

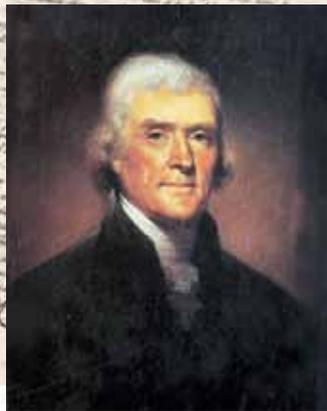
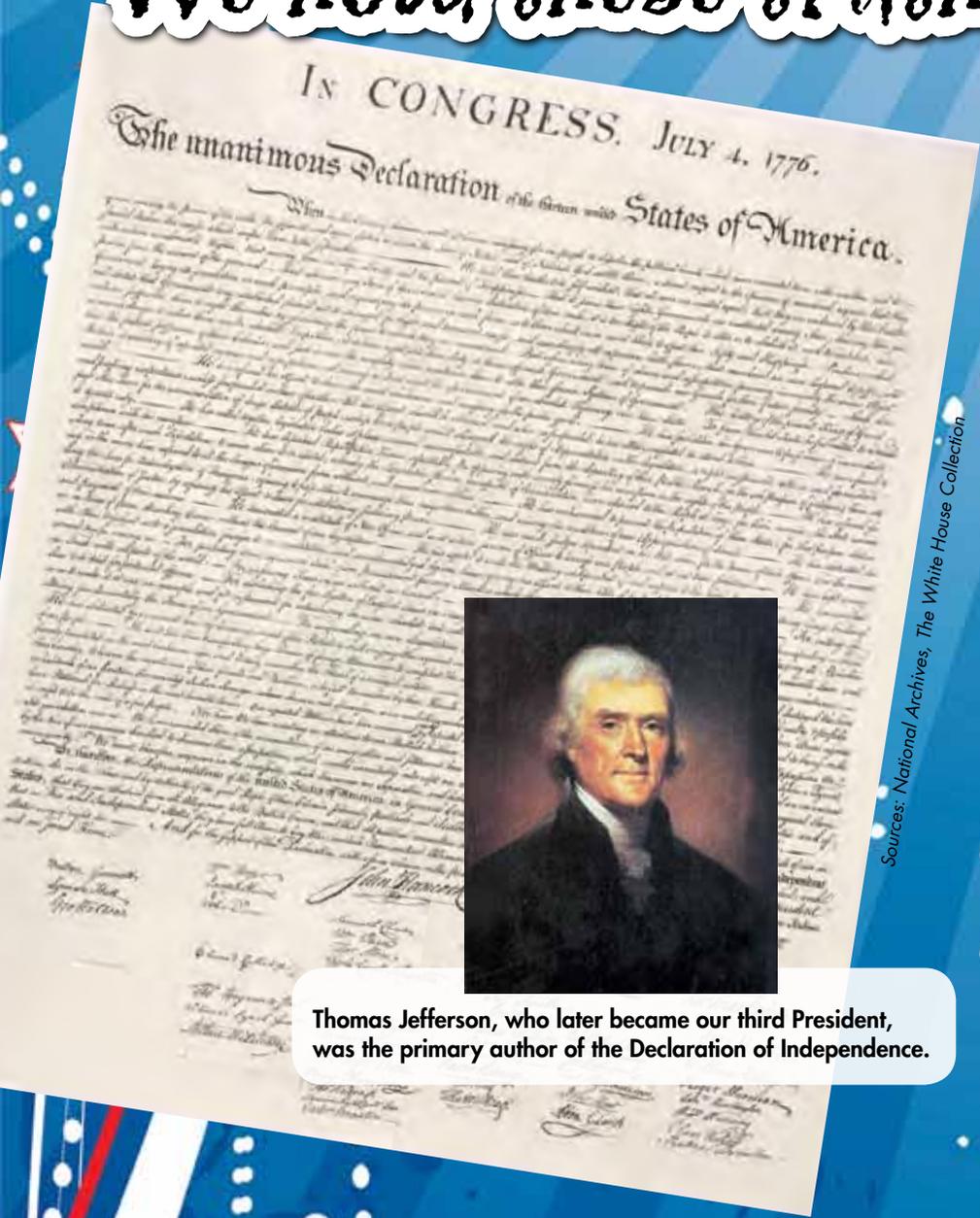
# Celebrate Freedom

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# "We hold these truths to be self-evident,



Thomas Jefferson, who later became our third President, was the primary author of the Declaration of Independence.

Sources: National Archives, The White House Collection

The United States of America is unique among nations in that it is primarily built around a set of ideas, or self-evident truths. Whereas most nations unite the members of a particular people group – the German people, the Japanese people, etc. – the U.S. unites all those who pledge allegiance to the core principles that have animated our nation since its founding.

Our nation's motto, *E pluribus unum*, captures America's uniqueness well. This phrase, which means "out of many, one," celebrates the fact that Americans have a common bond – a shared commitment to a set of ideals – even though we come from many different people groups.

Our nation's common bond was first articulated in the Declaration of Independence, a remarkable document drafted by Thomas Jefferson and signed by a group of leaders who pledged to each other "our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor."

