

7th & 8th Grades
Lesson Plan
Constitution Day



Wreaths Across America

Lesson Plan

Teacher:	Date:
Grades: 7 th & 8 th	Lesson: Constitution Day

<p>OBJECTIVES: US Department of Education: Each educational institution that receives Federal funds for a fiscal year is required to hold an educational program about the U.S. Constitution for its students on September 17 (if it falls on a weekend; it should be held in the previous or next week).</p>	<p>STRATEGIES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Writing <input type="checkbox"/> 5 Ws <input type="checkbox"/> Collaboration <input type="checkbox"/> Discussion Questions <input type="checkbox"/> Small Groups 									
<p>MATERIALS:</p>	<p>Computer/laptop; internet (with access to YouTube); Smart Board; copies of the 5 Ws <i>The Constitutional Convention May to September 1787</i>; copies of <i>The Articles Of Confederation And The Road To A New Constitution Reading for Understanding</i>; copies of <i>Check for Understanding The Articles Of Confederation And The Road To A New Constitution</i>; copies of <i>Constitution Day Word Search Puzzle</i>; copies of <i>From the Articles of Confederation to the Constitution Maze</i></p>									
<p>Engage: Hook the students</p>	<p>Play the YouTube video, <i>The Constitutional Convention May to September 1787</i>, by Keystone History, https://youtu.be/d3-MymE33ew Hand out the 5 Ws Worksheet, assign students a partner, the students should collaborate to answer the 5 key factors of Who, What, When, Where and Why of the Constitutional Convention.</p>									
<p>Explore: Students make sense of a concept through observations.</p>	<p>Hand out <i>The Articles Of Confederation And The Road To A New Constitution Reading for Understanding</i>. Students may popcorn read or read silently. When students have finished reading, hand out the <i>Check for Understanding The Articles Of Confederation And The Road To A New Constitution</i>, allowing students time to complete the questions. Handout copies of the <i>Constitution Day Word Search Puzzle</i>, allowing students time to complete the puzzle. Handout copies of the <i>From the Articles of Confederation to the Constitution Maze</i>, allowing students time to complete the maze.</p>									
<p>Explain: Teacher introduces formal vocabulary and language to students.</p>	<table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 33%;">Federalism</td> <td style="width: 33%;">Popular Sovereignty</td> <td style="width: 33%;">executive</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Separation of Powers</td> <td>Republicanism</td> <td>legislative</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Checks and Balances</td> <td>Supremacy Clause</td> <td>judicial</td> </tr> </table>	Federalism	Popular Sovereignty	executive	Separation of Powers	Republicanism	legislative	Checks and Balances	Supremacy Clause	judicial
Federalism	Popular Sovereignty	executive								
Separation of Powers	Republicanism	legislative								
Checks and Balances	Supremacy Clause	judicial								
<p>Elaborate: Students apply what they have learned.</p>	<p>Students learn about the transition of the United States government from the Articles of Confederation to the US Constitution and its principles by completing the materials and activities in this lesson plan.</p>									
<p>Evaluate: assessment.</p>	<p>The teacher will determine the activities to be utilized for formal and informal assessment.</p>									
<p>Enrichment/Service-Learning Project</p>	<p>For the Founding Fathers, the American Revolution created a new republican world. This shift was not just about getting rid of a King and holding elections. There was a moral dimension to the American Revolution—one that got at the character of American society. For this new government to succeed, the system itself had to produce elected officials committed to serving the common good—not their own self-interest. To download the Wreaths Across America Youth Service Project, go to www.wreathscrossamerica.org/teach</p>									

