



7. 50 States, One Nation | Lesson Plan

How can 50 states be part of one nation without losing their independence?

Students will explain how Articles IV–VII help maintain unity between the states while preserving limited government, and conduct a government upgrade to a Constitutional Republic.

Learning Objectives:

- Define key terms and ideas presented in the Constitutional Articles IV through VII.
- Explain how Articles IV–VII help maintain unity among the states while preserving limited government.
- Discuss the reasons the Founders wanted to separate powers.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the Constitution Articles I through III.

Key Vocabulary:

- **Article IV:** The part of the Constitution that explains how states must treat one another and how citizens' rights are respected across state lines.
- **Amendment:** A formal change or addition to the Constitution.
- **Supremacy Clause:** The principle found in Article VI that declares the U.S. Constitution is the highest law of the land, and state laws cannot conflict with it.
- **Ratification:** The official approval of the Constitution by the states, making it valid and in effect.
- **Federalism:** A system of government in which power is shared between a national government and state governments.
- **Privileges and Immunities:** The constitutional guarantee that citizens of one state are entitled to the same basic rights and protections in other states.

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: 50 States, One Nation* (Watch [Here](#))
- Worksheet: History in 5: *The Constitution Explained: 50 States, One Nation* (Click [Here](#))
- Supplies: Paper, pencil, timer

Lesson Plan (45-55 minutes)

Warm Up: (5 minutes)

1. Teacher Prompt (display on the board or read aloud): If every classroom on campus had completely different rules – different grading scales, different behavior policies, different expectations – would that still feel like one school? What problems might happen?



2. Call on 2-3 students. Write short responses on the board. (Key idea to surface: unity requires some cohesion.)
3. Discuss how a group can lose unity when everyone follows completely different rules, and why shared rules are necessary for order, cooperation, and stability.
4. Explain that today's lesson will examine how the final four articles of the Constitution help keep the states united while still preserving limited government.

Government Upgrade Time! (10-12 minutes)

1. Divide students into groups of 3–4. Each group draws or is assigned one government system from the **Government Upgrade** (last page of the lesson plan).
2. After students read their Government Upgrade Card, distribute the worksheet (one per student). Direct students to complete the **Government Upgrade Time!** section.
3. Students should complete the following on the worksheet:
 - a. New Government Type
 - b. New Civilization Name
 - c. Why the old system was declared defunct
 - d. The three branches of government and each branch's function
 - e. Short explanations for the key constitutional principles (divided power, rule of law, representation, written rights, avoiding mob decisions, and correcting mistakes)
4. Share Out and Class Comparison: Ask 2–3 groups to share their new government type/name and why their government system was declared defunct.
5. Save the remaining worksheet sections until after students have watched the video and received direct instruction.

Founders Purpose: 50 States, One Nation (5 minutes)

1. **Direct Instruction:** Explain plainly why Articles IV–VII were needed and what each one does to hold the country together.
 - The Founders had already designed the *three branches* (Articles I–III). Now they had to solve the “union problems” with Articles IV-VII.
 - **Article IV** explains how states must treat each other and each other's citizens.
 - **Privileges and Immunities:** A state can't treat citizens from other states as second-class citizens in basic civil rights (you don't lose your status as an American citizen when you cross a border).
 - Full Faith and Credit: States generally must respect other states' public acts and court decisions.
 - If someone is charged with a serious crime and flees to another state, that other state cannot just shelter them, there is a process to return them.
 - Congress has the authority to admit new states. The union is designed to grow.