While the men who signed the Declaration of Independence were not perfect, the ideals they championed have captured the imagination of people all over the world for many, many years.

Indeed, part of the reason the U.S. has brought unprecedented freedom and prosperity to so many people is because our nation's founding principles have been embraced not just by generations of native-born Americans, but also by waves of immigrants who have come to the U.S. to start a new way of life, free from the tyranny and oppression that many have faced elsewhere.

These immigrants have often viewed America as "a shining city on a hill," as a beacon of light and hope and opportunity for people everywhere. Moreover, every time new immigrants affirm America's founding ideals, they breathe life and energy into our nation, proving anew that the self-evident truths found in the Declaration of Independence still have great relevance today.

**Credits:**  
**Written by:** Bill Mattox and Lynn Baden  
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## About Celebrate Freedom:

Each year, students in the state of Florida are expected to recite a key passage from the Declaration of Independence and to spend at least three hours in the classroom studying this important document. Celebrate Freedom carefully examines this key passage, helping students better understand its meaning and why it is still important to us today.

This booklet is sponsored by The James Madison Institute (JMI), a Tallahassee-based organization which conducts civics education programs throughout the state of Florida. Celebrate Freedom has been made possible thanks to the generosity of the Lillian S. Wells Foundation, the Gibbs Family Foundation, and many other donors around the state. Guidance for this curriculum has been provided by the Florida Department of Education, a number of Florida teachers, and the News in Education (NIE) staff at the Sun Sentinel.

**For more information about JMI's programs for students, go to:**  
**[www.foramericanideals.org](http://www.foramericanideals.org) or call (850) 386-3131.**



# that all men are created equal

Source: US GOV National Archives



Immigrant children, Ellis Island, New York. 1908.

## Thought Experiment: Equality in the Classroom

Imagine what would happen if the teachers at your school decided that from now on, *You, the Students*, would be responsible for adopting classroom policies based on the self-evident truth that all students are created equal. What would you do? Create a plan explaining what you would do and how you would implement your policies.

Would you have everyone receive the same homework assignments? Take the same tests? Get the same punishment for being tardy?

Would you give any special consideration to those who struggled to grasp new concepts? Would the grading scale be the same for all students? Would all students receive the same grade regardless of the quality of the work (so long as they tried equally hard)?

Would you encourage stronger students to study with weaker students? Would you require those who excelled to share some of their good grades with those who struggled?

Would you see to it that any student who brought an apple to the teacher was rewarded?

How do you think our nation's founders would want you to answer these questions? Do you think they'd want you to provide equal opportunities? To seek equal outcomes?

Do you think the founders would want you to bend the rules a little for certain students? Would they want to reward those who curried favor with the teacher? How do you think they'd want you to account for the fact that even though we all have equal intrinsic worth, we aren't all equally capable in every subject or activity? Write an essay explaining your thoughts on this and support your ideas with facts based on the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

The first truth to which our founders pointed – “that all men are created equal” – was a very radical idea at the time of the Declaration of Independence. For example, soon after settling in New York in the 1700s, French colonist Jean de Crevecoeur marveled to a friend that America “is not composed, as in Europe, of great lords... Here are no aristocratical families, no courts, no kings.”

In societies that deny that all human beings are created equal, the legal system often treats certain individuals as second class citizens – and the social and economic systems make it impossible for a person of a certain class, or caste, to advance.

America's founders believed that everyone should be entitled to equal justice under the law and that the government should not favor one individual over another or one group over another. To put it in sports terms, the founders believed in a “level playing field” where the rules are the same for everyone – and everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed.

While our founders did a superb job of promoting ideas like equality, they sometimes failed to live up to their own lofty principles. As a result, our nation had to endure many years of slavery and of racial discrimination.

Yet, to their great credit, many of our nation's African-American leaders nevertheless embraced the self-evident truths found in the Declaration of Independence. They claimed the founders' ideals as their own.

For example, Booker T. Washington made a point of opening his Tuskegee Institute on the Fourth of July in 1881. And Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. rooted his appeal for justice in the founders' own words by saying, “When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir.”

Thankfully, these civil rights leaders understood that our nation's founding principles are greater than the men who first championed them – or the men and women who have since embraced them. Moreover, as we will see on pages 4-5, these leaders also understood that the self-evident truths cited by the founders are even greater than the laws adopted by government authorities.



Source: Library of Congress

Booker T. Washington



## Extra! Extra! Read About World News

Look through the world news section of your local newspaper. Find an article or a photograph about people living in another part of the world that do not have the same freedoms that Americans enjoy – or about someone who came to America to escape oppression elsewhere.

In one or two paragraphs, write about what you learned. How does the article or photograph you found make you feel as an American? How does it make you feel as a member of the human race?

# that they are endowed by their Creator



In 1960, students at Florida A & M University organized non-violent protests outside several lunch counters in Tallahassee that refused to provide seating to black customers. What do you think of the students' signs? Do you think it was wise for them to refer to the "golden rule?" Or to ask "What is Christian about racial discrimination?" Or to assure people that they were non-violent? What adjectives would you use to describe the students' methods?