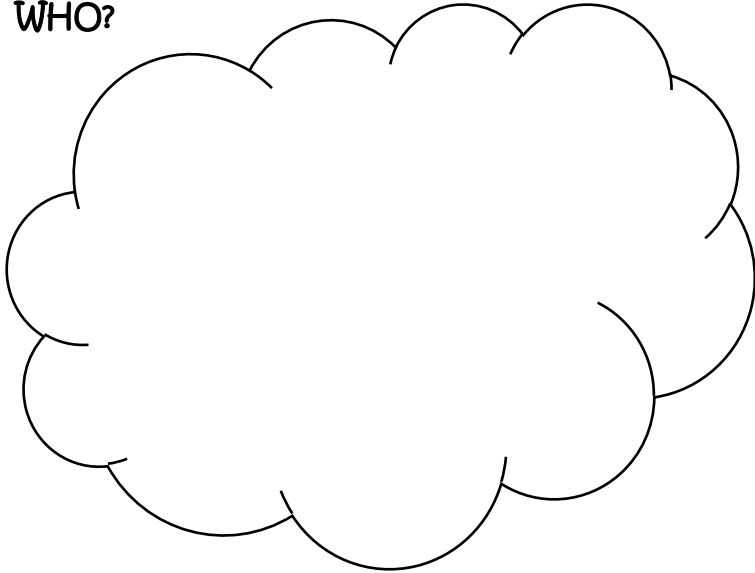
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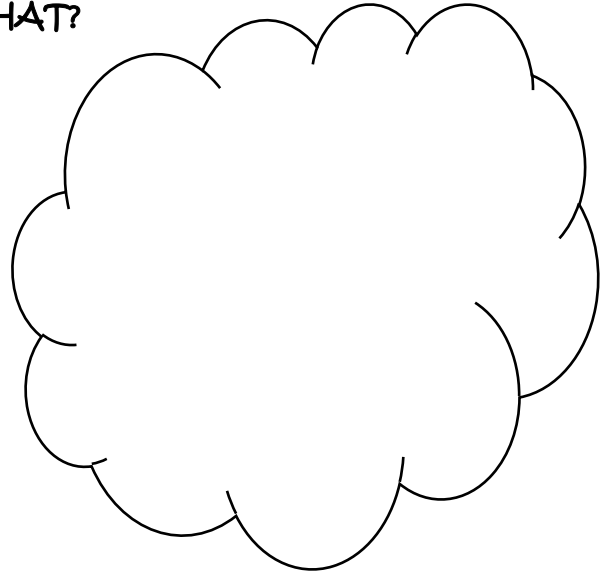
Name _____

5 W's Worksheet for the video *The Constitutional Convention | May to September 1787*

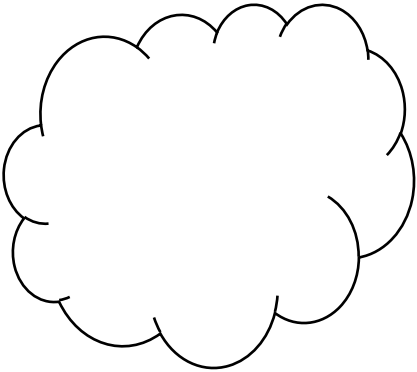
WHO?



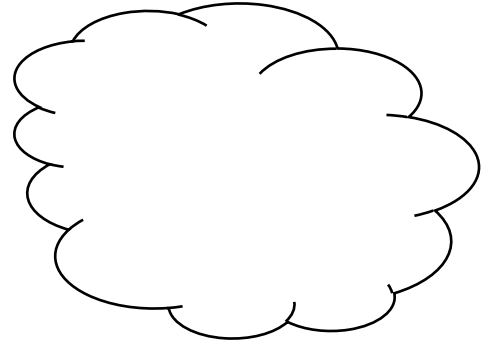
WHAT?



