



GRADE 8+

The Federalist Papers by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay | Lesson Plan

How did the Federalist Papers shape our country?

Students will learn about the importance of the Federalist Papers. They'll watch a video and read selections from the Federalist Papers. After a discussion about these topics, students will have a greater appreciation of our government's system of checks and balances.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify who wrote the Federalist Papers.
- Explain why the Federalist Papers were written.
- Recognize why the Framers of the Constitution created a federal government with checks and balances.
- Appreciate the system of government established by the Founding Fathers.

Key Vocabulary:

- **Constitution:** A document that acts as a rulebook for a country. It has important laws and rules that explain how the country should be run, and it also protects the rights and responsibilities of its citizens.
- **The Federalist Papers:** A series of essays written by three of the Founding Fathers to explain how the U.S. Constitution worked. It is like a user manual or guidebook for the Constitution.
- **Bill of Rights:** The first ten amendments, or changes, to the U.S. Constitution. They protect the basic rights of American citizens, such as freedom of speech and worship and the right to bear arms and to be tried by a jury.
- **Checks and Balances:** A system of government that prevents any one of its branches from getting too powerful and threatening the rights of the people.

Educational Standards: Founding Documents, American Literature, Civics, Government, American Values, U.S. History, U.S. Constitution

What You'll Need

- Video: [The Federalist Papers by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay](#)



Scan to watch video.

- Worksheet:
- Documents: [The Declaration of Independence](#) and [the U.S. Constitution](#)
- Book: [The Federalist Papers](#)

Lesson Plan (50 mins.)

Warm-Up: (5 mins.)

- Ask: *Why do we have a government? What do you think the government's job is? Where does a government get its power? Can a government become too powerful?*
- Ask: *How could we prevent a government from being too powerful?*
- Brainstorm ideas with the students on the whiteboard.
- State: *These are the issues our Founding Fathers struggled with when founding our government. The Federalist Papers document this struggle.*

Watch and Complete: (30 mins.)

1. Read a portion from Federalist #51, which discusses the system of checks and balances.
2. State: *Let's watch a video that explains the importance of the Federalist Papers.*
3. Watch the video.

Wrap-Up: (15 mins.)

1. Debate: Have students debate whether the Federalist papers are relevant today or should they be rewritten?

Don't have time for the full lesson? Quick Activity (30 mins.)

Flip your classroom; have the students watch the video at home. Have a discussion in class the next day over the following items:

- Discuss how the Founders' system of government has protected our rights. Some possible questions include: *Why do you think the Founding Fathers established a system with checks and balances? Do you think the system does a good job of protecting our rights? If not, what are ways that the system could be improved?*

- Discuss the importance of non-government institutions, such as families, churches, and communities, to the country. Some possible questions include: *How does your family, your church, and your community impact your life? Why did the Founding Fathers think these institutions were important? How did the Founders protect these institutions from the government?*
- Debate: Have students debate whether the Federalist papers are relevant today or should they be rewritten?

Extension Assignments:

Ideas for homework that connect to original sources are below:

- Research and complete the missing words in *The Federalist Papers Worksheet*.
- Have the students read the clauses of the Constitution that relate to checks and balances: Congress can impeach the president, the president can veto laws, and the Supreme Court can make rulings on the laws Congress passes.
- Have a student read the clauses of the Declaration that refer to “unalienable rights” and “governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed.” Ask the students to describe what these clauses mean in their own words.
- Have the students read the Bill of Rights, especially the First Amendment.