



Democracy for Juniors

What do you think of when you hear the word “government”? Do you think of the president? The Supreme Court? Congress? All of these are part of the United States government—but your city or town has a government too. Your city, state, and country government all work together. How? You’ll see!

Steps

1. Find out about local government
2. Find out about state government
3. Find out about our country’s legislative branch
4. Find out about our country’s executive branch
5. Find out about our country’s judicial branch

Purpose

When I’ve earned this badge, I will know more about how my government works—from my town or city to the whole country.

No Person shall be a Representative who
who shall not, when elected, be an Inhabitant of
Representatives and direct Taxes shall be ap
members, which shall be determined by adding to the
taxed, three fifths of all other



No Person shall be a Senator who shall not
when elected, be an Inhabitant of that State for
The Vice President of the United States shall
M

Three Branches of Government

The United States government—and the government for all of the states—is broken into three parts, or branches. Each branch has its own role in how the law is made and used.

The Constitution of the United States divided the government in this way

to make sure that no one person or group has too much power.

Legislative—makes laws

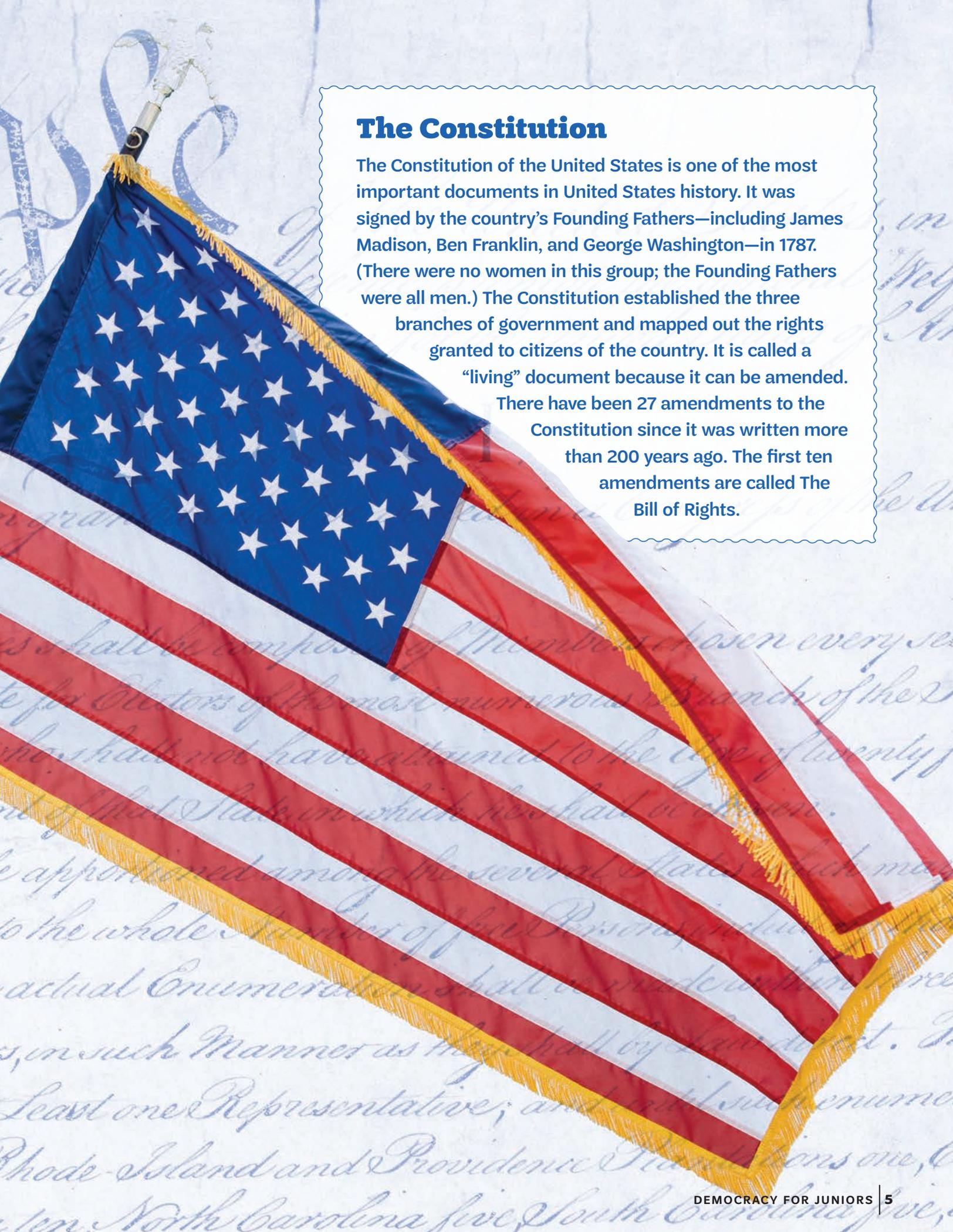
Executive—enforces laws

Judicial—interprets laws

A system of “checks and balances” helps to keep power evenly distributed between the three

branches. Each branch “checks” the power of the other. For example, the legislative branch makes laws, but the president (or executive branch) can veto (say no to) laws, and the judicial branch can declare that a law doesn’t support the original laws written in the constitution.