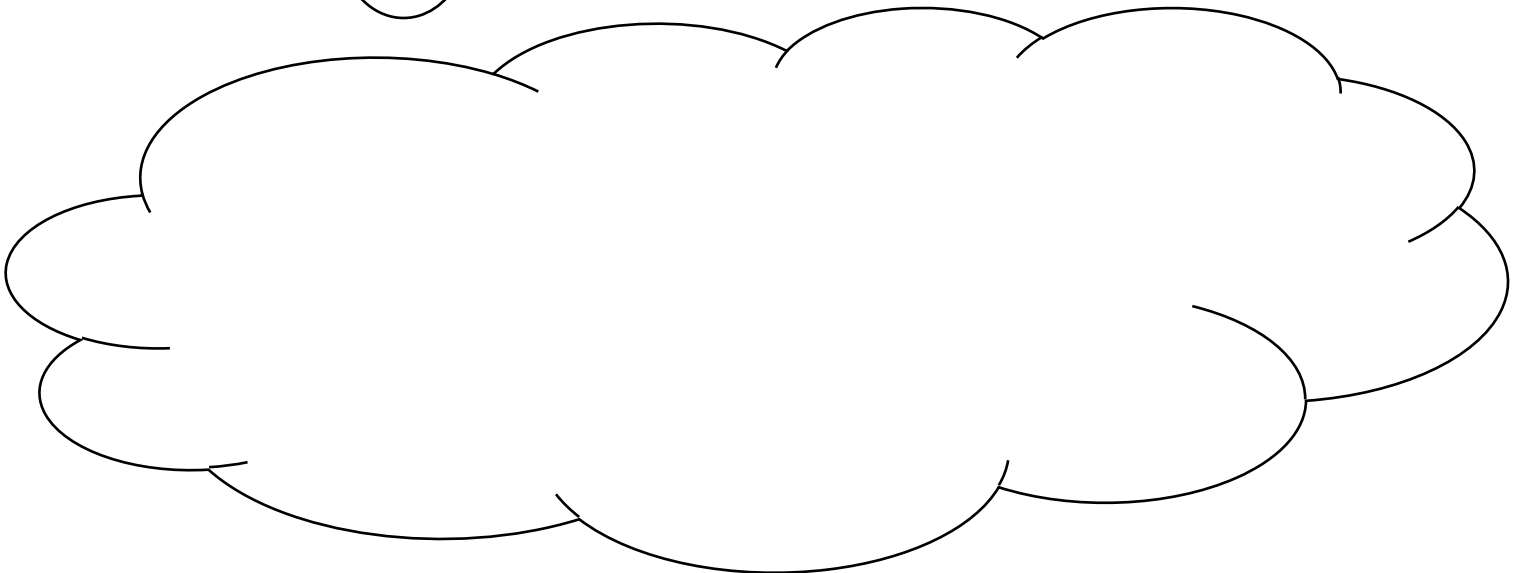
WHERE?



WHEN?



WHY?



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THE ARTICLES OF CONFEDERATION AND THE ROAD TO A NEW CONSTITUTION

Reading for Understanding

When the Constitutional Convention met in Philadelphia in 1787, our nation already had a framework of government—the Articles of Confederation. And the Constitutional Convention itself was—in many ways—a response to the weaknesses of this form of government.

The Important Thing to Remember about the Articles of Confederation: The Articles created a weak central government—a “**league of friendship**”—one that preserved state power (and independence). The Articles created a national government centered on the legislative branch, which consisted of a single house. There was no separate executive branch or judicial branch. There was no separate House and Senate. The delegates in the legislative branch voted by state—each state received one vote, regardless of its size. **The powers of the national government were limited.** The national government did not have the power to tax or to regulate commerce between the states. It could not force states to provide troops or send the government money.

Any proposed amendment to the Articles required unanimous approval from all thirteen states. As a result, no amendment was ever ratified. Congress could not exercise the powers that it *had* without support from *nine* of the thirteen states.

In other words, it could not declare war, enter into treaties with other nations, spend money, or appoint a commander-in-chief without the support of *nine* states. This supermajority requirement made it difficult for the national government to govern.

These limits **created several problems** for the young nation. Without the power to tax, Congress struggled to fund that national government and to pay its soldiers. It depended on *voluntary* contributions from state governments. And many states simply refused to pay their fair share. The national government struggled to defend the frontier. And many states raised trade barriers against one another—imposing taxes on one another’s goods, spurring unhealthy competition between the states, and harming the new nation’s economy. Congress was powerless to stop this.

STATE CONSTITUTIONS

The Constitutional Convention was also a response to the nation’s experience with revolutionary-era state governments. Prior to the American Revolution, the American colonies were ruled by royal governments linked to the British Empire. With the outbreak of the American Revolution, these royal governments fell.

