

1. What Is a Republic? | Lesson Plan

What is a republic, and why did the Founders choose it?

Students will define a republic and explain why the Founders chose it as a form of government that limits power and protects freedom.

Learning Objectives:

- Define what a republic is.
- Explain why the Founders believed a republic was the best form of government.
- Compare a republic to other government systems by examining how power is used and limited.

Key Vocabulary:

- **Founders:** American leaders who helped create the United States and establish its government, including key figures such as George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and Alexander Hamilton.
- **Anarchy:** The absence of government authority, with no one in charge to enforce laws or administer justice.
- **Tyranny:** Government rule marked by the abuse of power and the violation of people's rights.
- **Republic:** A system of government in which citizens elect representatives to make laws under a constitution.
- **Constitution:** A written framework that establishes a government and sets limits on its powers.
- **Checks and Balances:** A system of limits that prevents any one part of government from becoming too powerful by giving other parts the authority to restrain it.

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: US Constitution, US History

What You'll Need

- Video: History in 5: *The Constitution Explained: What Is a Republic?* (Watch [Here](#))
- Worksheet: History in 5: *The Constitution Explained: What Is a Republic?* (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): Is it better to live with no rules at all, or are rules necessary? Are there times when there might be too many rules or unfair rules?



Scan to watch episode:

2. Call on 2-3 students. Write short responses on the board. (Key idea to surface: anarchy is not freedom.)
3. Discuss the necessity of rules and how they can be a good thing for civilization, or turn into a power struggle.
4. Explain that today's lesson will examine why the Founders believed true freedom requires some rules and the right kind of government.

Government Set Up: Government Grab Bag/Government Profile (10-12 minutes)

1. Divide students into groups of 3–4. Each group draws or is assigned one government system from the **Government System Grab Bag** (last page of lesson plan).
2. After students read over their government system, hand out worksheets (one per student) and ask them to complete the "**Civilization Set Up: Government Profile**" section of the worksheet.
3. Teacher guardrails for this section:
 - **Keep ideas realistic.** Students should describe real-world governments, not imaginary creatures, magic, or futuristic technology.
 - **Describe the rules of the government, not the personality of the ruler.** Students might say things like, "King Bob is nice and gives everyone cookies." But that's not what we're after here. Students should describe how power works in their given system.
 - **Do not solve problems yet.** Students should observe how power works in their system and note concerns, but not try to fix them. Students will work out solutions as they progress through this unit (see additional videos for History in 5 for the next lesson in the series).
4. Share Out and Class Comparison: Ask groups to present their civilizations briefly to the class. This provides students with an opportunity to learn about various forms of government.
5. Save the other elements of the worksheet until after students have watched the video and received direct instruction.

Founders Purpose: What Is a Republic? (5 minutes)

1. Direct Instruction: Explain plainly that the Founders didn't invent the Constitution out of thin air.
 - They studied history and saw that many governments failed because power was abused. In a republic, the people hold the power, but not by ruling directly. They choose representatives to make laws and lead on their behalf.
 - The Founders knew power needs limits. In a republic, power is limited by a written Constitution that clearly says what the government can and cannot do.
 - The Founders divided power so no one person, group, or branch of government could control everything. They created three branches of government to form a system of checks and balances. If one branch was trying to do too much or

become too powerful, the other branches could stop that from happening.
Dividing the power prevents tyranny.

2. Watch the video to see what a republic is and why it worked better than anything else. Ask students to watch for the following in the video:
 - The problem the Founders were trying to solve.
 - The definition of a republic and how it differs from other governments.
 - The temptation of power.
 - The solution: Checks and balances.
 - The warning that Benjamin Franklin gave.

Watch and Discuss: (10-15 minutes)

1. Watch ***History in 5: Constitution Explained: What Is a Republic?*** uninterrupted.
2. After the video, discuss the following questions to check for understanding and prepare students to complete the worksheet:
 - Why isn't anarchy true freedom?
 - What is a republic, and why did the Founders want one?
 - Why was the pie example a good way to explain checks and balances?
 - What are the three branches of government that the Founders developed?
 - Why did Benjamin Franklin say that we would "have a republic, if we can keep it?"
3. Teacher tip: Encourage students to use at least one vocabulary word in their answers (republic, Constitution, power, tyranny, checks and balances, anarchy).
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 republic.
 - Give one reason the Founders chose this system of government.
2. Success Criteria: A strong response should mention that a republic limits power through the Constitution and/or checks and balances to help prevent tyranny and protect freedom.
3. Let students know that they'll continue their civilization activity with the next lesson (**Lesson 2: Constitution Explained: How the Founders Got it Done.**)

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

Distribute one **Government System Grab Bag** slip to each group of students and invite them to complete the **Civilization Set Up: Government Profile** section of the **What Is a Republic?** Worksheet. Then watch the video, **What Is a Republic?**, and discuss as class which government is most dangerous.

Government System Grab Bag

Note: These descriptions are simplified models to help students compare how power works in different systems. Real governments may include features from more than one system.

Dictatorship – One person takes control and makes decisions very quickly. This can feel efficient, but the ruler uses force or fear to stay in power. Citizens have no voice, and there are no protections if they disagree. These governments often punish opposition and may create conflict at home or abroad.

Absolute Monarchy – A king or queen is born into leadership, which can create stability and quick decision-making. However, the monarch holds all power and is not chosen by the people. Because there are no limits on the ruler's authority, the people depend entirely on whether the ruler is wise or cruel.

Oligarchy – A small group of powerful people can solve problems using their wealth, but they usually only make laws that help their own tiny group. There are no protections for ordinary people unless a powerful family chooses to help them.

Theocracy – Religious leaders use their faith to keep the country united, and everyone knows and understands the rules, but the laws can feel very strict for people who have different beliefs.

Communist Government – A powerful group of government leaders controls all the land and supplies. They promise everyone will be equal, but it is hard for people to own property or make their own money. Because of this, the country often stays poor, and people are not allowed to disagree with the government.

Direct Democracy – Every person has an equal vote on every law, but it takes a very long time for the country to make any decisions, and the majority can bully the minority. There are no protections for the minority. The majority always wins.