



We the People

Objectives

- Students will **identify** the importance of civic action in their community.
- Students will **analyze** parts of the Preamble to the United States Constitution.
- Students will **discuss** how the Preamble has inspired civic action throughout history and opportunities for action today.
- Students will **create** a presentation that shares the importance of the Preamble goals through history and today.

Overview

In this lesson, high school students will explore how the Preamble to the United States Constitution outlines opportunities for reflection and civic action. Students will consider the importance of civic action in their school and community, analyze the text of the Preamble, and identify how the goals outlined in the Preamble create a blueprint for civic action today and in the future. Through peer discussion, historical inquiry, and textual analysis, students will explore how the concept of “We the People” empowers them to become engaged community members. Finally, students will use their new understanding to submit an entry to the America’s Field Trip contest sponsored by America250—the nonpartisan initiative established by Congress to orchestrate a commemoration of the nation’s 250th anniversary in 2026, also known as the Semiquincentennial.

America’s Field Trip Contest Overview

America250 is inviting elementary, middle, and high school students to share their perspectives on America 250 years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Students can submit artwork, poems, essays, and more articulating what America means to them. First-place award recipients will be able to participate in a once-in-a-lifetime “field trip” experience at one of the nation’s most iconic cultural landmarks and institutions, and second-place awardees will receive a cash award. First-place awardees and their designated chaperone will receive travel and lodging accommodations for their selected trip. For more information about America’s Field Trip, contest rules, and field trip experiences for awardees, please visit america250.org/FieldTrip.

Time

60–90 minutes

Timing of the activities may vary by classroom. Consider how this activity and submission to the contest could be split into multiple days or used in collaboration with other educators across your school.

Materials

- Paper/Pencil
- Handout: *Contest Submission Information*
- Handout: *Understanding the Preamble*, one per student
 - *Understanding the Preamble* ([Google Slide](#))
- Handout: *Preamble Investigation Graphic Organizer*, one per small group
 - *Preamble Investigation Graphic Organizer* ([Google Slide](#))

Teacher Preparation

- Read through the activity and handouts beforehand to consider adaptations necessary for your students' needs. These may take the form of additional scaffolds for reading or civic action examples relevant to your community and student interests.
- Students will be participating in short presentations during the "Act" phase. The presentations can be shown using chart paper or in a digital format depending on resources, time, and class size.

Procedure

ASK

- Begin by sharing with students that they will participate in a brief warm-up activity designed to investigate and answer the question, "Why is civic action important?"
 - **Teacher Note:** *If students seem unfamiliar with the term "civic action" or "civic engagement", share the following definition. Civic action means trying to make a difference in the life of your community and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference.*
- Set up the warm-up activity by providing students with the scenario below:
 - Making people feel welcome and supported in our school community is important. If you could organize an event to promote those feelings, what would it be? Why? How would your event help people feel more welcome?
- As students conclude their individual responses, shift into a brief whole-class discussion to connect how the scenario is just one example of civic action. The following guiding questions can be used to structure this debrief discussion:
 - How does this scenario highlight how you can be an active citizen? What other examples could you think of?
 - How does civic action benefit members of a community?
 - Why is adding your voice and taking action important for the health of communities and the country?
- As the discussion concludes, challenge students to think about what America means to them and why civic action could be connected to that meaning. Share that they will continue to explore the importance of civic action through today's activities.
- Finally, share with students that they will use what they have learned at the end of the lesson to submit an entry into the America's Field Trip contest.

ANALYZE

- Students will learn about the importance of civic action by analyzing and interpreting the text of the Preamble to the United States Constitution. They will identify and define key terms while translating the Preamble into modern terms using the **Understanding the Preamble Handout**.
- Provide each student with their own copy of the handout and encourage students to read the Preamble section with bolded words, reminding students that some key words have been defined for them. After a first read, ask students to use the space provided to rewrite the Preamble in modern language.
- As students finish, rewrite the Preamble with the class so that it is visible for the whole group. Invite students to share the language they used to modernize the Preamble and discuss the meaning of sections as you go.
 - **Teacher Note:** *To help explore the meaning and the importance of word choice in the Preamble, take a few minutes to highlight the phrases “We the People” and “in order to form a more perfect union.” Ask students to consider the meaning of these phrases with guiding questions like:*
 - *Who does “We” refer to in the Preamble?*
 - *Why is the concept of “We” important to the meaning of the Preamble?*
 - *Why might the Preamble state “more perfect” rather than only “perfect?” How does “more perfect” imply a responsibility for ongoing civic engagement from “We the people?”*

APPLY

- Next, students will work in small groups to discuss the goals laid out in the Preamble to the United States Constitution and their connection to civic action, both throughout history and today.
- Begin by organizing students into small groups and distributing a copy of the **Preamble Investigation Graphic Organizer** to each group. Assign each small group one of the following Preamble goals to guide their work. The five Preamble Goals for this activity are:
 - Establish Justice
 - Insure Domestic Tranquility
 - Provide for the Common Defense
 - Promote the General Welfare
 - Secure the Blessings of Liberty

- Once each group has been assigned a Preamble goal, students will use the guiding questions on the **Preamble Investigation Graphic Organizer** to structure their exploration. The guiding questions are:
 - What does this Preamble goal mean to the members of your group?
 - How has this Preamble goal been important throughout history? What are some examples?
 - How might this Preamble goal be relevant to our lives today? How might different groups of people or communities view these goals differently?
 - How can individuals and communities work towards achieving and preserving these goals for the future?