In addition to believing that all men are created equal, our nation's founders believed that every individual possesses certain rights that cannot be granted by government, nor taken away by government.

In the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson described these rights as "unalienable," which means that they are so much a part of our birthright as humans that they cannot be denied us.

Once again, this was a radical idea at the time of the Declaration of Independence.

For most of human history up to the American Revolution, the concept of rights had been applied in a very limited and selective fashion. Typically, rights were considered special privileges, reserved only for special groups or classes of people.

Drawing upon the writings of political philosopher John Locke, America's founders concluded that certain rights were universal – for all mankind – and could not be trampled upon by any government that wished to be considered legitimate.

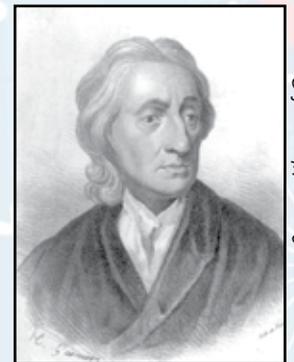
As Alexander Hamilton wrote, "The sacred rights of mankind are written, as with a sun beam in the whole volume of human nature, by the hand of Divinity itself, and can never be erased or obscured by mortal power."

By claiming that men had been endowed with rights by their Creator, the founders were asserting that no earthly government could be considered the ultimate authority over men.

This was significant at the time, and would also prove significant later. For example, when subsequent generations of Americans fought against grievous evils like slavery and racial discrimination, they often made their case by appealing to a higher law and a higher authority – just as the founders justified their Declaration of Independence by citing "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God."

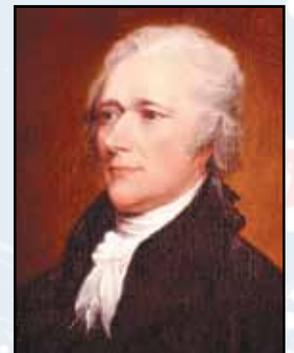
Thankfully, our nation's greatest political leaders have been mindful of the need to respect the religious differences that exist among Americans. They have avoided the establishment of a state church (like those found in many nations), while not hindering the free exercise of religion among the American people.

In addition, our nation's greatest political leaders have affirmed this self-evident truth found in the Declaration of Independence: Our most fundamental rights have been given to us as a divine birthright; no legitimate government can ever take them away.



John Locke

Source: Library of Congress



Alexander Hamilton

Source: Credit Suisse First Boston Collection

# with certain unalienable Rights,



Source: Library of Congress

The 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution extended the right to vote to women.

## Thought Experiment: Marooned on a Desert Island

What do you think would happen if all the students in your school were suddenly marooned on a desert island where no person had ever lived before and no means of communicating with the outside world existed?

On such an island, would you have any rights? Would there be any laws you'd have to follow? Would anyone have the right to tell you what to do? Would you have the right to govern anyone else? How would this be determined? And do you think the strongest people on the island would be willing to cooperate? How about the smartest? The loudest? The meanest?

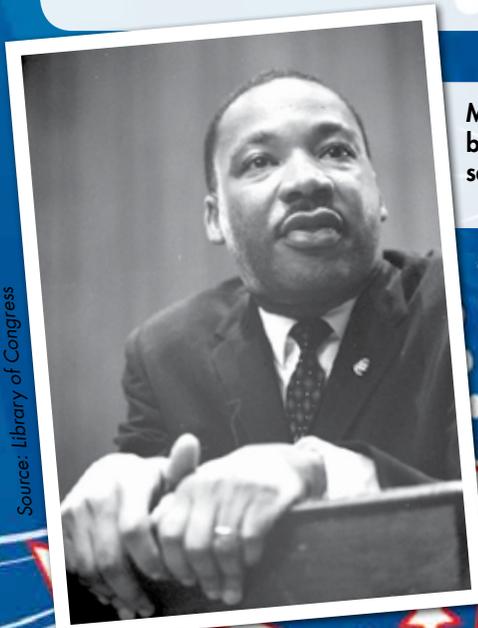
## Extra! Extra! Read All the Headlines

Scan the headlines in the news sections of your local newspaper. Find some news stories in which American citizens are exercising various rights guaranteed to them by the U.S. Constitution. Try to find at least one example of:

- Freedom of speech
- Freedom of religion
- Freedom of assembly
- Right to own personal property
- Right to protection against cruel and unusual punishment
- Right to a trial by jury
- Right to vote

Share your articles with your class. Which of the constitutional rights that we have as Americans do you consider most valuable? Why? Under what circumstances, if any, would it be legitimate for a government to suspend certain rights?

Source: Library of Congress



Martin Luther King Jr. believed "the truth will set you free."

## Activity: Vocabulary

The Declaration of Independence contains a number of words and phrases that may not be familiar to today's readers. Look through the following list of words found in this historic document. Look up the definition of ten words from this list that you have never used. Write a sentence for each new word using it in the correct context.

abdicate  
abolish  
absolve  
acquiesce  
allegiance  
annihilation  
appropriations  
arbitrary  
barbarous  
candid  
compliance  
convulsion  
constrain  
deriving  
denounce  
depository  
desolation  
despotism  
disavow  
dispose  
emigration

evince  
harass  
impel  
inestimable  
institute  
invariably  
judiciary  
kindred  
levy  
magnanimity  
mercenaries  
perfidy  
prudence  
quartering  
rectitude  
redress  
relinquish  
tenure  
transient  
unalienable  
usurpation

# that among these are Life, Liberty,

As colonial America bristled under England's rule, our nation's early leaders spent many hours discussing the appropriateness of declaring their independence from the British. And they spent many hours debating how best to foster liberty in America.

