



## 9. Taxes, Voting Rights, and More | Lesson Plan

How often should the Constitution be amended?

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Students will understand that the Constitution is not meant to change with every new idea, but only when a change is necessary, lasting, and important enough to belong in the nation's highest law.

### Learning Objectives:

- Distinguish between changes that belong in the Constitution and those that should be handled by ordinary laws or policies
- Evaluate a proposed amendment by weighing its benefits and potential consequences
- Explain why some amendments strengthen the Constitution while others may create new problems
- Describe how later amendments fall into three broad areas: voting, government power, and the presidency

### Key Vocabulary:

- **Amendment:** A change or addition to the Constitution.
- **Term limit:** A limit on how long someone can hold office.
- **Income tax:** Money collected by the government from people's earnings.

**Educational Standards:** CCRA.R.7, CCRA.W.2, CCRA.W.4, CCRA.W.9, CCRA.L.1, CCRA.L.2, CCRA.L.4, CCRA.SL.1, CCRA.SL.2

Academic Subject Areas: U.S. Constitution, U.S. History

### What You'll Need

- Video: History in 5: *The Constitution Explained: Taxes, Voting Rights, and More* ([Watch Here](#))
- Worksheet: History in 5: *The Constitution Explained: Taxes, Voting Rights, and More* ([Click Here](#))
- Supplies: Paper, pencil, timer

### Lesson Plan (55-60 minutes)

#### Warm Up: (5 minutes)

1. Teacher Prompt (display on the board or read aloud): Imagine the school wants to help students get healthier. Teachers and parents notice that many students are eating a lot of sugar at school—candy, desserts, soda, and other sweet snacks. So the school makes a new rule: “No sugar, ever, at school. Not in lunches, not in snacks, not at parties. Zero tolerance for sugar.”

Do you think this is a good rule? Why or why not? What problems might this rule solve? What new problems might it create?



2. Call on 2-3 students. Write short responses on the board. (Key idea to surface: A rule can begin with a good goal and still create new problems if it ignores human nature, goes too far, or is difficult to enforce.)
3. Explain that when people make rules, they often hope to fix a real problem. But not every change actually makes things better. Sometimes a rule sounds wise in theory but fails in practice. Human nature matters, and wise governments must remember that when making laws or changing foundational rules.
4. Explain that the Constitution was designed to be strong, stable, and not easily changed. Amendments are possible, but they must be approached carefully and with good judgment. Today's lesson explores several lesser-known amendments, including one that was later reversed, to help students consider an important question: Does every amendment make the Constitution better?

**To Amend, or Not To Amend, That Is the Question:** (12-15 minutes)

1. Divide students into groups of 3–4. Give each group all three Constitution Scenario Cards (on the last page of the lesson plan).
2. After students read their Scenarios, distribute the worksheet (one per student). Direct students to complete the **To Amend, or Not to Amend** section as a group, but save the Comprehension Questions for later.
3. Directions for the Scenarios:
  - a. Read and discuss the proposed amendment and its purpose
  - b. Consider both the arguments for and against the change
  - c. Decide as a group whether the idea should become part of the Constitution
  - d. Prepare to explain the group's decision using at least one clear reason
4. As groups work, circulate and prompt students to think about: Does this solve a real problem? Could this create new problems? Is this the kind of rule that should apply to everyone, everywhere? Does this belong in the Constitution—or somewhere else?
5. Share Out and Class Comparison: Have each group place their scenario under a class chart (e.g., *Worthy of Amendment*, *Risky Change*, *Should Not Be an Amendment*).
  - a. Facilitate a brief class discussion by selecting 2–3 scenarios that reveal strong differences in reasoning or initial reactions. Guide students to consider how some ideas may sound good at first but become more complicated upon closer examination.
6. Save the remaining worksheet sections until after students have watched the video and received direct instruction.

**Founders Purpose:** Taxes, Voting Rights, and More (5-10 minutes)

1. **Direct Instruction:** Remind students that for most of human history, rule came from force, inheritance, or conquest, not from the consent of the governed or equality under the law. The American Founding was different and experimental because it hadn't been tried quite like this before. Reiterate the foundations of American government:

- We are a nation grounded in enduring truths about human nature and in the inalienable rights granted by God. These are the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. No other nation had stated those principles so clearly at its founding.
- We express these principles through a written Constitution shaped by a realistic understanding of human nature.
- Our nation is governed by the people and for the people, but always under moral and constitutional constraints, some clearly stated, and others rightly understood.
- The Founders understood that people are capable of self-government, but also prone to error, passion, ambition, and the misuse of power. Because of that, they designed the Constitution with checks and balances. Power is divided deliberately so that it is difficult to gather and abuse.
- The Founders knew the future would bring challenges they could not fully predict. For that reason, they made the Constitution strong but not unchangeable. Amendments allow for correction, but only through a careful and demanding process.
- Over 11,000 amendments have been proposed in American history, but only 27 have been ratified.
- Even if something is a good idea, that does not mean it belongs in the Constitution. They are not meant for temporary concerns or specific policy preferences. Amendments are meant for:
  - correcting injustices
  - improving the structure of government
  - addressing lasting national problems
- Explain that after the Bill of Rights and the Civil War Amendments (13th–15th), later amendments focused less on basic freedoms and more on improving how the system works over time. These amendments can be grouped into three main areas:
  - Voting: Expanding who can participate in government (17th, 19th, 23rd, 24th, 26th)
  - Government Power: Adjusting what the government can do (16th, 18th, 21st)
  - The Presidency: Clarifying how the executive branch operates (20th, 22nd, 25th)
- Here are the details about the voting amendments:
  - 17th Amendment → Senators elected directly by the people
  - 19th Amendment → Women gain the right to vote
  - 23rd Amendment → Washington, D.C. receives electoral votes
  - 24th Amendment → Poll taxes banned
  - 26th Amendment → Voting age lowered to 18
- These amendments have to do with government power:
  - 16th Amendment → Federal government can collect income tax
  - 18th Amendment → Alcohol banned nationwide (Prohibition)

