

## Gerald R. Ford Becomes Our Nation's 38<sup>th</sup> President: The 25<sup>th</sup> Amendment at Work



### Lesson Objectives:

Students will learn how the Constitution guides our country's lawmakers and how the 25<sup>th</sup> Amendment was instrumental in Gerald R. Ford becoming the 38<sup>th</sup> President.

**Grade Level:** 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>

### Learning Standards Addressed:

First Grade	Social Studies	1-H2.0.7	Identify the events or people celebrated during United States national holidays and why we celebrate them
		1-C1.0.1	Identify some reasons for rules in school
	Common Core Reading Standards	Determine the meaning of words and phrases	
	Common Core Writing Standards	Write an opinion piece, introduce topic, supply a reason for opinion	
Second Grade	Social Studies	2-H2.0.3	Use an example to describe the role of the individual of history
		2-C1.0.1	Explain why people form governments
	Common Core Reading Standards	Determine the meaning of words and phrases Describe the connection between a series of historical events	
	Common Core Writing Standards	Write an opinion piece, introduce topic, supply a reason for opinion	

### Terms to Know and Identify:

(Vocabulary flashcards provided)

Constitution	Law
Government	President
Vice-President	25 <sup>th</sup> Amendment

### Materials Needed:

- Adapted “Pass the Eraser” activity guide (Included)
- An eraser any other easily passable object
- The Constitution and Gerald R. Ford Images Kit
- Vocabulary Flashcards (Included )
- The Constitution KWL worksheet (Included)
- “Who Will be Our Leader?” writing prompt and paper (included)
- Optional: *Gerald R Ford: A Test of Character*, available at <http://www.nationalgeographic.org/education/gerald-r-ford/>

### Procedure:

#### Part One (45 minutes)

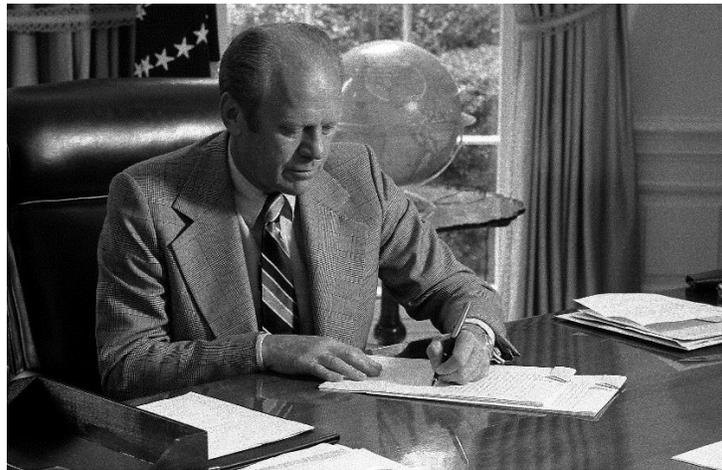
1. Tell students that today you will begin learning a little bit about the U.S. Constitution. Give each student a copy of the KWL chart (included in lesson). Ask students to brainstorm and then list the things they already *know* about the Constitution (in the K column), as well as things that they *want* to know or *wonder* about the Constitution (in the W column). Collect charts or ask students to store them, as they will fill out the last column after finishing the lesson.
2. Ask the students these questions: “Do you like having rules?”, “Do you think we need rules?”, and “Why are rules important?” Tell the class that you will be playing a game to learn a little bit about having rules. As a group, complete the adapted “Pass the Eraser” activity. (Included in this lesson)
3. Following the activity, ask students how the activity made them feel. Prompt students to explain why they felt that way. Use this as a jumping off point to brainstorm about the importance of rules. Have students consider what rules they have to follow at home, at school, and in their neighborhoods and what would happen if there were no rules to follow.
4. After establishing the need for rules in a community, explain that the Constitution is a set of rules for running the United States:

The Constitution is a set of laws by which our government is run. Some of these laws are called *Amendments*, which means that they were added to the Constitution after it was written. One of these, the 25<sup>th</sup> Amendment, is very important to ensuring that the country **always** has a leader and we will learn more about it in our lesson.

You may choose to project an image of the Constitution. See the *Constitution and Gerald R. Ford Images Kit*.

