



2020-2021 We the People Middle School Simulated Congressional Hearing Questions

UNIT 1 What Were the Founders' Basic Ideas about Government? REGIONAL + STATE QUESTION

1. Thomas Jefferson once wrote that the nation's Founders were students of history.* What were some important lessons about history that the Founders learned from their studies?

- Why was the history of the Roman Republic both an example and a warning to America's founding generation?
- Why do you think the Founders chose a republican or representative government rather than other known forms of government?
- To what extent does the common good of our society today depend on the classical republican ideal of civic virtue?

* Thomas Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia (Paris, 1785).



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UNIT 1

What Were the Founders' Basic Ideas about Government? STATE QUESTION

2. How did both classical republicans and natural rights philosophers influence the Founders' views about government?

- What are the essential differences between classical republicanism and natural rights philosophy?
- Explain what John Locke meant by the social contract. Do social contracts exist today? Give examples.
- Do you think government should have purposes that classical republicans and natural rights philosophers did not include in their writings? Explain your answer.



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UNIT 2

What Shaped the Founders' Thinking about Government? REGIONAL + STATE QUESTION

1. "Despite its weaknesses, the Articles of Confederation made lasting contributions to American government."* Do you agree with this assessment? Why or why not?

- Why did the Articles of Confederation prove inadequate almost from the start?
- What arguments could you have made in support of the Articles?
- What did the Framers learn from the Articles' inadequacies, and how did they correct them in the Constitution?

*The Concise Encyclopedia of Democracy (New York: Routledge, 2000),32.



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UNIT 2

What Shaped the Founders' Thinking about Government? STATE QUESTION

2. Shortly after the start of the Revolutionary War in 1775, many of the new states began to write their constitutions. All of them included some basic principles. What were those basic principles and why were they important?

- How would you explain legislative supremacy, and why did most states favor it?
- What ideas drawn from natural rights philosophy were reflected in the new state constitutions?
- Why do you think most state constitutions began with a preamble and a declaration of rights?



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UNIT 3

What Happened at the Philadelphia Convention? REGIONAL + STATE QUESTION

1. In Federalist 70, Alexander Hamilton argued, "Energy in the Executive is a leading character in the definition of good government. It is essential to the protection of the community against foreign attacks; it is not less essential to the steady administration of the laws."* Do you agree or disagree with Hamilton? Why?

- How does the Constitution both empower and limit the executive branch?
- What arguments were discussed in the Constitutional Convention and ratification debates about the power of the executive branch? Are they relevant today? Why or why not?

*Alexander Hamilton, "The Executive Department Further Considered" (Federalist 70), New York Packet, March 18, 1788, The Avalon Project, Yale Law School



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UNIT 3

What Happened at the Philadelphia Convention? STATE QUESTION

2. The U.S. Constitution has often been called a "bundle of compromises," since the delegates often had to reach compromises on various issues. What compromises were made at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia?

- What process did the Founders use for arriving at decisions during the Philadelphia Convention?
- What role should compromise play in our government today?



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UNIT 4 How Was the Constitution Used to Establish Our Government? REGIONAL + STATE QUESTION

1. The Framers invented a new political system that has been called "a government of separated institutions sharing powers."* Is this an accurate description? Why or why not?

- What powers did the Constitution give the national government over state governments? What are the advantages and disadvantages of that distribution of power?
- What is the relationship between the power of the national and state governments today? Has it changed since the founding? Why or why not?

*Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 29.



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UNIT 4 How Was the Constitution Used to Establish Our Government? STATE QUESTION

2. “Contemporary political scientists suspect that democratic politics is fundamentally unworkable without parties and partisanship. Parties connect the ordinary citizen to government and politics and offer them broad policy choices, thereby giving voters a chance to direct and control government through party politics.”* Do you agree or disagree? Why? What evidence can you offer to support your response?

- Why did the Founders initially oppose the formation of political parties, and why did they change their stances?
- In what ways does America’s two-party system promote its constitutional principles? In what ways might it hinder them?
- Why do you think the United States has remained essentially a two-party system, while many democracies have multiparty systems?

* Rick Valelly, “Who Needs Political Parties?” in Princeton Readings in American Politics, ed. Richard M. Valelly (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 513.



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UNIT 5

How Does the Constitution Protect Our Basic Rights? REGIONAL + STATE QUESTION

1. In 1870 Congress passed the Fifteenth Amendment, which prohibits the federal and state governments from denying a citizen the right to vote based on that citizen's "race, color, or previous condition of servitude." Is voting a fundamental right? Why or why not?

- How has the right to vote expanded to more Americans since 1870?
- How does voting play an important role in a constitutional democracy?
- What might be done to improve voter participation, particularly that of young voters?



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UNIT 5

How Does the Constitution Protect Our Basic Rights? STATE QUESTION

2. How and why did the Fourteenth Amendment enlarge and extend due process protections?

- The Constitution does not define due process of law. How would you explain the meaning of due process of law?
- How can the rights of individuals and the rights of society conflict?
- How does due process of law protect individuals from possible abuses of powers? Provide examples in the response.



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UNIT 6

What Are the Responsibilities of Citizens? REGIONAL + STATE QUESTION

1. “The first requisite of a good citizen in this Republic of ours is that he shall be able and willing to pull his weight.”* Do you agree or disagree with President Theodore Roosevelt? Why or why not? What are the attributes of good citizenship?

- How is citizenship defined in the Fourteenth Amendment?
- What, if any, are the responsibilities of citizenship in the United States?
- Is criticizing the government, when necessary, consistent with good citizenship? Why or why not?

*Theodore Roosevelt, *Addresses and Presidential Messages of Theodore Roosevelt, 1902–1904*, introduction by Henry Cabot Lodge (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1904), 85.



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UNIT 6

What Are the Responsibilities of Citizens? STATE QUESTION

2. An English historian once said, “The powers of technology appear to be unlimited. If some of the dangers may be great, the potential rewards are greater still.”* Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not? Provide examples of how technology has had both positive and negative effects on our lives today.

- In what ways, if any, does modern technology affect the privacy rights of Americans?
- How might the Internet encourage or discourage the achievement of democratic principles and values?
- What actions, if any, do you think citizens, Congress, or your state legislature should take to limit the tools of modern technology, such as social media?

*D.S.L. Cardwell, Dictionary of the History of Ideas, vol. 4, Technology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), 364, quoted in Practically Speaking: A Dictionary of Quotations on Engineering, Technology and Architecture, ed. Carl C. Gaither and Alma E. Cavados-Gaither (Bristol, UK: Institute of Physics Publishing, 1999), 364.