Informal patriot assemblies assumed the duties of governance throughout America. In May 1776, Congress agreed to a resolution, proposed by John Adams—calling for the colonies to set up new state governments. The American colonies responded with new charters of government: **state constitutions**. This was a constitutional revolution in itself—a decisive turn towards written constitutions.

In the years between the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and the new Constitution in 1789, the United States was governed primarily by thirteen separate governments. During this period, the state constitution makers looked to translate their vision of an ideal American republic into concrete **written constitutions**. Generally speaking, America’s early state constitutions created governments led by a strong legislature—responsive to each state’s voters—and a weak executive branch and judiciary.

These state governments pushed laws to relieve debtors (those who owed money). They set up trade barriers to protect their own businesses from competing with businesses from other states. During this period, the American economy cratered—with many leaders blaming the downturn on the economic policies advanced by the states’ democratically elected legislatures. With the new Constitution, the Framers were looking, in part, to respond to—what they perceived to be—the weaknesses of the powerful, democratic state legislatures.

SHAYS’ REBELLION

Finally, there was the danger of mob rule—and **Shays’ Rebellion**. The economic situation grew dire by 1786. Revolutionary war debt ravaged the budgets of the national government and some states. States tried a variety of measures to address the debt crisis—including debt relief. Businesses were failing, and trade suffered. And under the Articles of Confederation, the national government could do little to help.

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In late 1786, farmers in Western Massachusetts—facing high land taxes (and growing debt) and feeling that the economic (and governing) class in Boston did not represent them—took matters into their own hands. Under the leadership of Daniel Shays—a thirty-nine-year-old farmer who had fought in the American Revolution, including at Lexington and Bunker Hill—the farmers organized themselves into an armed fighting force and marched through the western part of the state. The farmers seized control of court buildings—preventing the state government from taking possession of their farms. They forced debtors’ prisons to close. And they attempted to commandeer the arsenal at Springfield, Massachusetts. Their plan was to march to Boston and confront the Massachusetts government.

Under the Articles of Confederation, Congress had no power to raise an army. They could ask the states for help—but they could not force them to raise troops. As a result, a Massachusetts militia eventually put down the rebellion. For many of the founding fathers—including George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and James Madison—Shays’ Rebellion was proof that the Articles were too weak to govern the country. They feared that this might be the first of many violent uprisings. The national government had no real power to stop them or to address the underlying problems through a good policy.

Eventually, these key leaders concluded that the nation needed to hold a convention—one that might work to propose a strong national government, whether through revisions to the Articles of Confederation or even through a new Constitution. Key figures like James Madison and Alexander Hamilton pushed to ensure that the nation called that convention and that America’s most beloved leader—George Washington—would be there when it happened.

On February 21, 1787, the Confederation Congress *did* agree to call for a convention of state delegates to meet in Philadelphia for the “sole and express purpose of revising the Articles.”

However, the Framers instead crafted an entirely new framework of government—the U.S. Constitution.

PRINCIPLES OF THE AMERICAN CONSTITUTION

The key principles of the U.S. Constitution: popular sovereignty, federalism, separation of powers, checks and balances, and republicanism.

POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY

What is popular sovereignty? “Popular sovereignty” is just a fancy way of saying that the U.S. Constitution establishes a government that is driven by *us*—not a monarch, not the elites, not an aristocracy—but by us, the American people. As with most things, Abraham Lincoln may have said it best in the Gettysburg Address: popular sovereignty means “government of the people, by the people, for the people.”

Where do we see popular sovereignty in the U.S. Constitution?

Think about the opening words of the Constitution: “We the People.” Generally speaking, when we refer to “popular sovereignty,” we are talking about “rule by the people” and the idea that ultimate power and authority rests not with the government itself, but with the people themselves. The President, Congress, and the courts are limited by this. We are the boss. And they work for us.

Where does this idea come from?

At its core, popular sovereignty is the idea that the people are the source of the government’s authority and, in turn, can alter the government whenever they deem it appropriate—whether in response to tyrannical misrule or smaller-scale deficiencies in the Constitution’s design. These can be *big* changes like a Revolution, or *small* changes like new laws or new constitutional amendments. The principle of popular sovereignty has been the engine of American constitutional development since the beginning and remains the ultimate source of our Constitution’s legitimacy.