To the colonists, liberty was not a foreign concept. They knew that many of America's early settlers had come to our shores seeking the freedom to live and work and worship as they pleased. Moreover, the colonists had once enjoyed a fair amount of freedom under British rule. This made them all the more distressed when England began to strip away many of these freedoms.

To the founders, liberty was an unalienable right, an essential part of our human birthright.

But the founders did not view liberty as complete and utter lawlessness.

Ironically, the leaders of the American Revolution were not "revolutionaries" in the sense that they wanted simply to overthrow a political establishment. They were instead people who wanted to form "a more perfect union" in which "ordered liberty" not only flourished, but also supported and reinforced other unalienable rights – like life, the pursuit of happiness, and the owning of property.

"The revolution in the United States was produced by a mature and reflective taste for freedom, and not by a vague and indefinite instinct of independence," observed Alexis de Tocqueville, a Frenchman who visited and studied

America in the early 1800s. "It was not supported by passions of disorder; but, on the contrary, it advanced with a love of order and of legality."

Put another way, the founders believed in liberty, but they believed in more than just liberty. They considered freedom a divine right, but they did not believe it trumped all other rights.

*Source: Library of Congress*

They did not believe, for example, that one person's freedom gave him the right to take another's life or another's property.

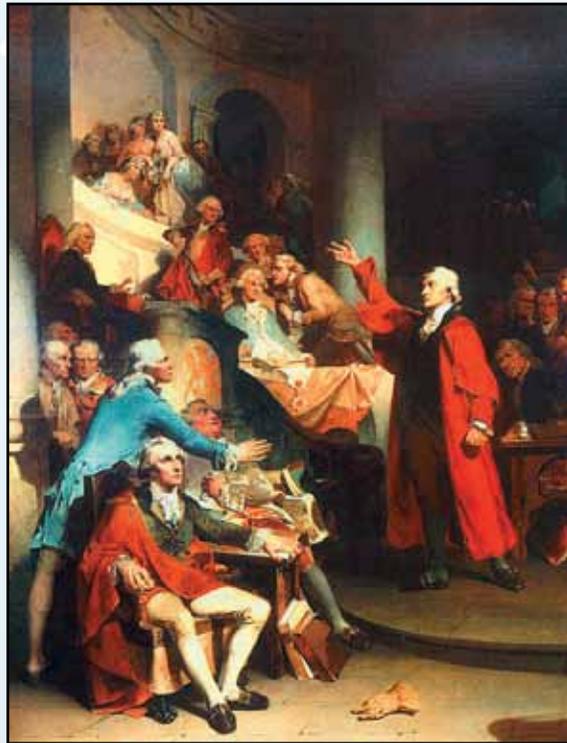
Interestingly, this appreciation for "ordered liberty" is illustrated in all sorts of ways in everyday life in America. In pastimes like football, for example, each team is free to run any play it wants any time it wants, provided that it does so within the rules of the game. You can run a dive play or a flea flicker or a double reverse – but you can't make a late hit or seek to injure another player. Doing so would trample upon the rights of others.

Since the British government was trampling upon the colonists' rights, the founders believed they were justified in declaring America's independence. They regarded liberty as absolutely essential to the

American way of life. As Patrick Henry famously cried, "Give me liberty or give me death."

Throughout our nation's history, liberty has remained a hallmark of the United States of America. This is why France presented our nation with the iconic Statue of Liberty in 1876 on the 100th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. And it is why the First Amendment freedoms found in the U.S. Constitution – such as freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and freedom of religion – are so cherished today.

America, then, is a land of ordered liberty. It is a place where everyone enjoys the freedom to pursue happiness, while respecting the rights of others. As the Pledge of Allegiance says, America believes in "liberty, and justice, for all."



**Peter F. Rothermel's 1851 painting depicts Patrick Henry speaking before the Virginia House of Burgesses. Patrick Henry loved liberty more than his own life. Do you think the American Revolution would have been successful if its leaders had been unwilling to die for freedom?**

# and the pursuit of Happiness.

Source: NASA



Astronaut James B. Irwin, lunar module pilot, gives a military salute while standing beside the deployed U.S. flag during the Apollo 15 mission.

Source: OldPine, WikiTravel



The Mayflower II is a replica ship of the original 1621 Mayflower docked at the State Pier in Plymouth, Massachusetts.

## Thought Experiment: Blame the Umpire?

U.S. Presidents love to throw out the first pitch at baseball games, but some people think the role of government is actually a lot more like that of an umpire than that of a player.

Governments, like umpires, have a responsibility to ensure that people have the freedom to pursue happiness (or to pursue victory). But governments, like umpires, can't guarantee that anyone will actually succeed in this pursuit.