5. Place students into small groups or with a partner. They will engage in a *who, what, where, when, why, and how* activity by thinking about and responding to several questions. Ask the students to discuss the following questions:

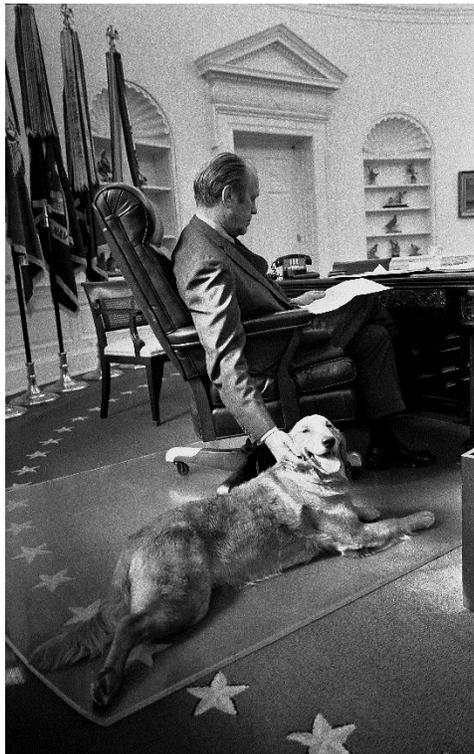
- a. The 25<sup>th</sup> Amendment was created so that we would know what to do if we suddenly needed a new president. What would happen in our school if we suddenly needed a new leader? Imagine that our school principal is suddenly unable to lead the school. Is there already a plan for what would happen next?
  - b. If not, **how** would the school decide who should become the principal in this case and **when** and **where** should this take place? (Example: immediately, within a month, the following school year; at a school board meeting, at a school assembly, in the school office, etc.)
  - c. **Who** do you think would be the best person to take his/her place?
  - d. **What** character traits would you look for when seeking a new leader? Would you want them to be honest? Trustworthy? Respectful? Tell **why** you chose the person you did.
6. After discussing these questions in groups or with partners, students should work independently to respond to this writing prompt: *“Imagine your school Principal has been offered a job in the White House...and starts NEXT WEEK! You have been chosen to decide who will be the next leader of the school.”* Use the included writing paper to have students write who they would choose and why.



### Part Two (45 minutes)

1. Remind students what they have learned about the Constitution and the Amendments. Ask them to reflect on their conversations about what they would do if their principal could no longer lead the school. Explain that the goal of the 25<sup>th</sup> Amendment is to have a plan regarding who will be the new President if the current President cannot fulfill his or her duties. The 25<sup>th</sup> Amendment says that the Vice-President should take over the President's job the minute a President finds him or herself unable to do so. Emphasize that this ensures there is always a leader for the United States to guide the nation. You may want to have students give one or two reasons it is important that we always have a president.
2. Tell the class that the 25<sup>th</sup> Amendment has only been used twice in history – and both times it involved a man named Gerald Ford. Tell students that usually when someone becomes president, he or she has run for that position and was elected by the people. However, there was a time in our country where both the Vice President and the President could not do their jobs – who would lead us? The 25<sup>th</sup> Amendment came to the rescue and allowed Gerald Ford to become both the Vice President and then President, without ever being elected!

3. Tell students that when the Vice President at the time had to leave office, the President could select someone to take his place. How would he decide whom to choose? Gerald Ford was selected for this important responsibility because of the reputation he had built for himself of having good character and being trustworthy.
4. Project photos from the *Constitution and Gerald R. Ford Images Kit*. Have students read the captions to find information about Gerald R. Ford. Use the photos and captions to highlight Ford's character traits: hard-working, determined, honest, courageous, etc.  
You may also choose to show a clip from *Gerald R. Ford: A Test of Character*. While the film is appropriate for older students, playing up to the 9:02 mark gives students some background information.  
<http://www.nationalgeographic.org/education/gerald-r-ford/>
5. Ask students to complete their KWL charts now by listing the things they learned about the Constitution. You may also encourage them to look back at the first two columns. Were they able to answer some of the questions they had about the Constitution in the W column? If not, how can they find those answers?
6. Optional additional assessment piece: Ask students to reflect on the character traits that Ford displayed. What character traits do the students have that make them good leaders? Ask them to imagine they are running for president and create a campaign poster for themselves.
7. Optional additional assessment piece: Have students work in groups to create a set of rules for a "Classroom Constitution".



This lesson was created by the education staff at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Foundation. Additional resources as well as program information are available at [devoslearningcenter.org](http://devoslearningcenter.org).