As the Constitution’s Preamble—“We the People”—suggests, popular sovereignty was important to key delegates at the Constitutional Convention. We also see this principle in the Constitution’s ratification—or approval—process. As we discussed earlier, in September 1787, the United States already had a national framework of government—the Articles of Confederation. The new Constitution was the Framers’ proposal for replacing *that* government. But it was only that—a *proposal*. The Framers left the question of ratification—whether to say “yes” or “no” to the new Constitution—to the American people.

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In the Framers' view, only the American people themselves had the authority to tear up the Articles of Confederation and establish a new government.

In other words, it did not matter that the new Constitution was signed by America's two most beloved figures—George Washington and Benjamin Franklin—and written by some of the nation's best constitutional (and political) thinkers. It was not up to them. It was up to the American people themselves.

The ratification process was the Framers' attempt to make popular sovereignty a reality—a living, breathing thing in the world. For them, the foundation of all political power—the very legitimacy of our Constitution and the national government itself—rested with us: the American people.

We also see the principle of popular sovereignty in the Constitution's amendment process. Article V sets out the process for amending the Constitution.

The Founding generation did not believe that they had a monopoly on constitutional wisdom. Therefore, the Founders set out a formal amendment process that allowed later generations to revise our nation's charter without the need to resort to violence or revolution.

FEDERALISM

What is federalism? "Federalism" is the word used to describe the Constitution's system of dividing political power between the national government and the states.

When we look for Federalism in the Constitution, where can we find it? The Constitution itself does not say "federalism" anywhere. But it is in there! It's everywhere!

Examples Include: Article I, Section 3 (the original Senate); Article I, Section 8 (the powers of Congress—especially the Commerce Clause and the Necessary and Proper Clause); Article I, Section 10 (limitations on the powers of the states); Article IV (Privilege and Immunities Clause and Fugitive Slave/Rendition Clause); Article VI (Supremacy Clause); the Tenth Amendment; and/or the Enforcement Clauses of the Reconstruction Amendments.

Why so many layers? What would be a benefit of having lots of layers of government? Why did the Founding generation value federalism? For the Founding generation, federalism was an important way of bringing government closer to the American people themselves—to the level of government closest to them.

We are a country that founded (as Lincoln said) on the promise of "government of the people, by the people, for the people." By breaking the powers of the government up and not just having a national government, this gives a ton of power to the state governments—the governments that the Founders believed were closest to the people.

Furthermore, by empowering states to shape policy in important ways, federalism permits states to shape a range of policies in ways that serve our diverse nation. This lets the people in the state that they live in—and their elected officials—write laws that fit their community best.

State governments often lead the way in trying out new laws and policies. When those ideas work out well, they can spread to other states and even bubble up to the national level—changing the way that things work all across the nation. Ideas that are tested as state laws sometimes lead to larger changes in how our country works as a whole.

An example is women's suffrage. Women began voting in Western states long before the Nineteenth Amendment. And this experiment worked out so well that other states extended voting rights to women, as well—including (eventually) large states like New York and Michigan. Finally, this experiment culminated in the Nineteenth Amendment—banning gender discrimination in voting.

But not all national laws bubble up from the states. The same thing can happen in the opposite direction, too. By giving the national government the power to override the states in certain areas, the Constitution permits the national government to stop the states from doing certain things. The national government can set laws that apply to the entire nation—to everyone.

An example is the national government's response to Jim Crow segregation.

Beginning in the late 1800s, many Southern states set up systems of laws that discriminated against African Americans. In response, the national government eventually passed new laws—like the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965—that applied to the entire country.

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Even though the Founders established a new national government, they preserved a central role for the states in our constitutional system. To that end, they set up a system of federalism—dividing power between the national government and the states. While future amendments granted the national government new powers, the states retained substantial powers to promote the health, safety, and welfare of their citizens.

SEPARATION OF POWERS AND CHECKS AND BALANCES

Through the separation of powers, the Constitution distributes political power between three branches of government.