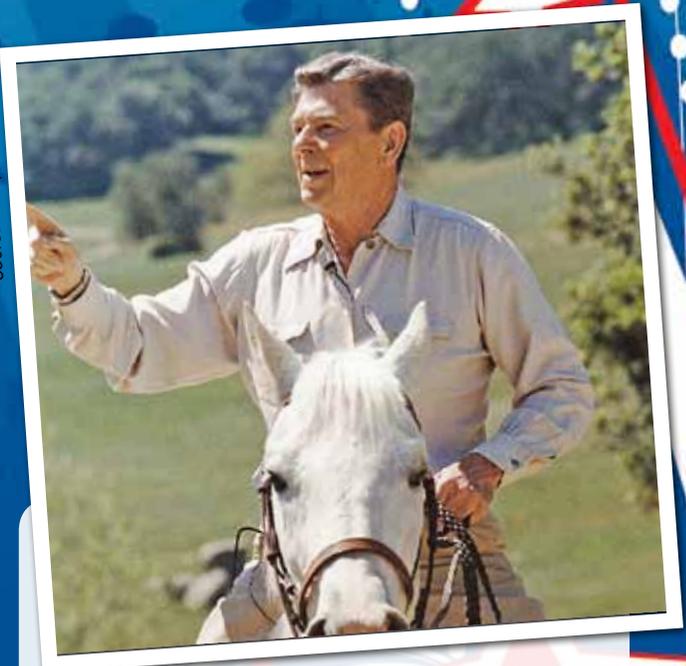
Nevertheless, many people complain about the government, just as some complain about the umpire at baseball games. Usually, these complaints stem from a perception that the government is either making too many calls, too few calls, or calls that unfairly favor one side over another.

Think about the American Revolution. Do you think the colonists had a legitimate complaint with the "umpire" at that time? How would you characterize this complaint? That the British government wasn't doing enough to help the colonists? That the British government was being too meddlesome in the lives of the colonists? That the British government was not being fair in the way that it dealt with the colonists?

## Extra! Extra! Check out the CLASSIFIEDS!

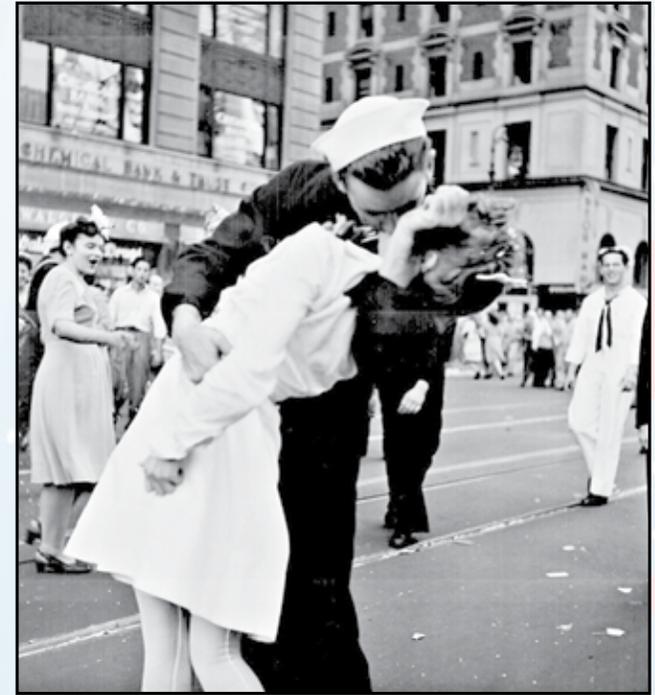
Look through the job postings in your local newspaper. Write an advertisement for a key leadership position in government, such as a judge, police officer, tax collector, legislator, or mayor. List the attributes that you think a person filling this government position ought to have. In what ways might these attributes be similar to those of an umpire or referee? In what ways might they be different? Share your want ad with the class.

Source: wikipedia



U.S. President Ronald Regan was an enthusiastic horseback rider. Here he rides his horse, El Alamein, at Rancho del Cielo.

# That to secure these rights,



Source: National Archives

Just as the colonists secured our independence in the American Revolution, the U.S. military fought to keep us free after Japan's 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor. What emotions do you think you would have experienced if you had been among the Marines raising the U.S. flag at the Battle of Iwo Jima? If you had you been among the people in New York's Times Square on V-J Day?

Have you every considered what life would be like without government? If people did as they pleased without anyone to rule over them? Would life be better without government? And if government is to exist, what should be its purpose?

The founders spent a lot of time pondering questions like these. They were lovers of liberty who had seen first-hand how governments can abuse their powers and hinder everyone's pursuit of happiness. Moreover, the founders believed that in a perfect world, governments would not have to exist. As James Madison, the author of the U.S. Constitution once observed, "If men were angels, no government would be necessary."

Still, the founders knew that men are not angels – that we are all prone to mistreat or take advantage of others in certain circumstances. In addition, the founders knew that if government did not secure our individual rights, we would live in a chaotic world where bullies and thugs constantly ran roughshod over others.

So, in the years following the Declaration of Independence, the founders spent a great deal of time fashioning a new government. They wanted this government to be strong enough to protect individual rights, yet not so strong that government leaders could themselves become tyrants who bully and badger the American people.

