

## 6. Why We Need a Bill of Rights | Lesson Plan

Why did the Founders feel the need for the Bill of Rights?

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Students will explore why the Founders insisted on writing down specific rights as an addendum to the Constitution: so our freedoms cannot be slowly ignored, stretched, or taken away.

### Learning Objectives:

- Describe why the Bill of Rights was added to the Constitution.
- List or explain key freedoms protected by the first ten amendments.
- Explain how writing rights down helps limit government power (prevents abuse/loopholes).

### Key Vocabulary:

- **Right:** A freedom or protection you have simply because you are a person (something the government should not take away).
- **Moral Obligation:** A duty you ought to do because it's the right thing to do (not just because you feel like it).
- **Bill of Rights:** The first ten amendments to the Constitution that protect individual freedoms.
- **Amendment:** A change or addition to the Constitution.
- **Loophole:** A gap or technical "workaround" in the rules that lets someone do something unfair while claiming they didn't break the rules.
- **Limited Government:** A system where government power is restricted by law.

**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, Civics

### What You'll Need

- Video: History in 5: *The Constitution Explained: Why We Need a Bill of Rights* (Watch [Here](#))
- Worksheet: History in 5: *The Constitution Explained: Why We Need a Bill of Rights* (Click [Here](#))
- Supplies: Paper, pencil, timer

### Lesson Plan (45-55 minutes)

#### Warm Up: (5-7 minutes)

1. Review with students:
  - Students should recall that rights written on paper don't defend themselves. In the last lesson, they learned that the Supreme Court's job is to interpret the



Constitution and declare laws unconstitutional. This lesson answers the obvious follow-up: *What exactly are they protecting?*

- The Supreme Court lesson taught that *the referee exists*.
  - This lesson explains *the rulebook the referee uses*.
2. Teacher Prompt (display on the board or read aloud): If a rule doesn't clearly say you can't do something, does that mean it's allowed? Or could you still be punished if you did it?
  3. Call on 2–3 students. Write short responses on the board. (Key idea to surface: unclear rules could potentially create loopholes that can be exploited.)
  4. Discuss the necessity of having *clear rules* that protect people even when leaders are pressured, afraid, or angry. Explain that a government can claim it supports freedom, but if freedoms aren't written down, officials can find "loopholes" and still argue they followed the rules. Explain that the Bill of Rights was added to make key freedoms unmistakable and to limit government power more clearly, so rights couldn't be slowly redefined, ignored, or explained away.
  5. Explain that in this lesson, students will see why some Founders demanded a written list of protections included in the Constitution that were specifically spelled out to protect their freedoms.

**Government Scenario:** Activity (10-12 minutes)

1. **Groups return to their assigned government system** from Lessons 1–5 (Dictatorship, Absolute Monarchy, Oligarchy, Theocracy, Communist Government, Direct Democracy).
2. Ask students to reflect on the situations and problems their government faced in previous lessons. Remind them that each system struggled to protect freedom because power was unclear, unchecked, or unfairly used.
3. **Distribute the worksheet** (one per student). Direct groups to complete the "**Fix the Flaws**" section only for now (explain that they will complete the second half after watching the video).
4. **Teacher support (use if groups get stuck):** Use guiding questions to help students connect past failures to missing rights or limits.
  - **Dictatorship:**  
What happened when one person controlled decisions and justice? What rights would stop one leader from deciding someone's guilt on his own?
  - **Absolute Monarchy:**  
How did freedom depend on the ruler's personality? What protections would ensure the ruler follows the same rules as everyone else?
  - **Oligarchy:**  
Who benefited from the system—and who didn't? What rights would guarantee equal treatment for all, not special treatment for the leaders?
  - **Theocracy:**  
What happened to people who believed or spoke differently? What rights would protect belief, speech, and fair investigation?

- **Communist Government:**  
What happened when disagreement or criticism wasn't allowed? What rights would require courts to hear evidence and protect truth-telling?
  - **Direct Democracy:**  
What problems occurred when decisions were driven by emotion or majority pressure? What rights or limits would protect smaller groups and slow rushed decisions?
5. Share Out and Class Comparison: Invite groups to briefly share one problem their system had and one right or guardrail they chose to fix it.
  6. Save the comprehension questions on the second page of the worksheet until after students have received direct instruction and watched the video.

**Founder's Purpose:** Why We Need a Bill of Rights (5-7 minutes)

1. **Direct Instruction:** Explain plainly why the Bill of Rights was added, what it does, and how it fits into the Constitution's design.
  - The original Constitution limited government power, but it didn't list specific rights. Some Founders warned that if rights weren't written down, the government could find loopholes and slowly take freedoms away.
  - James Madison agreed and proposed adding ten amendments to make certain freedoms unmistakable.
  - These ten amendments are called the Bill of Rights.
  - The Bill of Rights does not give people their rights. It protects the God-given rights that people already have by clearly limiting what the government can do.
  - The First Amendment protects people's freedom of conscience and their ability to speak, publish, gather, and petition the government: religion, speech, press, peaceful assembly, and petition.
  - The Second Amendment protects the right to bear arms, which the Founders believed was connected to self-defense, the right to life, and protection against tyranny.
  - The Third and Fourth Amendments protect privacy and security in your home: the government can't quarter soldiers in your house (3rd), and it can't search or seize your people or property without good reason (4th).
  - The Fifth through Eighth Amendments protect people when they're accused of a crime: you can stay silent (5th), you get a lawyer and a fair, speedy trial with a jury (6th–7th), and punishments can't be cruel or way too harsh (8th).
  - The Ninth and Tenth Amendments are protections against big government: people have other rights even if they aren't listed (9th), and powers not given to the national government stay with the states and the people (10th).
  - Together, the Bill of Rights acts as a rulebook that prevents the government from stretching its power or redefining freedom over time.
2. Next, introduce the video and watch it together as a class. Ask students to watch for the points just discussed above.