- The legislative branch—Congress—makes the laws.
- The executive branch—led by the President—enforces the laws.
- And the judicial branch—headed by the Supreme Court—interprets the laws.

At the same time, through its system of checks and balances, the Constitution grants each branch of government the power to check abuses by the other branches.

With the **separation of powers**, the Framers divided the powers of the national government into the three separate branches. The goal was to prevent any single branch of government from becoming too powerful. At the same time, each branch of government was also given the power to check the other two branches. Again, this is the key principle of **checks and balances**.

Take one simple example. Congress was given the power to make our nation's laws. But the President was given the power to veto any law passed by Congress, and federal judges were given the power to declare any law unconstitutional. (This is known as the power of judicial review.)

REPUBLICANISM

For the Founding Fathers, the American Revolution created a new republican world. This shift was not just about getting rid of a King and holding elections.

There was a moral dimension to the American Revolution—one that got at the character of American society. At the same time, Americans were concerned about corruption and decline. The Founders were children of the Enlightenment. They often used history as their guide. For them, history taught a clear (and scary) lesson: *Republics were fragile—and they all seemed destined to fall.*

For the revolutionary generation, the key historical example was the decline and fall of the Roman Republic. The key lesson there?

Republics rise or fall based on the character and spirit of their people. For republics to survive, citizens must sacrifice individual self-interest and commit to the public good.

The Founding Fathers was critical of luxury and greed. Furthermore, the Founders believed that the government itself must work to promote the good of everyone—helping the many, not the well-connected few. This was the idealistic goal of the American Revolution (and the American republic itself). This is what the Revolution was all about.

And for the revolutionary generation, this is what its new governments *should* be all about. To realize this vision, the people themselves should have a key voice in the government. For the revolutionary generation, the people were honest and able to discern their interests. But they could make mistakes.

Given the size of America, the American people themselves could not run the government. The Framers were tasked with designing a government that might translate the people's considered judgments into sound policy for the republic. On this view, policy should serve their collective interests—even if it ran counter to their immediate preferences at a given moment. Policy should be driven by reason, not passion. It should not benefit the powerful and well-connected over the rest of us.

Furthermore, to succeed, the system itself had to produce elected officials committed to serving the public good—not their own self-interest.

Adapted from the National Constitution Center

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ANSWER KEY

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Check for Understanding THE ARTICLES OF CONFEDERATION AND THE ROAD TO A NEW CONSTITUTION

1. Why did the Articles of Confederation create such a weak central government? The Articles of Confederation created a weak central government because the colonies had been under the rule of Great Britain prior to the Revolutionary War, and many considered the rule of the crown to be oppressive. States created governments when crown governments failed.

2. What was one cause of Shays' Rebellion? The economic crisis post-Revolutionary War. debt ravaged the budgets of the national government and some states. States tried a variety of measures to address the debt crisis—including debt relief. Businesses were failing, and trade suffered. And under the Articles of Confederation, the national government could do little to help.

3. How did Shay's Rebellion influence the constitution? Many of the founding fathers— Washington, Hamilton, and Madison—Shays' Rebellion was proof that the Articles were too weak to govern the country. They feared that this might be the first of many violent uprisings. The national government had no real power to stop them or to address the underlying problems through a good policy.

Principle	Definition	Key Words, Ideas, or People
Popular Sovereignty	A government that is driven by <i>us</i> —not a monarch, not the elites, not an aristocracy—but by us, the American people	the people are the source of the government's authority, alter the government whenever they deem it appropriate, they can be big changes like a Revolution, or small changes like new laws or new amendments
Federalism	The system of dividing political power between the national government and the states.	women's suffrage, Jim Crow Laws, the states retained substantial powers to promote the health, safety, and welfare of their citizens. Federal law trumps state law, Supremacy Clause.
Separation of Powers	The distribution of political power between three branches of government.	legislative branch—Congress—makes the laws; executive branch—led by the President—enforces the laws; judicial branch—headed by the Supreme Court—interprets the laws.
Checks and Balances	The power granted to each branch of government to check abuses by the other branches.	Congress- the power to make our nation's laws; President was given the power to veto any law passed by Congress; federal judges can declare any law unconstitutional
Republicanism	Civic republican virtue, or the idea that Americans had to choose virtue over vice, reason over passion, and the public good over private self-interest.	Policy should be driven by reason, not passion. It should not benefit the powerful and well-connected over the rest of us. the system itself had to produce elected officials committed to serving the public good—not their own self-interest.