- The Constitution guarantees each state a republican form of government (representative, not a king).
 - Slavery created disputes across state lines, and compromises were made to keep the union together. The original Constitution included a clause requiring the return of persons “held to service or labor” who escaped. It was a major compromise at the time; it’s also part of why later conflict deepened.
 - **Article V** explains how the Constitution can be changed, but not too easily.
 - There are two ways to propose an amendment to the Constitution:
 1. Congress proposes with a two-thirds vote in both houses, or
 2. States call a convention to propose amendments if two-thirds of states request it.
 - Ratification: A proposed amendment becomes part of the Constitution only when three-fourths of the states approve it.
 - **Article VI** establishes that the Constitution is the highest law of the land.
 - The Constitution is supreme—and so are federal laws made under it and treaties made under U.S. authority.
 - If a state law conflicts with the Constitution (or a valid federal law), the Constitution wins.
 - Government officials must take an oath to support the Constitution.
 - The Constitution forbids a religious test for public office—government office is not limited to one denomination or church.
 - Article VI prevents 50 competing rulebooks by placing the Constitution at the top.
 - **Article VII** explains how the Constitution became official.
 - The Constitution took effect only after the people approved it, state by state.
 - Article VII makes the Constitution lawful because it was adopted through the people’s approval.
 - Together, **Articles IV–VII** act like the Constitution’s “stability system”: they protect unity between states, allow careful change, establish one highest law, and ground the government in the people’s approval.
2. Next, introduce the video. Ask students to watch for the points just discussed above.

Watch and Discuss: (10-15 minutes)

1. Watch *History in 5: Constitution Explained: 50 States, One Nation*, uninterrupted.
2. After the video, discuss the following questions to check for understanding and prepare students to complete the worksheet:
 - Do you understand the difference between the state government and the federal government? (Explain that the Constitution divides power between the state and federal governments. That system is called federalism.)
 - Why would the Founders divide power between state and federal governments?

- What problems might happen if states acted completely independently?
 - What problems might happen if the federal government controlled everything?
3. Teacher tip: Encourage students to use at least one vocabulary word in their answers.
 4. Allow time for students 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):
 - Define federalism.
 - Give one reason the Founders chose this system of government.
2. Success Criteria: A strong response should explain that Federalism is a system in which power is shared between the national (federal) and the state governments, and that the Founders chose this system for several reasons: to prevent power from being concentrated in one place, to protect liberty by dividing the power, to allow states to govern their local matters while being unified as a country.
3. Let students know that they'll continue their civilization activity with the next lesson
(Lesson 8): *Constitution Explained: Civil Rights for All Americans.*

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

Distribute one **Government Upgrade Card** to each group of students and invite them to complete the **Government Upgrade Time!** section of the *50 States, One Nation Worksheet*. Then watch the video "50 States, One Nation" and discuss as a class why an upgrade was necessary.

Government Upgrade Cards

Note: This lesson is a continuation of the previous six lessons.

Dictatorship – Citizens have determined that a Dictatorship is not working and declare this system of government defunct. Concentrated power in one ruler has led to abuse and instability. The work begins in forming a Constitutional Republic that secures rights, limits powers, and brings cohesion.

Absolute Monarchy – Citizens have determined that an Absolute Monarchy is not working and declare this system of government defunct. Inherited power without clear limits has weakened stability and the rule of law. The work begins in forming a Constitutional Republic that secures rights, limits powers, and brings cohesion.

Oligarchy – Citizens have determined that an Oligarchy is not working and declare this system of government defunct. Rule by a small group has produced favoritism and unequal treatment under the law. The work begins in forming a Constitutional Republic that secures rights, limits powers, and brings cohesion.

Theocracy – Citizens have determined that a Theocracy is not working and declare this system of government defunct. Unchecked religious authority silenced and ignored real problems. The work begins in forming a Constitutional Republic that secures rights, limits powers, and brings cohesion.

Communist Government – Citizens have determined that a Communist Government is not working and declare this system of government defunct. Centralized state control has created too many problems to name. The work begins in forming a Constitutional Republic that secures rights, limits powers, and brings cohesion.

Direct Democracy – Citizens have determined that a Direct Democracy is not working and declare this system of government defunct. Unchecked majority rule has created groups of bullies who pressure people. The work begins in forming a Constitutional Republic that secures rights, limits powers, and brings cohesion.