An American flag with a gold fringe is positioned diagonally across the page. The background is a light blue and white pattern of cursive handwriting, likely from the original Constitution document. A white, scalloped-edged box contains text about the Constitution.

The Constitution

The Constitution of the United States is one of the most important documents in United States history. It was signed by the country's Founding Fathers—including James Madison, Ben Franklin, and George Washington—in 1787. (There were no women in this group; the Founding Fathers were all men.) The Constitution established the three branches of government and mapped out the rights granted to citizens of the country. It is called a “living” document because it can be amended. There have been 27 amendments to the Constitution since it was written more than 200 years ago. The first ten amendments are called The Bill of Rights.

STEP 3 Find out about our country's legislative branch

The legislative branch, or Congress, is the branch of the United States government that makes laws. There are two groups of people that make up Congress: The House of Representatives and the Senate. Find out more about the legislative branch in this step.

CHOICES—DO ONE:

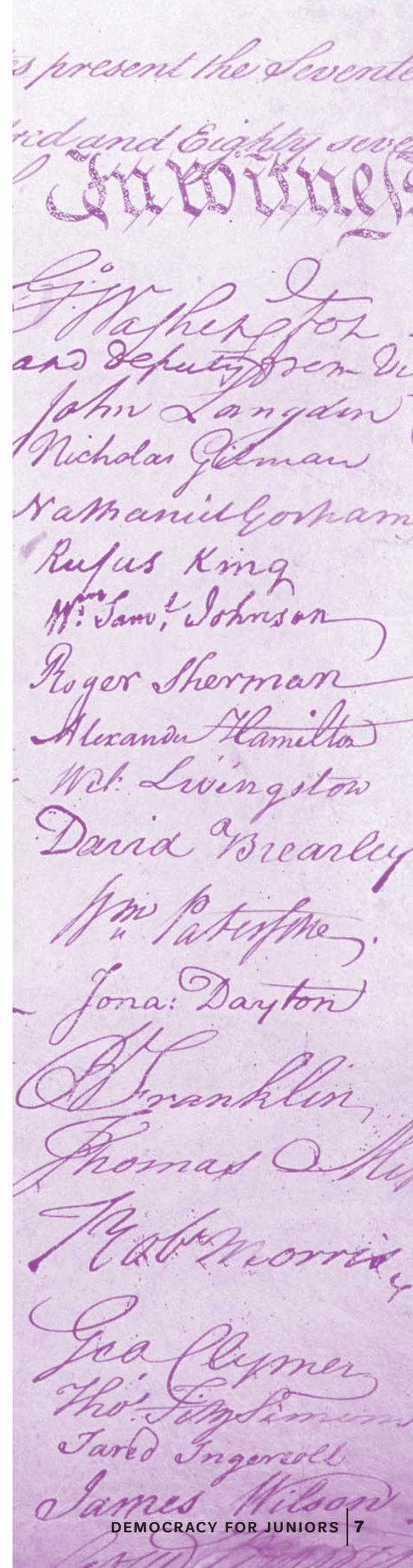
Draft a bill. Read “How a Bill Becomes a Law” on the next page. Then, on your own or in a small group, draft your own bill on a topic or issue that’s important to you. Share your bill with a larger group. Be prepared to defend it and answer questions.

OR

Map the country. Each state in the country is represented by two people in the United States Senate. The House of Representatives is more complicated. There are currently 435 House members, and the number for each state is decided by the size of its population. With help from an adult, print out a map of the United States and find the current number of representatives in each state. Write each number on the map and color in the states with the most representatives. Do you agree with how the numbers are broken out? How do you feel about each state having the same number of senators?

OR

Talk about representation. With help from an adult, find out how many women are currently serving in the United States Senate and House of Representatives. Then, find the number of women serving when you were born and when some of the older women in your life were your age. Talk to some of these women about the political shifts they’ve seen over time. Do they believe women are adequately represented in government today?



How a Bill Becomes a Law

The House of Representatives' most important job is creating laws. A bill becomes a law through these steps. Do you see any examples of checks and balances (where the powers of one branch can be challenged by another branch) in this process?



1. Someone has an idea.

This idea can start with anyone, even kids like you! If an elected official likes the idea and wants to make a law, they write a bill.



2. The bill is introduced.

Bills are officially introduced in the House of Representatives when they are placed in a special box called "the hopper."



3. The bill goes to committee.

A group of committee members (senators and representatives) meets to work on the bill and revise it, if necessary. Then they take a vote to reject or accept the bill. Depending on the outcome, the bill goes to a subcommittee for additional work or to the House or Senate floor for debate.