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Constitution Day Word Search Puzzle

Q	C	H	E	C	K	S	A	N	D	B	A	L	A	N	C	E	S	J
A	Z	W	S	X	E	D	C	R	F	V	T	G	B	Y	H	N	E	U
Y	T	N	G	I	E	R	E	V	O	S	R	A	L	U	P	O	P	D
U	C	J	M	I	P	E	K	O	L	Q	W	R	E	T	E	Y	A	I
S	O	X	E	D	C	P	R	E	S	I	D	E	N	T	X	R	R	C
T	N	H	N	Y	J	U	U	M	I	K	L	O	P	Q	E	A	A	I
S	G	Z	X	S	W	B	C	D	E	B	G	T	Y	H	C	N	T	A
U	R	I	K	L	O	L	P	W	E	S	C	X	V	T	U	G	I	L
P	E	W	A	S	H	I	N	G	T	O	N	A	W	S	T	X	O	N
R	S	M	Y	G	C	C	O	N	S	T	I	T	U	T	I	O	N	I
E	S	Z	A	E	S	A	Q	U	S	H	B	G	E	R	V	M	O	L
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E	P	O	I	U	I	I	Y	T	R	E	W	Q	L	K	J	H	P	N
C	G	L	E	G	I	S	L	A	T	I	V	E	F	S	D	A	O	A
O	M	N	B	V	C	M	O	X	Q	W	A	Z	S	D	F	H	W	R
U	U	O	P	G	F	D	B	N	M	S	I	L	A	R	E	D	E	F
R	N	D	S	A	W	E	R	Y	U	P	O	I	L	K	M	N	R	W
T	N	S	T	N	O	I	L	L	E	B	E	R	S	Y	A	H	S	V

federalism	Washington	Franklin	separation of powers
checks and balances	constitution	popular sovereignty	republicanism
legislative	Shays Rebellion	executive	judicial
Madison	congress	president	supreme court

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Q	C	H	E	C	K	S	A	N	D	B	A	L	A	N	C	E	S	J
A	Z	W	S	X	E	D	C	R	F	V	T	G	B	Y	H	N	E	U
Y	T	N	G	I	E	R	E	V	O	S	R	A	L	U	P	O	P	D
U	C	J	M	I	P	E	K	O	L	Q	W	R	E	T	E	Y	A	I
S	O	X	E	D	C	P	R	E	S	I	D	E	N	T	X	R	R	C
T	N	H	N	Y	J	U	U	M	I	K	L	O	P	Q	E	A	A	I
S	G	Z	X	S	W	B	C	D	E	B	G	T	Y	H	C	N	T	A
U	R	I	K	L	O	L	P	W	E	S	C	X	V	T	U	G	I	L
P	E	W	A	S	H	I	N	G	T	O	N	A	W	S	T	X	O	N
R	S	M	Y	G	C	C	O	N	S	T	I	T	U	T	I	O	N	I
E	S	Z	A	E	S	A	Q	U	S	H	B	G	E	R	V	M	O	L
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E	P	O	I	U	I	I	Y	T	R	E	W	Q	L	K	J	H	P	N
C	G	L	E	G	I	S	L	A	T	I	V	E	F	S	D	A	O	A
O	M	N	B	V	C	M	O	X	Q	W	A	Z	S	D	F	H	W	R
U	U	O	P	G	F	D	B	N	M	S	I	L	A	R	E	D	E	F
R	N	D	S	A	W	E	R	Y	U	P	O	I	L	K	M	N	R	W
T	N	S	T	N	O	I	L	L	E	B	E	R	S	Y	A	H	S	V

