



## **What's So Special about the Constitution?**

Paragraphs for Key Word Outlining  
By Jennifer Kimbrell

### **1. The Longest Lasting Constitution**

In 1787, America's Founding Fathers created the Constitution. The United States is still a young country. But the U.S. Constitution is the world's oldest written constitution in continuous use. It is 234 years old! In the year 2000, 159 countries had written constitutions. Among those, 101 were less than 30 years old! France has gone through 10 different constitutions since 1791. El Salvador has had 36 since 1824. How did the leaders of a baby nation create such a great guide for government?

### **2. Fear**

The United States had fought a bloody war with England for freedom. King George had used all of his power to try to take their freedom. But the Americans won. Now they were afraid of a powerful national government. They wanted the states to govern themselves. But every state acted like its own tiny country. They were divided states, not united states. Leaders decided to hold a meeting. Men from each state would create a strong government to unite the States.

### **3. Fight**

The meeting was called the Constitutional Convention. It began on May 25, 1787. James Madison had a plan. It was different from any existing government. The government would have three parts. The parts were the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches. But the plan did not explain exactly how the parts would work. Also, the small states were worried. They wanted as much power as the large states. The men had to stop fighting and agree on all the details.

### **4. No Kings Allowed!**

The Executive branch would carry out the laws. On June 1<sup>st</sup> someone suggested that one man should be in charge of the Executive branch. An eerie silence followed. The Americans were remembering King George. King George was one man. He was in charge. He was powerful. He used his power to try to take their freedom. They were afraid of having one powerful man in charge. They were afraid of losing their new freedom. They decided to drop the idea for a while.

## **5. Tenacious Warriors**

The meeting continued into the hot summer. Many disagreements broke out. The men at the meeting were smart and tough. They had fought and won the Revolution against all odds. All of them had different ideas. All of them were stubborn. Each thought he was right. Debates became arguments. Tempers blazed. It seemed that the Convention would fall apart. Benjamin Franklin was an old man by then. He said that every day they needed to ask God for help with their job. He called for prayer.

## **6. Feat**

The summer of 1787 was over. All of the details had finally been decided. A committee of the best writers worked on the final draft. On September 17, 1787, they displayed the majestic parchment. Many were worried. No one agreed with every detail. Would the Constitution work? Ben Franklin reassured them. He said that the men were wise. But they could also be wrong and selfish. No one should expect perfection. But he was shocked at how nearly perfect it was!

## **7. The Rule of Law**

Under our Constitution, government officials cannot do whatever they like. This even applies to the President. In the old days, the king could do whatever he liked. He could make any law he liked. He could ignore any law he didn't like. That was government by "the Rule of Men." The Constitution set up "the Rule of Law." It says what government officials can and cannot do. It stops government officials from taking away rights from the people.

## **8. Limited Power**

The Founding Fathers knew that it was natural for people to grab power. They had seen that even good people can be warped by power. Government needs enough power to do its job. But the power must be limited to protect the rights of American citizens. Their solution was the three branches of government. Each branch is to keep the other two from becoming too powerful. This is known as "the system of checks and balances."

## **9. States' Rights**

The Constitution only gives the federal government certain duties. States hold most of the power. State governments are located near the citizens instead of far away in Washington. Citizens can more easily watch and guard the state government. Also, states can change the Constitution if three-fourths of the States agree. A state government can even refuse to obey federal laws that are unconstitutional. This is called "nullification." States' rights protect the people from tyranny.