National Woman's Party at Belmont-Paul Women's Equality National Monument

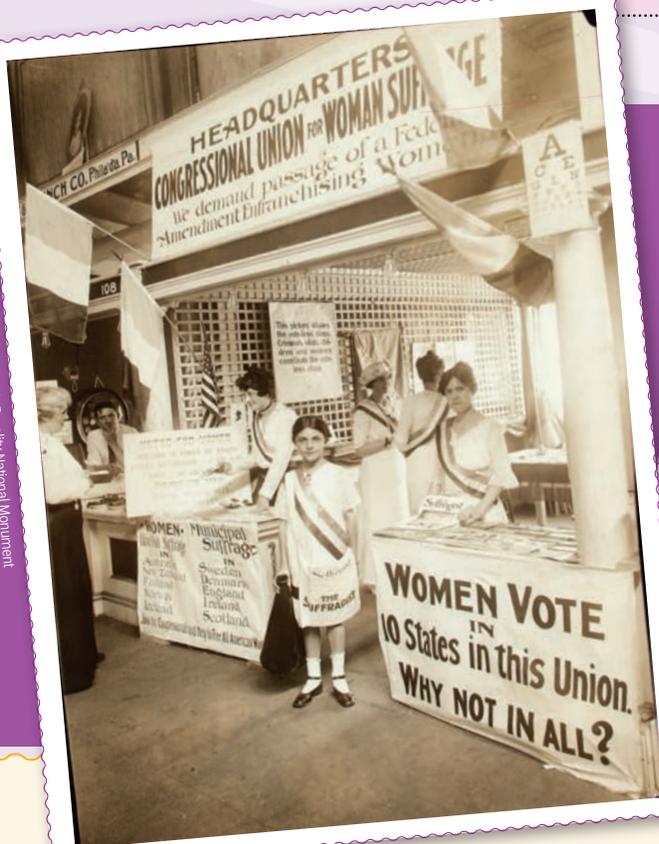


Image from collection of the Girl Scouts of the USA National Archive

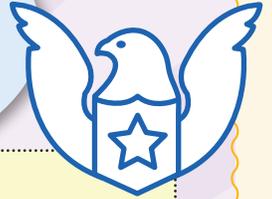


4. Congress debates and votes.

During the debate, members of the House or Senate can suggest changes to the bill. Then they take a vote. If it passes, the bill is sent to the other house of Congress to go through this process again. If both houses receive a majority vote on the same version of the bill, it goes to the president.

5. The president takes action.

Now it's the president's turn. They can:



- ★ **Approve and pass.** The bill is law!
- ★ **Veto.** The president rejects the bill and sends it back to Congress. Congress can then take a vote. If the bill receives a two-thirds majority vote from the House and Senate, they can override the veto. The bill becomes law.
- ★ **Choose no action.** The president does nothing. After ten days with no action, if Congress is in session, the bill becomes law.
- ★ **Pocket veto.** If Congress adjourns—or goes out of session—within ten days after the president receives the bill, the president can choose not to sign it. The bill does not become law.

The 19th Amendment

When the government of the United States was first developed, women had no role. They took care of the home, the children, and the men in their families. Most men did not feel that women should vote—in fact, there were actually laws saying that women could not vote. Lots of people came to believe this was wrong; many women and some men fought against it. Finally, in 1920, the 19th Amendment was passed. It says that women can vote in all elections. Despite this victory, many women of color faced obstacles to casting their votes. These challenges continued until the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which aimed to prevent racial discrimination in voting.

Photos l-r: Women and girls campaign for the right to vote, 1914; A Girl Scout holds a baby outside a polling place while the mother votes, 1921.



STEP 5 Find out about our country's judicial branch

The judicial branch of the government is made up of courts and judges. It's the branch of the government that evaluates laws. In this step, you'll learn more about how the judicial branch works.

CHOICES—DO ONE:

Talk to a lawyer. Have an adult help you contact one to talk about what they do. Why did they choose their profession? How does the judicial branch work with the other two branches of government? What do they think are the most important cases in national history? Ask any other questions you may have.

OR 

Talk to a judge. Find out about what they do. How does the judicial branch work with the other two branches of government? What's the difference between the Supreme Court and local courts? How does a case make it to the Supreme Court? Ask any other questions you may have.

OR 

Talk to a social studies, history, or civics teacher. Find out how they teach their students about the judicial branch. How does the judicial branch work with the other two branches of government? Ask any other questions you may have.

The Supreme Court

The Supreme Court, which is sometimes called “The Highest Court in the Land,” is made up of nine people called justices. These justices were all men until 1981, when the first woman, Sandra Day O'Connor, joined the court. (She was a Girl Scout too!) Today the court is a mixture of men and women.

Justices are appointed, not elected, and they serve lifelong terms. That means they usually stay on the court until they pass away or retire, but the Constitution gives Congress the power to impeach (vote to remove) justices for “Treason, Bribery, or other high Crimes and Misdemeanors.” There go those checks and balances again!

Now that I've earned this badge, I can give service by:

- Helping Brownies make their own “branches of government” tree
- Encouraging my family to attend a town hall meeting together
- Hosting a presidential trivia night for the girls in my class

I'm inspired to:

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