## **Constitution**

A set of rules that guides how the United States works

## **Government**

A system of rules for living in a nation, as well as the people that make and uphold the laws

## **President**

The head of the United States government; he or she has many powers and responsibilities

## **Vice-President**

The Vice-President becomes President if the current President cannot fulfill his or her duties

## **25th Amendment**

A law in the constitution that says what will happen if the President or Vice President cannot fulfill his or her duties

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

# THE CONSTITUTION

**K**  
NOW

What do I know about the United States  
Constitution?

**W**  
ONDER

What do I wonder about the United States  
Constitution?

**L**  
EARNED

What did I learn about the United States  
Constitution?



## Pass the Eraser Activity Guide

Adapted from: 26 Law Day 2015 Planning Guide © 2015 American Bar Association  
Playing by the Rules

Grades: K–5

Time: 10 minutes

Materials Needed: “Passable” object (e.g., eraser, ball, stuffed animal, beanbag) to allow students to pass back and forth during the game

This is a modern adaptation of a classic law-related education game known as the “Eraser Game.” This game allows students to actively think about the importance of rules in the classroom or in a community setting and what makes rules fair and legitimate. Students reflect on their ability to shape rules and then apply these concepts to laws in society.

### Procedure

1. Tell students that they will play a game. Do not say anything else, and do not give them any rules. Ask them to form two lines. Note: The students will probably look confused and ask you, “How do you play it?” or “What are we supposed to do?”
2. Tell the first person in each line to begin the game. Explain that the person at the front of each line should pass the object to the person behind him or her, and the first line to get their eraser to the back of the line wins. Do not state or enforce any rules. For example, if one student tosses the eraser to the back of the line, or students skip others to get to the back of the line, do not correct them.
3. After the object has been passed to a couple of students, interrupt the game and declare a new rule such as, “Oh wait, you are supposed to pass with your eyes closed. Let’s start the game over and follow these new directions.”
4. After a minute or so, interrupt again with another rule change like, “Actually, you are supposed to pass the eraser with your left hand.” Once again, start the game from the beginning. Continue to periodically interrupt the game with new “rules,” making the game start over with each new direction.
5. Continue the pattern of changing directions and restarting the game until students begin to seem annoyed, exasperated, or ask for clarification of the rules. Once students begin to express dissatisfaction with the process of the game, end the game.

## Instructor Background

*The following content is provided as teacher background for the lesson:*

### **The Constitution**

A constitution is a set of fundamental customs, traditions, rules, and laws that set forth the basic way a government is organized and operated. Most constitutions are in writing, some are partly written and partly unwritten, and some are not written at all.

By this definition of a constitution, nearly every nation has a constitution. Good governments and bad governments have constitutions. Some of the worst governments have constitutions that include lists of the basic rights of their citizens. A list of rights does not mean that the citizens actually enjoy those rights.

The U.S. Constitution was written at a convention held in Philadelphia in 1787. Many political leaders, including Alexander Hamilton and James Madison, were dissatisfied with the government under the Articles of Confederation. They claimed the government was inadequate for meeting the problems of the United States. A number of prominent leaders suggested holding a meeting of representatives of all the states. This idea of holding a special meeting, or convention, to discuss constitutional changes, instead of using the legislature, was an American invention. Most of the early state constitutions had been written by state legislatures. In 1780, Massachusetts became the first state to hold a constitutional convention. By 1786, Madison and other leaders decided that if a convention could be used successfully in a state, it was worth trying at the national level. In 1786, a meeting to discuss commercial problems was held in Annapolis, Maryland. Only five states sent representatives. Disappointed at the low turnout, Hamilton, Madison, and others wrote a report asking Congress to call a meeting in Philadelphia to suggest ways to change the Articles of Confederation to strengthen the national government. Congress did so after a delay of several months. Delegates to the Philadelphia Convention were authorized only to propose amendments to the Articles, not to develop an entirely new constitution, which is exactly what they did.

-Center for Civic Education. (2008). "Constitution Day Across the Country." *Constitutionday.civiced.org*.

### **The 25<sup>th</sup> Amendment**

For the purposes of this lesson, the 25<sup>th</sup> Amendment was passed to establish an order of succession should a standing President die, be removed, or resign from office. It also accounts for a temporary inability for the President to perform his duties. The 25<sup>th</sup> Amendment also sets up a system in which a President can nominate a Vice Presidential candidate should the original Vice President become unfit for the position.

It was ratified in 1967, and was inspired in part by the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Although there was a precedent for Vice Presidents becoming President upon the inability of their predecessor to maintain the position, the constitutional language was vague.