ACT

- As the groups conclude their investigation activity, encourage each group to prepare a focused presentation to share their understanding in two minutes or less.
- To prepare, student groups should review their assigned Preamble goal and their answers to the guiding questions. To help present their findings in a clear and engaging way for the audience, students could use a combination of the following:
 - **Talking points:** Briefly explain their goal and its meaning from their perspective.
 - **Short historical examples:** Share one or two key events or figures that demonstrate the goal's importance throughout history.
 - **Modern-day connections:** Share one to two examples of how the goal relates to their lives or current events.
 - **Call to action:** Briefly suggest ways that they can work towards achieving the goal for future generations, either as individuals or together as part of their communities.
- While each group shares, encourage students to reflect on which Preamble goals they believe are most relevant for them. As students reflect, remind them to begin preparing for their America's Field Trip contest submission by considering how their understanding of the Preamble can help shape their response to the question "What does America mean to me?"
 - **Teacher Note:** *As students reflect on their response to the question "What does America mean to me?" encourage them to consider the earlier teacher-led discussion in the "Analyze" section. Ask students to consider how phrases like "We the People" might be important when considering what America means to them.*

SUBMIT

- As a final step, encourage students to submit an entry into the America’s Field Trip contest. The contest asks high-school-aged students (9–12) to submit an entry in one of two ways:
 - Students may submit an essay of up to 1,000 words on the prompt “What does America mean to me?”
 - Students may submit a video up to two minutes in length that answers the question “What does America mean to me?”
- For more information on the contest and the link to submit entries, please use the **Contest Submission Information Handout**.

Frameworks & Standards

Educating for American Democracy

- We the People 9–12: What values, virtues, and principles can knit together “We the People of the United States of America?”
- Civic Participation 9–12: Analyze leadership through past and present examples of change-makers.
- Civic Participation 9–12: Analyze strategies and examples of civic participation, including instances of participation by those without full political rights.

The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework

- D2.Civ.10.9-12: Analyze the impact and the appropriate roles of personal interest and perspectives on the application of civic virtues, democratic principles, constitutional rights, and human rights.

ELA Standards

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.5: Analyze how a text uses structure to emphasize key points or advance an explanation or analysis.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.2.E: Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation provided (e.g., articulating implications or the significance of the topic).

<p style="text-align: center;">The Preamble</p> <p><i>“We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common Defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Rewrite the Preamble:</p> <p><i>Use this section to put the Preamble into your own words.</i></p>
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Guiding Questions	Your Responses	Define Key Terms
<p>How do these goals connect with the ideas expressed in other founding documents? (e.g., “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” in the Declaration of Independence)</p>		<p>Justice: <i>Fairness</i></p> <p>Tranquility: <i>A state of being calm</i></p> <p>Defense: <i>Resisting attack</i></p> <p>General Welfare: <i>The health, happiness, and fortunes of people</i></p>
<p>How do the main goals outlined in the Preamble provide opportunities for civic action? (e.g., “We the People” reflects the importance of voting and access to voting rights)</p>		<p>Liberty: <i>The power to act as one pleases</i></p> <p>Posterity: <i>Future generations</i></p>

Directions: Use the organizer below to record your responses for the Preamble Investigation activity.

Our Preamble Goal:	
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Guiding Questions	Your Responses
<p>1. What does this Preamble goal mean to the members of your group?</p>	
<p>2. How has this Preamble goal been important throughout history? What are some historical examples?</p> <p><i>Ex. One historical example of "promote the general welfare" might be the creation of school systems in the U.S.</i></p>	
<p>3. How might this Preamble goal be relevant to our lives today? How might people or groups view these goals differently?</p>	
<p>4. How can individuals and communities work towards achieving and preserving these goals for the future?</p>	

Contest Submission Information

[America's Field Trip](#) is a nationwide student contest sponsored by **America250**, the official nonpartisan entity charged by Congress with planning the nation's Semiquincentennial in 2026, also known as the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. America's Field Trip invites students in grades 3–12 to be part of this historic milestone by sharing their perspectives on what America means to them—with the chance to earn a once-in-a-lifetime field trip experience at an iconic American landmark or cultural site, including the Smithsonian's National Zoo, National Archives Museum, Kennedy Space Center, and Yellowstone National Park—just to name a few.

Official Rules can be found at america250.org/FieldTrip/Rules.

- **Submission Deadline:** April 16, 2025 at 5:00 p.m. ET
- **Eligibility:** Any student in grades 3–12 who is a legal resident of any of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, or the U.S. territories is eligible to enter. First- and second-prize awardees from the 2024 America250 America's Field Trip contest, which ended on May 17, 2024 are not eligible to enter or win.
- **Requirements:** Students at each grade level may create artwork, including physical artwork, that is submitted through a high-res photo, digital drawing, or an essay.
 - Students in grades 3–5 may submit writing up to 100 words
 - Students in grades 6–8 may submit writing up to 250 words
 - Students in grades 9–12 may submit writing up to 500 words
- **Judging Criteria:** A panel of current and former educators will evaluate submissions based on **Clarity of Idea** (25%), **Student Voice** (50%), and **Presentation** (25%).
- **Prizes:** 25 first-place awardees from each grade level category and their designated chaperone will receive travel and lodging accommodations for a three-day, two-night trip to a select historical or cultural site. 25 second-place awardees from each grade level category will each receive a \$500 cash award. Award recipients will be announced in May 2025, and field trips will take place in July and August 2025.

How to Enter the America's Field Trip Contest

Students at each grade level will respond to the prompt, "What does America mean to you?" with artwork or an essay. Students must develop submissions individually.

Students must have a teacher, parent, or legal guardian submit their entry through the application portal at america250.org/FieldTrip/Application. A teacher may only submit an entry on behalf of a student with written permission from that student's parent or legal guardian.

For more information about America's Field Trip, including official contest rules, 2025 field trip locations, judging criteria, submission thought starters, classroom activities, and Spanish-language resources, please visit america250.org/FieldTrip or scan the QR code.

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