- 21st Amendment → Repealed Prohibition
  - And these amendments have to do with the presidency:
    - 20th Amendment → Presidential term begins in January
    - 22nd Amendment → Limits presidents to two terms
    - 25th Amendment → Establishes presidential succession
  - the Constitution establishes principles and structure, while laws and policies handle many day-to-day details and practical decisions. Confusing those two levels can lead to instability or government overreach, which the Founders wanted to avoid.
2. Next, introduce the video. Ask students to watch for the points just discussed above.

**Watch and Discuss:** (7-10 minutes)

1. Watch **History in 5: Constitution Explained: Taxes, Voting Rights, and More**, uninterrupted.
2. After the video, discuss the following questions to check for understanding and prepare students to complete the worksheet:
  - How many amendments have been proposed? How many have actually passed?
  - Why did the Founders make it possible—but difficult—to amend the Constitution?
  - What are the three main categories of amendments discussed in the video?
  - What does the story of Prohibition (the 18th and 21st Amendments) teach us about changing the Constitution?
3. **Teacher tip:** Encourage students to use vocabulary such as *amendment*, *repeal*, *vote*, *term limit*, or *tax* in their responses.
4. Allow students time to complete the rest of the worksheet. Scaffold and differentiate as needed based on student needs.

**Wrap Up:** (5 minutes)

1. Have students complete an exit ticket or door check (spoken or written):
  - Does every amendment make the Constitution better? Why or why not?
  - What kinds of changes belong in the Constitution—and what kinds do not?
2. Success Criteria: Not every good idea should become an amendment. Amendments should be used for serious, lasting issues, and too many changes can weaken the Constitution, while careful changes can strengthen it.
3. Let students know that they will continue building and improving their civilizations in the next lesson, where they will consider how to live out and apply the values they have established. **(Lesson 10): Constitution Explained: Living Our Values** (the last lesson in the series).

**Don't have time for a full lesson? Quick Activity (30 minutes)**

Distribute each of the **Constitution Scenario Cards** to each group of students and invite them to complete the **To Amend, or Not To Amend** section of the *Taxes, Voting Rights, and More* Worksheet. Then watch the video "Taxes, Voting Rights, and More" and discuss when amendments are necessary and when they are not.

## Constitution Scenario Cards

Note: This lesson builds on the previous eight lessons in the Constitution Explained series.

### Scenario 1 – No Homework Nationwide for K-6 Students

Proposed Amendment: Ban all homework in schools for students K-6 nationwide.

#### Arguments FOR:

- Students would have more free time and less stress
- Families could spend more time together
- Kids might enjoy school more

#### Arguments AGAINST:

- Students may not practice what they learn
- Learning could slow down
- Responsibility and discipline might decrease

### Scenario 2 – Only Five School Subjects

Proposed Amendment: All schools may teach only five subjects. No more, no less.

#### Arguments FOR:

- Keeps education focused on the most important subjects
- Prevents schools from becoming too complicated or overwhelming
- Ensures all students learn the same core knowledge

#### Arguments AGAINST:

- Limits what students can learn and explore
- Different students have different strengths and interests
- The world changes—schools may need to teach new subjects over time

### Scenario 3 – Politicians Stay Forever

Proposed Amendment: Allow politicians who are doing a good job to stay in the office indefinitely. Only vote them out if they don't do good work.

#### Arguments FOR:

- Citizens would keep experienced leaders
- Good leaders could continue helping the country
- Less disruption from constant elections

#### Arguments AGAINST:

- Too much power in one person over time
- Harder to remove someone once they gain control
- Could lead to unfair influence or corruption

**Scenario 4 – No Age Limit for Voting**

Proposed Amendment: Every citizen should be able to vote, regardless of age. If they have a voice, they have a vote.

**Arguments FOR:**

- Citizens would all have a voice
- Everyone affected by laws could help choose leaders
- Encourages participation from a young age

**Arguments AGAINST:**

- Younger children may not understand important issues fully
- Adults could easily influence or manipulate children's votes
- Could make elections less stable, thoughtful, or fair

**Scenario 5 – People Need to Go to Church**

Proposed Amendment: All citizens must attend church weekly to encourage moral behavior.

**Arguments FOR:**

- Citizens would learn moral values
- Could lead to better behavior in society
- Encourages shared beliefs and community

**Arguments AGAINST:**

- Forces people to believe or act in a certain way
- Violates freedom of conscience
- Could lead to corruption, hypocrisy, or cult-like control