As George Mason once said, "From the nature of man, we may be sure that those who have power in their hands . . . will always, when they can . . . increase it."

Under the leadership of James Madison, the founders wrote a Constitution that established a federal system of government which

divided powers between national, state, and local authorities. In addition, they separated the national government into three different branches (legislative, executive, judicial) so that there would be lots of checks and balances to prevent any one branch of government from wielding too much authority.

The founders also went to great lengths to maximize the liberties of the American people. As Thomas Jefferson said, "[A] wise and frugal government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned."

When you stop and think about it, it's really quite remarkable that the founders did what they did. After directing a successful revolt against an oppressive power, many leaders would have sought to grab great power for themselves.

Yet, the founders, to their great credit, did not do this. They did not perceive themselves to be all-wise and all-noble. So, when they adopted the U.S. Constitution in 1787, the founders limited the federal government's powers to those they specifically enumerated.

In addition, they established a system for amending that Constitution so that any imperfections in their work could be corrected by the people's representatives. Over the last 200+ years, the U.S. Constitution has been amended in a number of important ways. But thanks to the founders' vision and foresight, this document lives on, "securing the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity."

# Governments are instituted among Men

## Thought Experiment:

### Do You Know the Way to San Jose?

Suppose you were taking a cross-country road trip to California and wanted to see a bunch of sights along the way. To ensure that you made it to every place you wanted to go, you'd probably take along a road atlas or a global positioning system (GPS).

Interestingly, a famous U.S. Senator from the 1800s once compared the U.S. Constitution to the maps and GPS systems of his day. "We may be tossed upon an ocean where we can see no land – nor, perhaps, the sun or stars," Daniel Webster observed. "But there is a chart and a compass for us to study, to consult, and to obey. That chart is the Constitution."

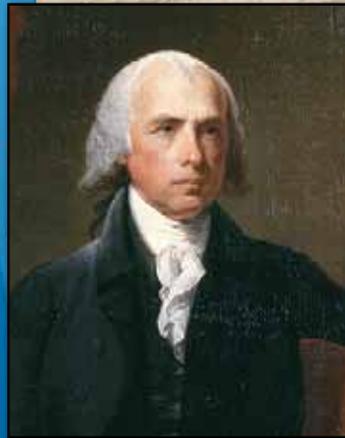
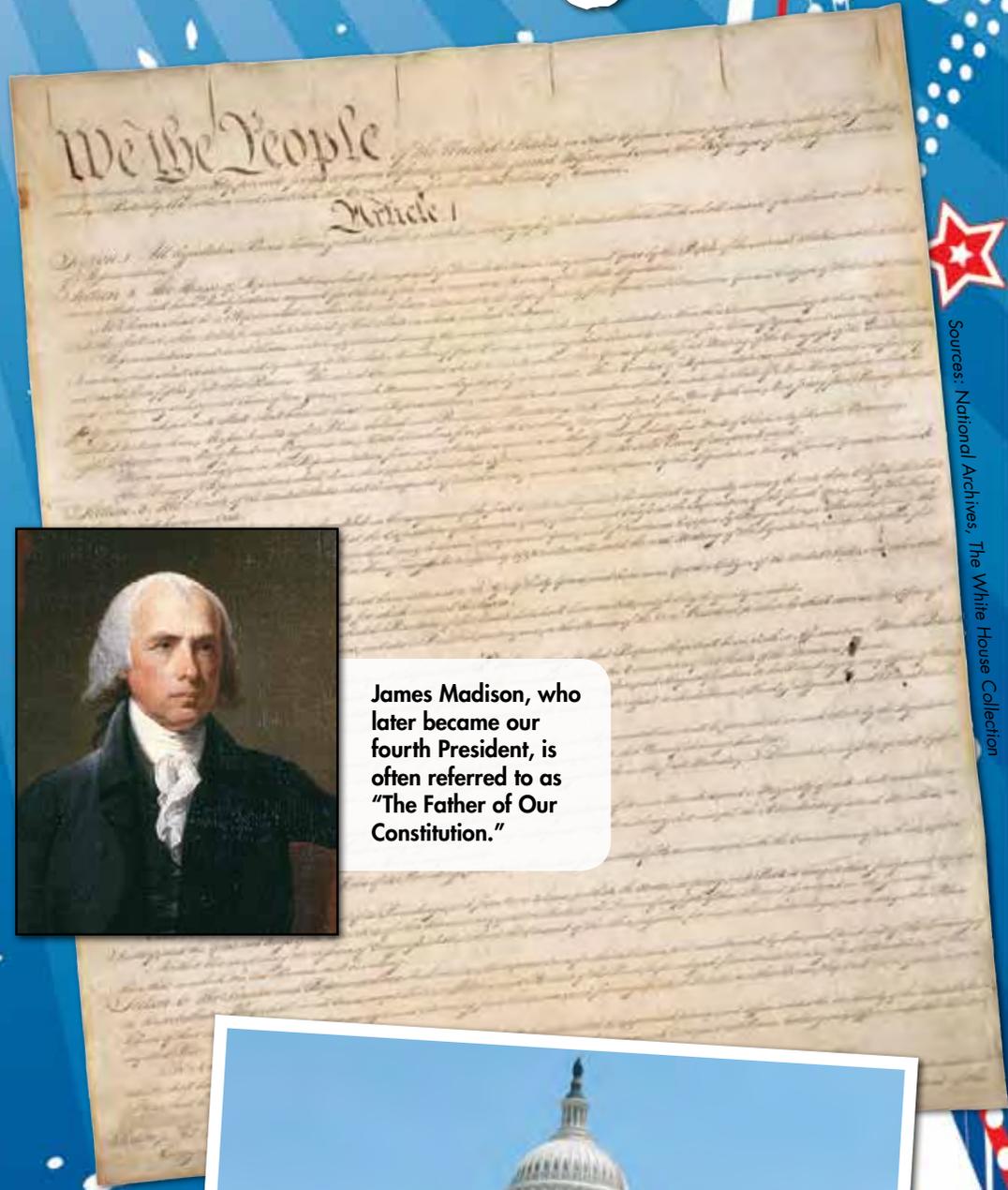
The U.S. Constitution is the authoritative guide to our national affairs. It outlines the major roads or branches of government, where they intersect, and how ideas travel from being an initial proposal to being an enacted law.

