelphia Convention resolve the conflict about representation in Congress?

**Activities:**

**Teachers Note:** Before the lesson the teacher should read *A More Perfect Union: The Story of Our Constitution* by Betsy and Giulio Maestro to:

- ✓ Become familiar with the text,
- ✓ Choose vocabulary words to be examined,

- ✓ Identify where you will stop and ask for predictions,
- ✓ Determine background knowledge required to fully understand the story,
- ✓ Develop questions for the read aloud, and
- ✓ Anticipate student responses.

(Suggested vocabulary: Convention, Delegate, Declaration of Independence, Congress, Constitution, Representative, Compromise, Draft, Ratify, Amendment)

**Activate Prior Knowledge:** Conduct an activity to activate prior knowledge learned in Lessons 8 and 9 of *We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution, Level 1* and Unit Three of *We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution, Level 2*.

**Setting the Stage:** Lead the students through a guided imagery activity to help students create mental images of the Constitutional Convention of 1787 before reading ***A More Perfect Union: The Story of Our Constitution***. A sample guided imagery activity is included in this lesson plan (See Lesson Plan Activities).

**Reading:** Conduct an interactive read-aloud of ***A More Perfect Union: The Story of Our Constitution*** stopping frequently to clarify what is happening in the story and asking students to make predictions, discuss new vocabulary, and make personal connections. Monitor reading comprehension by asking clarifying questions, restating facts and details in the text, and identifying cause and effect relationships. Questions might include: Why did the Continental Congress call for the convention in Philadelphia? Who were some of the important people attending the convention? Why do you think George Washington was elected to lead the convention? Why do you think the delegates decided to keep events of the convention secret? What issue caused the most argument at the convention? What was the Great Compromise?

**Research: Who's Who at the Convention?** Students conduct research on the delegates to the Constitutional Convention to determine what experience and special talents they brought to the assembly. Investigation focuses on the delegates age at the time of the convention, occupation, education, previous political experience, committee assignment, and special interest. Students write a brief biography on two or more of the delegates. Biographies can be posted around the classroom or bound together to create a collective biography. Sources of information for this activity include World Book Online at AskRI.org; <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/convention/delegates/>; <http://www.law.umkc.edu>; <http://www.archives.gov>; *The Founders : the 39 Stories Behind the U.S. Constitution* by Dennis Fradin

**Social Studies:** The delegates to the Constitutional Convention of 1787 decided that they needed to form a new government. Representatives from large states submitted a proposal called the Virginia Plan. Delegates from smaller states disagreed and submitted a proposal called the New Jersey Plan. Have students use various resources to gather information about each plan and complete the graphic organizer to show how the delegates settled their disagreements through compromise. Give each student a copy of the “Great Compromise” graphic organizer activity found in this lesson plan. *The We the People: the Citizen & the Constitution* middle school text has an excellent explanation of the Virginia and New Jersey Plans on pages 116-119. Wikipedia.org

has a good article on both plans with excellent cross references and digital photographs of the primary documents ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virginia\\_Plan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virginia_Plan)).

**Writing:** After the students have completed the “Great Compromise” activity divide the students into four groups. Group one will write a statement defending the ideas proposed in the Virginia Plan. Group two will write a statement defending the ideas proposed in the New Jersey Plan. Group three will write a statement explaining the key points of the Great Compromise and how it solved the problem of state representation in the new government. Group four will write a statement explaining how the compromise is evident in our government today. Arrange the class into the four groups with one student seated at the front of the class acting as George Washington, the convention leader. Each group will present their statements to the class through an oral presentation.

**Map Skills: (1)** Distribute the blank map of “The 13 British Colonies” and ask students to label the map with the names of each of the colonies and important cities, such as Boston (MA), New York (NY), Philadelphia (PA), Savannah (GA), Charleston (SC), Williamsburg (VA), New Haven (CT), Providence (RI), Portsmouth (NH), Annapolis (MD), Trenton (NJ), New Bern (NC). **(2)** Conduct a lesson on using the map scale to measure distance and the compass rose to identify direction. Have students use a ruler to measure the scale in miles (2 inches = 400 miles). Ask students to measure the distance between cities on the map. Example: Measure the distance between Williamsburg and Philadelphia ( 1 inch = 200 miles). Explain how each 1/2 inch = 100 miles, 1/4 inch = 50 miles, etc. Continue the activity with students measuring the distance between each of the cities on the map and Philadelphia. Create a chart of the results for use with the math activity.

**Mathematics:** Through the math activity students will calculate how long it would take for a delegate to travel to Philadelphia by horseback or carriage in 1787. Students will then compare these results with travel by train, car, and airplane today. Remind students that delegates would have to stop frequently and could travel only for a maximum number of hours each day. Students will begin by researching the miles per hour (mph) for each form of travel or use the data below. Students will present the results of their calculations by making a bar graph.