**Watch and Discuss:** (10-15 minutes)

1. Watch *History in 5: Constitution Explained: Why We Need a Bill of Rights* uninterrupted.
2. After the video, discuss the following questions to check for understanding and prepare students to complete the worksheet:
  - Why did some Founders think that specific rights had to be written down?
  - Which right do you think a government would try to take away first—and why?
  - Which two amendments act like “insurance policies,” and what are they insuring? (Hint: the last two.)
3. Allow students time to complete the rest of the worksheet. Scaffold and differentiate as warranted based on student needs.

**Wrap Up:** (5 minutes)

1. Have students complete an exit ticket or door check (spoken or written):
  - What are the Ten Amendments called, and why are they important?
  - Name three that you can remember.
2. Let students know that they’ll continue their civilization activity with the next lesson  
**(Lesson 7): *Constitution Explained: Fifty States, One Nation***

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

Distribute one Government Crisis Scenario slip to each group of students and invite them to complete the “Fix the Flaws” section of the “Why We Need a Bill of Rights” Worksheet. Then watch the video, and work through the suggested discussion questions.

## Lesson Recap Cards

*Note: Government systems were assigned in Lesson 1 and continued through Lesson 5. Students should use their assigned government system for this lesson as well.*

### **Dictatorship**

**Lesson 1:** One ruler takes control quickly; people can't disagree safely.

**Lesson 2 (Food disease):** A plant disease ruins crops; the dictator seizes all food to "redistribute," but no one can safely correct any mistakes that were made.

**Lesson 3 (No trial law):** After food-line fights and theft, the dictator's guards can jail anyone accused of wrongdoing; no questions, no trial.

**Lesson 4 (Illness + censorship):** A deadly illness spreads; the dictator takes control of news, medicine, and travel, and jails anyone who questions him.

**Lesson 5 (Rigged trial):** Students "spread dangerous ideas" by criticizing the dictator; he picks the judge/jury and decides the verdict before the trial even happens.

### **Absolute Monarchy**

**Lesson 1:** A king/queen has all power; people's rights depend on the ruler's personality.

**Lesson 2 (No heir):** The king dies without naming an heir; nobles fight over the throne because there's no written succession rule.

**Lesson 3 (No criticism law):** The monarch makes criticism illegal; complaining about the ruler leads to jail.

**Lesson 4 (Spies rumor):** Rumors of enemy spies lead to curfews and guards searching homes at any time; complaints about this are treated as helping the enemy.

**Lesson 5 (King controls verdict):** A peaceful dissenter is arrested; the court is ordered to find him guilty because the king is "always right."

### **Oligarchy**

**Lesson 1:** A small group of powerful families rules; laws often help them, but not everyone else.

**Lesson 2 (Drought + grain):** A long drought causes shortages; ruling families argue over who gets the grain, while regular people have no say.

**Lesson 3 (Famine favoritism):** Famine hits; oligarchs pass a rule that powerful families get food and water first.

**Lesson 4 (Flood aid):** Flooding spreads; leaders help towns that support them first and may ignore others.

**Lesson 5 (Two justice systems):** A poor person who steals is punished; a leader who steals is declared innocent.

### **Theocracy**

**Lesson 1:** Religious unity creates clear rules, but people with different beliefs have fewer freedoms.

**Lesson 2 (Drought as “punishment”):** A severe water shortage hits; leaders debate the need for canals/ratios vs. stricter religious laws, and people fear questioning them.

**Lesson 3 (Forced belief):** New peaceful outsiders arrive; leaders require everyone to follow the same religious rules.

**Lesson 4 (Religion outlawed):** The leader declares all other religions illegal; different beliefs or prayers become crimes.

**Lesson 5 (Journalist blamed):** A journalist reports mishandled food/water supplies; courts punish the reporter for “insulting the faith” while officials avoid charges.

### **Communist Government**

**Lesson 1:** The state controls land and supplies; people can't easily own property or disagree openly.

**Lesson 2 (Food + fuel shortages):** Shortages spread; the government insists everything is fine and silences disagreement.

**Lesson 3 (Profit illegal):** Citizens grow extra food and sell it; the government confiscates it and makes profit illegal, risking corruption and low motivation.

**Lesson 4 (Secret police):** The leader suspects secret plots against him; secret police are allowed to spy, search homes, arrest, and punish anyone labeled a threat.

**Lesson 5 (“Dangerous lies”):** A reporter shares true information about shortages/protests; the government calls it “dangerous lies,” arrests them, and party-controlled courts agree and find the reporter guilty.

### **Direct Democracy**

**Lesson 1:** Everyone votes on everything; decisions are slow and the majority can bully the few.

**Lesson 2 (Wheat famine):** A wheat shortage threatens famine; constant voting and re-voting prevents a plan from sticking long enough to work.

**Lesson 3 (Floodgates delay):** A storm and rising river require opening floodgates now; a small group refuses to vote, and delay risks flooding more farms.

**Lesson 4 (Punish an island):** An island refuses an alliance; an angry crowd votes in the moment to punish it, driven by emotion and loud voices.

**Lesson 5 (Mob removal):** The town votes to exile a popular speaker “in the heat of the moment,” with no court and no chance to defend himself.