Keeping this analogy in mind, do you think lawmakers are ever reluctant to "ask for directions" (or consult the Constitution)? Do you think they're ever tempted to take "short cuts" that aren't found on the map? Do you think lawmakers are more apt to "run red lights" than are the people they represent? And do you think the system of government that the founders gave us adequately protects citizens from the dangers of a "driver" drunk with power? Explain your answers to others.

## Extra! Extra! Scavenge Your Whole Newspaper

Skim through an entire edition of your local newspaper or use the search feature of the digital edition of your local newspaper, as if you were on a scavenger hunt. Using a bright pen or marker, highlight the names of the different government officials that you find, seeking to identify at least one in each of the following categories:

- A member of the U.S. House of Representatives
- A member of the U.S. Senate
- The President of the United States
- A member of the President's cabinet
- A justice on the U.S. Supreme Court
- A member of the Florida House of Representatives
- A member of the Florida Senate
- The Governor of the State of Florida
- A member of the Florida Supreme Court
- A member of a City or County Commission in Florida
- The Mayor of a city or town in Florida
- A circuit or county judge in Florida



James Madison, who later became our fourth President, is often referred to as "The Father of Our Constitution."



Article 1 of the U.S. Constitution outlines the structure of the legislative branch, which meets in the U.S. Capitol.

Source: Raul65, Wikimedia Commons

Source: National Archives, The White House Collection



# deriving their just powers



Source: Library of Congress, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, www.floridamemory.com

Governments have certain powers – like the authority to declare war and to arrest lawbreakers – that no other entity can rightly claim. Do you think it's reasonable for the U.S. Government to require all 18 year-old males to register with the Selective Service in case they are needed during wartime? Why or why not?

When the founders went to write the U.S. Constitution in 1787, they began with three rather extraordinary words: "We the people." These three words may not seem all that remarkable, but they capture an idea that is extremely powerful.

America is a nation that is governed, ultimately, by the citizens who pledge their allegiance to "the republic for which it [the flag of the United States of America] stands."

Americans do not believe in the "Divine Right of Kings," the notion that rulers are not subject to any earthly authority or accountable in any way to their subjects. In fact, in the Declaration of Independence the founders directly challenged this notion by saying that any government's legitimacy (or "just powers") come "from the consent of the governed."

Still, the founders did not establish a direct democracy in which every governmental decision was put to a vote of all the people. Instead, they set up a republic (or representative democracy) in which officials elected by the people make governmental decisions.

When Benjamin Franklin was asked what kind of government the founders had given America, he replied, "A republic . . . if you can keep it." What Franklin meant was that for our system of government to work, ordinary Americans must take an active role in the civic life of our nation.

Citizens should register and vote. They should attend public meetings and candidate debates. They should stay informed on public issues and

seek to influence their elected officials with letters, phone calls, and petitions. They should organize rallies and protests. They should pay taxes and serve on juries. They should volunteer for military service and/or participate in a wide array of service projects organized by non-profit organizations, civic clubs, and community groups.

As Benjamin Franklin understood, for America's great experiment in self-government to continue, each new generation of Americans must commit to keeping the republic our founders gave us. Each new generation of Americans must take on the responsibilities of citizenship.

America truly is a unique nation. It is a country ruled not by kings or lords, but by ordinary citizens who have embraced our nation's founding principles and have committed themselves to ensuring that our system of government remains, in the words of Abraham Lincoln, "of the people, by the people, and for the people."



# from the consent of the governed.”

## Thought Experiment: If Kids Could Vote

Have you ever considered what America would be like if kids could vote in our national elections?

Some believe public officials would be more likely to fund education and other programs important to the young. Others believe public officials would be less likely to run up a huge debt since any current shortfalls would have to be paid by today's young people tomorrow.

What do you think would happen if kids were given the right to vote? Do you think young people would exercise their voting responsibility in a responsible way? Or do you think they'd act childishly and insist on getting all sorts of government goodies for themselves?