Travel by horseback in Colonial America was about 15 miles per hour.

Travel by carriage in Colonial America was about 10 miles per hour.

Travel by train in 1893 was about 100 miles per hour.

Travel by automobile today averages about 60 miles per hour.

Travel by airplane today is an average of 500 miles per hour.

## Lesson Plan Activities

### 1. Setting the Stage: Guided Imagery and Historical Perspective

**Lesson Topic: Guided Imagery & Constitutional Convention****Subjects: Social Studies, Language Arts****Materials:**

- Guided Imagery of the Constitutional Convention
- *A More Perfect Union: The Story of Our Constitution* By Betsy and Giulio Maestro

**Procedures:**

- The teacher will ask the students to participate in an activity that will allow them to pretend they were there when the Constitution was written.
- The students will close their eyes while the teacher reads the Guided Imagery activity about the Constitutional Convention.
- After the teacher finishes reading, he/she will ask the students what they thought about the atmosphere of the convention, what the people looked like, how they came to decisions, etc.
- The teacher will then begin reading *A More Perfect Union: The Story of Our Constitution* to the students, stopping to point out important names, dates and places. The teacher will read the first 21 pages and have the students finish reading the book in small groups.
- After reading, the teacher will ask the students various questions to check for understanding.

**Assessment:**

- The students will participate in the Guided Imagery activity and offer comments about the experience.
- The students will be asked to finish reading *A More Perfect Union* in small groups.
- The students will also be required to answer various questions about the reading.

**GUIDED IMAGERY**

Sit comfortably and relax. Close your eyes. Take a deep breath and exhale slowly. Allow yourself to travel back in time to Philadelphia in 1787.

See yourself as one of the 55 delegates who have just arrived at Independence Hall. Your task over the next few months is to develop and adopt a new plan of government for the United States of America.

As you enter the stately chamber, hear the wooden floors creak with each step that you take. Notice the tall ceilings and the high windows on either side of the room and the low railing across the back. Smell the musty odor caused by the hot, humid weather.

As you take your place at one of the round tables covered with a rich green cloth, observe the glass ink well with the quill pen sitting on the table. See the candles in the brass holders on the wall. Look around at the other delegates dressed in knee britches with silver buckles, silk stockings, and long waistcoats. Notice that several are wearing carefully powdered wigs.

Feel the excitement in the air as the chairman of the convention, General George Washington, calls for order. What a great leader! Everyone respects him so.

In the weeks and months that follow, you and your colleagues set about the business of writing a new constitution. What an awesome task you face.

Listen to the other delegates argue and shout and defend their positions. Everyone feels so strongly about their beliefs.

See yourself standing up and speaking for the people of your state. You owe it to them to represent them well.

Hear the applause from the other delegates as you make some favorable suggestions. They like your ideas, and you feel proud.

Return to the hall day after day as the debaters eventually turn to compromise to settle their differences. What a long and tedious process, but you will not give up. There's too much at stake.

Notice how weary and tired the delegates are getting. You are, too. It's growing harder to keep concentrating on the matters at hand and to keep the overall good of the country in mind.

It's September 17, 1787; after months of work, the delegates are showing their approval for the new constitution by signing their names to the document. One by one...

Now it's your turn as you read again the first few words, "We the People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union..." See yourself signing your name... boldly! Feel your body swell with pride.

You are smiling, standing up tall and straight! See the relief and joy and pride on the faces around you.

You take a deep breath as you walk out. You are shaking hands, congratulating delegates as you are leaving Constitution Hall. What a great day!

See yourself returning to this classroom, full of energy, and ready to work with the concepts surrounding this great document.

You may now open your eyes.

Source: [www.coreknowledge.org/CKproto2/resrcs/lessons/02\\_4\\_Constitution.pdf](http://www.coreknowledge.org/CKproto2/resrcs/lessons/02_4_Constitution.pdf)

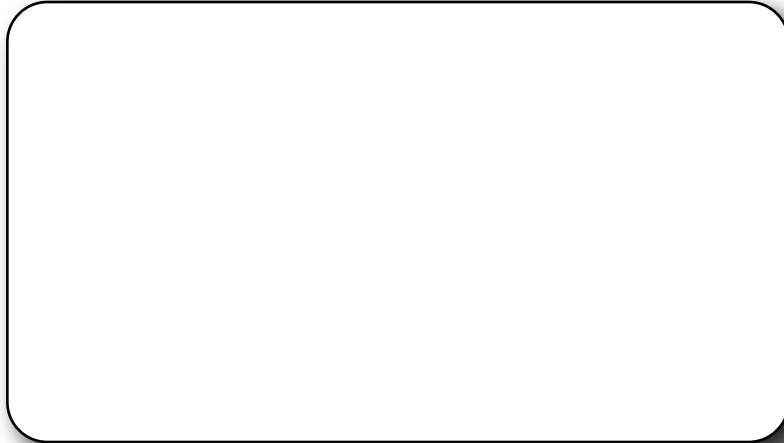
Source: <http://www.lessonplanspage.com/SSLAArt2WeekUSConstitutionTreeThemedUnit4.htm>