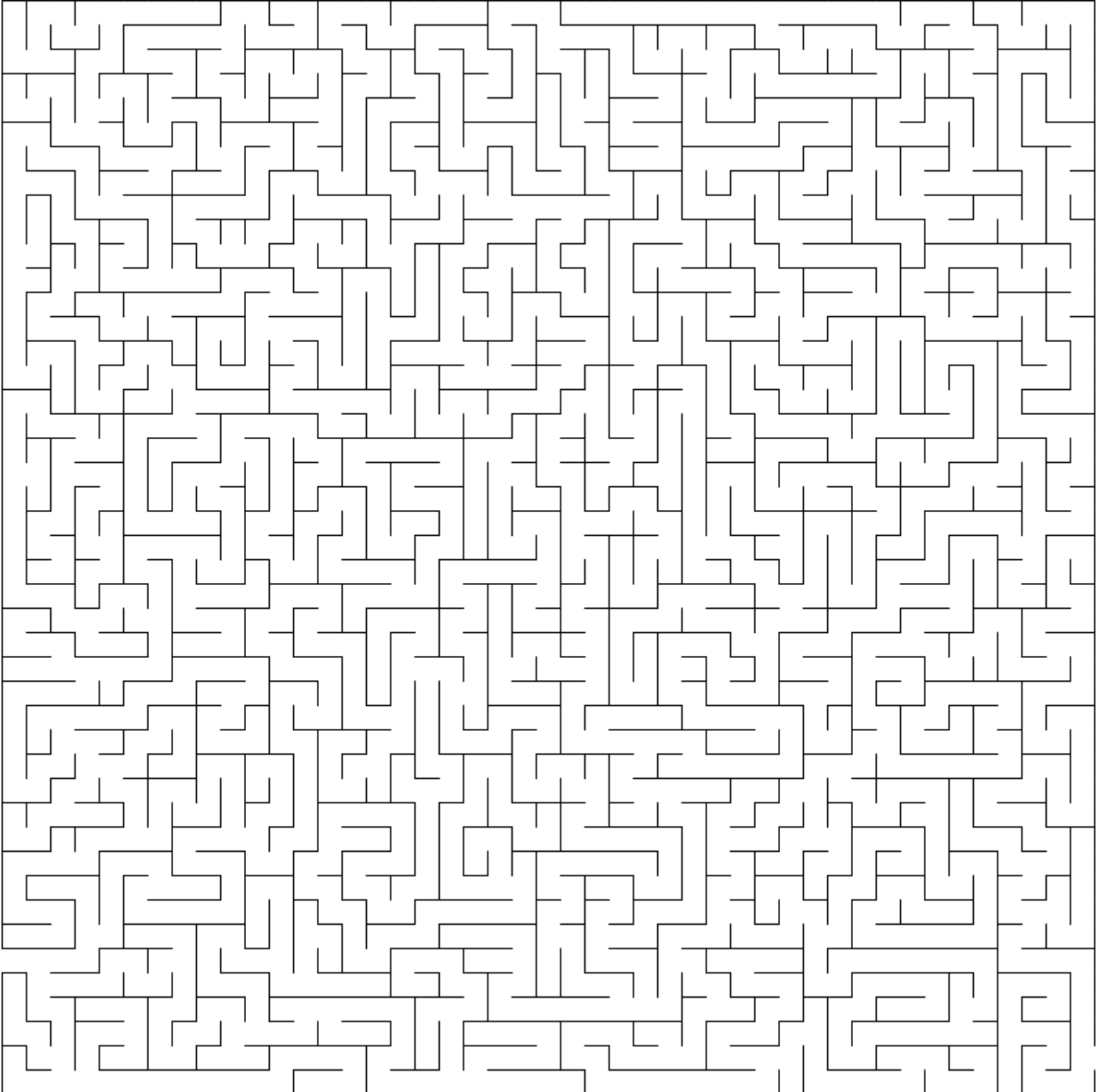
federalism	Washington	Franklin	separation of powers
checks and balances	constitution	popular sovereignty	republicanism
legislative	Shays Rebellion	executive	judicial
Madison	congress	president	supreme court

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From the Articles of Confederation to the Constitution Maze

ANSWER KEY