While government officials have never given any serious consideration to lowering the voting age below 18, many have given a great deal of thought to what makes a responsible voter. For example, James Madison wrote a very famous essay about the problems that arise when various "factions" place the interests of their own group ahead of the common interests of the nation.

Similarly, Benjamin Franklin once observed that "only a virtuous people are capable of freedom." By this, Franklin meant that the only way that freedom could survive is if individual citizens resisted the temptation to take advantage of others – even through legal means.

What do you think of these ideas? Do you think "factions" are a problem today? Do you think voters care too much about their own self-interest and too little about the common good? And is there always a conflict between one's self-interest and the best interests of the nation? Explain.

## Extra! Extra! Analyze the Opinion Pages

Madison's famous essay on factions is part of *The Federalist Papers*, a collection of influential writings which persuaded citizens and leaders to support ratification of the U.S. Constitution. Interestingly, the essays in *The Federalist Papers* first ran in the opinion section of several newspapers published in early America.

Take a look at the opinion pages of your local newspaper. Read one of the columns, editorials, or letters to the editor. Does this item advance the interests of a narrow group or faction? Does it do so in a manner that seems to be at odds with the interests of others? With the best interests of the nation?

Thomas Jefferson once observed, "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free . . . it expects what never was and never will be." Do you agree with this statement? How does one become an informed voter who thinks about the common good and the best interests of the nation? Write a persuasive essay that offers your opinion.

All the benchmarks cover grades 9-12 and are either Common Core Standards or Next Generation Sunshine State Standards (NGSSS).

Page 3: SS.912.A.1.2, SS.912.C.1.1, SS.912.C.1.2, WHST.9-10.2, WHST.9-10.4, WHST.11-12.2, WHST.11-12.4, RH.9-10.2, RH.11-12.2, W.9-10.2, W.9-10.4, W.11-12.2, W.11-12.4

Page 5: SS.912.C.1.1, SS.912.C.1.5, SS.912.C.2.1, SL.9-10.1, SL.9-10.4, SL.11-12.1, SL.11-12.4, RH.9-10.4, RH.11-12.4

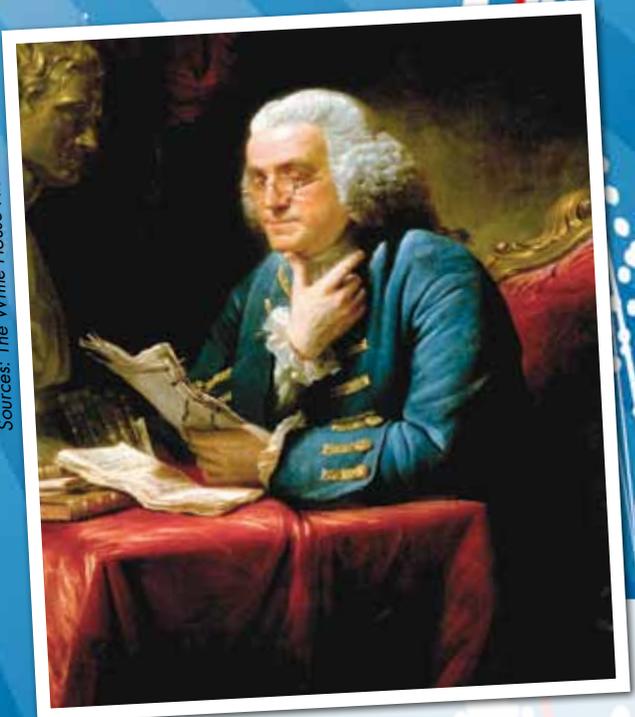
Page 7: SL.9-10.1, SL.9-10.4, SL.11-12.1, SL.11-12.4, W.9-10.1, W.9-10.4, W.11-12.1, W.11-12.4

Page 9: SS.912.C.1.1, SS.912.C.1.5, SS.912.C.2.1, SS.912.C.2.7, SS.912.C.2.2, SS.912.C.2.6, SS.910.C.2.10, RH.9-10.7, RH.11-12.7, WHST.9-10.7, WHST.11-12.7

Page 11: SS.912.C.2.2, SS.912.C.2.3, SS.912.C.2.4, SS.912.C.2.8, RH.9-10.7, RH.11-12.7, WHST.9-10.2, WHST.9-10.4, WHST.11-12.2, WHST.11-12.4, W.9-10.1, W.11-12.1, W.9-10.4, W.11-12.4

Page 12: WHST.9-10.7, WHST.9-10.8, WHST.9-10.9, WHST.11-12.7, WHST.11-12.8, WHST.11-12.9, WHST.9-10.2, WHST.11-12.2, WHST.9-10.4, WHST.9-10.6, WHST.11-12.4, WHST.11-12.6, TH.912.C.1.1

Sources: The White House Historical Association



From his early days in the newspaper business to his latter days as a statesman, Ben Franklin had a profound influence on American life.

Sources: State Library and Archives of Florida



A Palm Beach County election official carefully examines a punch card ballot during the recount of the 2000 presidential election.

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*An affiliate of National History Day*



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Then, you or your group present your findings in one of the following ways:

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