## 2. Social Studies Graphic Organizer

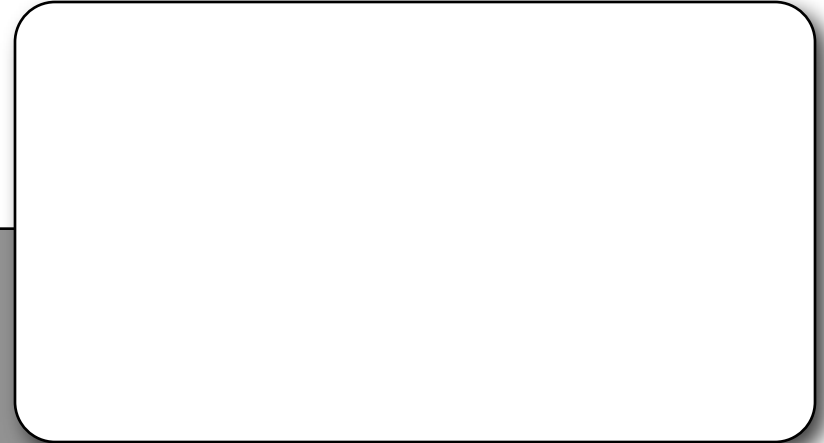
### The Great Compromise

Fill in the main points of each plan and then show how each plan resulted in the Great Compromise.

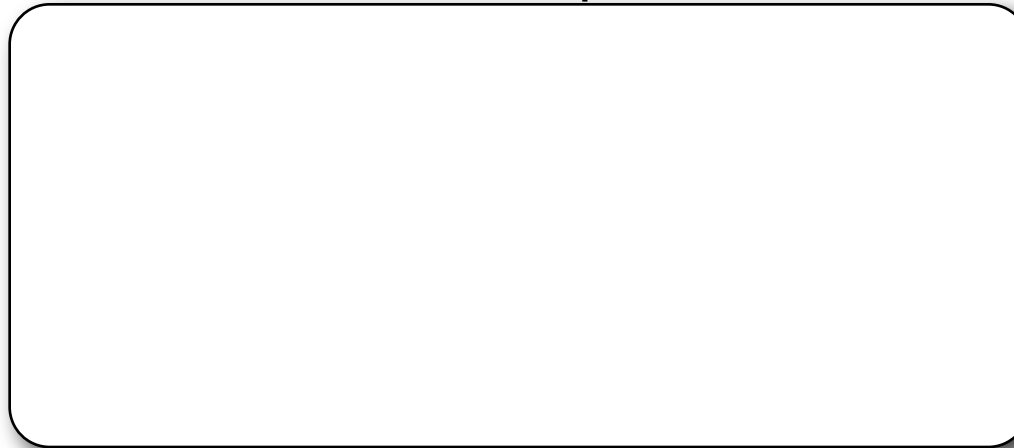
#### Virginia Plan



#### New Jersey Plan



#### The Great Compromise



Holt American Anthem: Quick Fact Transparencies for Review. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, p. 13.

3. Map Skills: To print out copies of the maps below go to <http://www.eduplace.com/ss/maps/historical.html>

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

### The 13 British Colonies



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## Materials Needed

- Multiple copies of ***A More Perfect Union: The Story of Our Constitution*** by Betsy and Giulio Maestro published by Harper Collins, c. 1987.
- Classroom set of ***We The People: The Citizen and the Constitution***, Level 1 or Level 2.
- Classroom set of The Great Compromise graphic organizer.
- Classroom set of the map of the 13 Colonies.
- Classroom set of rulers for the map activity
- Computer access to the Internet and World Book Online.

## Standards

### International Reading Association / National Council of Teachers of English

1. Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

8. Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

**Note: Add your state or local English language arts standards and benchmarks here.**

### **National Council for the Social Studies**

II. Time, Continuity, and Change: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ways human beings view themselves over time.

III. People, Places, and Environments: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of people, places, and environments.

IV. Individual Development and Identity: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of individual development and identity.

V. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions.

VI. Power, Authority, and Governance: Social studies programs should include experience that provide for the study of how people create and change structures of power, authority, and governance.

X. Civic Ideals and Practices: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ideals, principals, and practices of citizenship in a democratic republic.

**Note: Add your state or local social studies standards and benchmarks here.**

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