

SHHH! WE'RE WRITING THE CONSTITUTION

Shhh! We're Writing the Constitution
by Jean Fritz, illustrated by Tomie DePaola
(Putnam)

Themes: American History

Grade Level: Grades 4-7

Running Time: 31 minutes, iconographic

Summary

Shhh! We're Writing the Constitution is the story of how our Constitution was created. In 1786 delegates were sent to Philadelphia to try and create an ordered system of government. A system was developed based on the Virginia plan's three branches of government.

The story outlines the personalities of people including George Washington, James Madison, and Benjamin Franklin who were instrumental in creating this important document. The story also tells why people were opposed to the formation of a "national" government and the necessity for a "Bill of Rights" outlining the freedoms of the nation's people.

Objectives

- Children will learn the need for a Constitution
- Children will explore the creation of the Constitution
- Children will learn about important individuals whose aims were to develop an ordered system of government.

Before Viewing Activities

Share the book Shh! We're Writing the Constitution with children.

Then ask:

Why did the thirteen states need a Constitution?
Why do you think so many people were opposed to the word "national"?

Talk about the the main branches of government and the responsibilities of each. Then have children create a poster, drawing symbols for each branch and briefly outlining the workings of each branch.

Discuss what life in our country might be like without a set of rules or guidelines to follow. Ask: What problems might arise without rules? What could people do to maintain order? Suggest several hypothetical situations where the freedoms of two groups of people cause conflict. Have children divide into two teams, each representing a different side of the conflict so that each team feels satisfied.

After Viewing Activities

Have children use the school library to research the Bill of Rights. Then have children think about a classroom Bill of Rights. Ask: What kinds of freedoms do you think everyone in our classroom should have? What kind of freedoms might get in the way of learning and getting along? Provide markers and posterboard and have children work together to write a classroom Bill of Rights. As children work, emphasize the ways people work together to derive a consensus on various issues. Post the "Bill of Rights" on a classroom wall.

Have children divide into two groups. One group will pretend to be federalists, the other anti-federalists. Encourage each group to give arguments as to why they are in agreement, or opposed to the ratification of the Constitution.

Ask children to research the ten most recent Presidents of the United States. Then have children share the information they collected about the Presidents. As children discuss these men and their presidencies, include in the discussion: impeachment, one term vs. two term presidencies and political philosophies. Finally, have children decide who they find to have been the most effective president and the reasons for their choices.

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