

American Government Preamble to the United States Constitution

“We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”

The words written in italics above are the **preamble**¹ to the Constitution of the United States. The Constitution is the document that defines America’s democracy. It sets forth the nation’s laws. It also spells out the rights and liberties of the American people.

The United States Constitution’s preamble explains why the Constitution was written. The first three words are, “We the People.” At the time, these words were **revolutionary**.² Before the United States was established, there were 13 colonies. They were part of England, and their ruler was the king of England. The colonists had no say in the British government over what happened to them.

When America’s founding fathers established the country’s government, they wanted the citizens of the United States to have a say. They wanted the government to protect the people’s rights. They wanted the Constitution to establish a democracy. In a democracy, the people elect, or vote for, the people they want to run their government. The government’s power comes from the people. The government cannot exist without the **consent**³ of the **majority**⁴ of its people. If the government fails to protect the people, then the people can use their voting power to elect new people to run the government.

What should the government do for the people? The preamble says that the government should provide justice, or fairness. It should ensure tranquility, or

¹ **preamble** – introduction to a speech or piece of writing

² **revolutionary** – bringing or causing great changes

³ **consent** – agreement, permission, or approval

⁴ **majority** – more than half of a group of people or things

peace, by working to solve problems within the country when they arise. The government should also defend the country when necessary. It should care for the general well-being of the people. Finally, it should provide liberty for all.

The Constitution – with its many democratic goals and **methods**⁵ to reach them – has stood the test of time. It was written in 1787. More than 200 years later, this document still works for the people of the United States.

⁵ **methods** – ways of doing something

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What is the most basic purpose of the Constitution?
 - a. to declare independence from England
 - b. to establish a monarchy
 - c. to set forth the nation's laws
 - d. to declare war on other countries

2. The author describes how the American colonies were ruled by England in order to
 - a. explain why the American colonists wanted a government just like England's.
 - b. provide background information about how Americans used to be governed.
 - c. illustrate why American colonies wanted to take over England.
 - d. show how England helped the Americans in writing their own Constitution.

3. Which of these statements best explains how citizens have the power to make sure the principles of the Constitution are followed?
 - a. Citizens can elect new people to the government if the people running the government do not uphold the Constitution.
 - b. Citizens create a new Constitution every few years to make sure that government reflects their values.
 - c. The government cannot take any actions unless the citizens specifically give their consent.
 - d. The Constitution forbids the government from having any power so that only the citizens have any power.

4. Read the following sentence: "It should ensure tranquility, or peace, by working to solve problems within the country when they arise."

The word **arise** means

- a. get stronger
- b. disappear
- c. go to war
- d. start happening

5. This passage is mainly about

- a. why the Constitution was written.
- b. why the United States should be a part of England.
- c. why a king should rule over the United States.
- d. why a monarchy is better than a democracy.

6. What is the purpose of the preamble to the Constitution?

7. Why might the author have stated that the Constitution “has stood the test of time”?

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.

The American people wanted a democratic government, _____ they wrote a constitution that says the power comes from the people.

- a. yet
- b. earlier
- c. although
- d. so

9. Read the following sentence.

The Constitution was written in 1787 in order to establish a new American government.

Answer the questions below based on the information provided in the sentence you just read. One of the questions has already been answered for you.

1. What? The Constitution

2. (was) What? _____

3. When? _____

4. Why? _____

10. **Vocabulary Word:** revolutionary: causing great changes in the way something is done or made.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: _____
