By BETTY DEBNAM

You have something in common with all these U.S. citizens … and millions of others who are alive today or who have lived in the past.

Famous people…

Kids just like you…

Our Constitution

The Constitution is the supreme law of the land. It is a set of basic laws organizing, granting and limiting the powers of our government. It is something that we all share.

Basic facts

• It was created in Philadelphia…
• during the summer of 1787…
• in secret…
• in 87 days.
• It has 39 signers…
• and is made up of a preamble, seven articles, and 27 amendments added later.

The Constitution is on display at the National Archives building in Washington, D.C. An archives is a place where important documents are preserved.

Famous people in Row 1 (left to right): George Washington, Laura Bush, Martin Luther King Jr., Eleanor Roosevelt, astronaut Eileen Collins, Abraham Lincoln, Oprah Winfrey.

This is the first in a nine-part monthly series. We thank the staff of the National Archives, and Lee Ann Potter, director of education and volunteer programs, for their help.

Site to see: www.archives.gov
Would You Like to See the Real Thing?

A mother and her daughter examine the original Constitution in the Rotunda, a huge room in the National Archives.

Some of the million people who come to see the original Constitution every year sign a guest book and make comments. Here are a few:

“I like the Constitution. I am impressed that it is still around.” — Anonymous

“We didn’t realize they used such big paper.” — Amanda from New York

“Kudos to the Founding Fathers for being so awesome.” — Anonymous

“When we saw the phrase, ‘We the people’ on the Constitution, I felt so proud. I thought this was so cool!” — Shelby from California

“I’ve always heard about this place in my class.” — Mika from Japan

“I think every kid in America should read these and see the documents in real life.” — Anonymous

“Even though we are not Americans, this was an amazing experience.” — three girls from Germany

Our country’s most valuable charters, or documents, are displayed in special cases under special glass. Visiting the National Archives, you can see:
1. The Declaration of Independence;
2. All four pages of the Constitution; and
3. The Bill of Rights.

Would You Like to See the Real Thing?

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James Madison
The Father of Our Constitution

James Madison was a very smart student of government and a great statesman.
He was a friend of Thomas Jefferson.
Madison, 36 when the Constitution was written, influenced what went on at the Constitutional Convention more than any other delegate.

He wrote a plan for the new government, the Virginia Plan. Many of his ideas were adopted. He spoke often and the delegates listened.

He also took many notes and wrote up detailed reports. His records are our best sources of what went on. These were not published until after his death.

Madison worked very hard for ratification. He is credited with 29 of the Federalist Papers, a collection of essays supporting the Constitution.

He later served as a Virginia congressman and proposed the first 10 amendments (the Bill of Rights).

After serving as secretary of state under Thomas Jefferson, he was elected as our fourth president.

He lived longer than any of the signers. He died at the age of 85 in 1836.
What’s the big idea?

• Separation of powers: The delegates feared that giving too much power to any person or group could be dangerous. So they created three branches, or parts, of government: executive, legislative, and judicial.

• Checks and balances: This limits the power of each government branch. No single branch can overpower the others. Often, each branch needs the help of the others to do its job.

• Enumerated (e-NOOM-er-ate-ed) powers: The listed powers of government.

• Implied powers: The powers that are not listed but suggested.

• Federalism: The idea that our government divides powers between the national government and the state governments.

We will have more about the big ideas in the issues to come.

The Constitution has:

• A preamble (an introduction)
• Seven articles (sections) covering:

  Article I: The Congress (legislative branch)
  Article II: The president (executive branch)
  Article III: The judges and national courts (judicial branch)

Article IV: How states relate to each other and the national government.

Article V: How the Constitution can be amended or changed.

Article VI: The Constitution is the supreme law of the land.

Article VII: Ratification, or approval.
• The signatures of 39 delegates.

Amendments to the Constitution

Our Constitution is not perfect. It has been amended, or changed. Twenty-seven amendments have been added. The first 10 are called the Bill of Rights (1791).

1st: freedom of religion
2nd: right to bear arms
3rd: quartering of soldiers limited
4th: searches and seizures regulated
5th: rights to due process of law, including protection against self-incrimination
6th: rights of a person accused of a crime, including the right to be represented by a lawyer
7th: right to a trial by jury
8th: unfair bail, fines and punishment forbidden
9th: citizens entitled to rights not listed in the Constitution
10th: powers not listed reserved to the states or the people
11th: rules for lawsuits against states (1795)
12th: new way of selecting the president and vice president (1804)
13th: slavery abolished (1865)
14th: rights of citizenship, due process and equal protection under the law (1868)
15th: voting rights for former slaves (1870)
16th: federal income taxes authorized (1913)
17th: U.S. senators to be elected by the people (1913)
18th: sale of alcohol banned (1919)
19th: women gained right to vote (1920)
20th: dates of the presidential and congressional terms set (1933)
21st: 18th Amendment repealed (1933)
22nd: president limited to two terms (1951)
23rd: people in District of Columbia given right to vote for president (1961)
24th: no poll taxes in federal elections (1964)
25th: presidential succession and disability (1967)
26th: voting age lowered to 18 (1971)
27th: congressional salaries regulated (1992)

Congressional District: 2nd
District of Columbia: 23rd
Supersport: Jeni Armbruster

Height: 5-8  Weight: 145  Birthdate: 2-12-75  Hometown: Colorado Springs, Colo.

When she was 17 years old, Jeni Armbruster’s bright world turned dark. Due to optic neuritis, she lost her sight. What she didn’t lose, however, was her determination.

A star basketball player before becoming blind, Armbruster started playing goalball and is ranked among the top five players in the world. In goalball, players compete on a 60-by 40-foot court, listen to bells attached to the ball, then dive on the floor and try to prevent the other team’s shot from crossing their goal.

Armbruster was inducted into the Colorado Sportswomen Hall of Fame in 1995. In 1996, she was voted Colorado Amateur Athlete of the Year. Jeni, a graduate of the University of Northern Colorado, works as project director for the National Sports Education Camp Project at Western Michigan University. Her hobbies include e-mailing, judo and rock climbing.

Standards Spotlight: Our Constitution

Mini Page activities meet many state and national educational standards. Each week we identify standards that relate to The Mini Page’s content and offer activities that will help your students reach them.

This week’s standards:

• Students understand the U.S. Constitution and why it is important.

• Students understand government and where people in government get the authority to make, apply and enforce rules and laws and manage disputes about them.

• Students understand the important values and principles of American democracy. (Civics)

Activities:

1. Collect newspapers from several days. Cut out headlines that talk about the president, someone in the Congress, or someone on the Supreme Court. Cut out any photos of the president, or individuals in Congress or on the court. Make a collage of your headlines and photos.

2. Find a newspaper story about one of the branches of government. Cut it out and paste it on a piece of paper. Under the story, write down how the story shows the role of that branch of government.

3. Which of the amendments to the Constitution deal with (a) citizens’ treatment in courts, (b) elections, (c) the presidency and (d) slavery?

4. Use resource books and the Internet to identify the branch of the federal government that has the responsibility for each of these actions: raising taxes, enforcing laws, nominating Supreme Court justices, making laws, deciding if laws fit with the Constitution, declaring war, confirming Supreme Court justices, certifying the election of the president, and commanding the military.

(Standards by Dr. Sherrye D. Garrett, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi)