

U.S. Constitution Vocabulary

- 1) **Electoral College**—The group of presidential electors who cast the official votes for president and vice-president after a presidential election. Each state has a number of electors equal to the total of its number of its members in the Senate and the House of Representatives.
- 2) **equal representation**—The idea that each state should have the same number of representatives in Congress. The number of representatives in the Senate is based on equal representation.
- 3) **Great Compromise**—A plan accepted at the Philadelphia Convention that called for Congress to have two houses. In the Senate representation of the states would be equal, with each state having two senators. The House of Representatives would use proportional representation of the states, and therefore, the number of representatives from each state would be determined by its population. Also called the Connecticut Compromise.
- 4) **proportional representation**—The electoral system in which the number of representatives for a state is based on the number of people who live in that state. Proportional representation is used to determine the number of each state's representatives serving in the House of Representatives.
- 5) **jurisdiction**—The power or authority to hear cases and make decisions.
- 6) **Virginia Plan**—The plan presented at the Philadelphia Convention that provided for a national government composed of three branches. It proposed a Congress of two houses, both of which would be based on proportional representation. The Virginia Plan favored a strong national government.
- 7) **New Jersey Plan**—The plan presented at the Philadelphia Convention that called for a one-house national legislature with each state having equal representation. The New Jersey Plan followed the framework of the Articles of Confederation and favored a weak national government.
- 8) **tariff**—A tax on imported or exported goods or a list or system that describes such taxes.
- 9) **fugitive slave clause**—Article IV, Section 2, Clause 3 of the U.S. Constitution, which stated that slaves who escaped must be returned to their owners. It was later abolished by the Thirteenth Amendment.

- 10) **three-fifths clause**—Article I, Section 2, Clause 3 of the U.S. Constitution, later eliminated by the Fourteenth Amendment. The clause provided that each slave should be counted as three-fifths of a person in determining the number of representatives a state might send to the House of Representatives. It also determined the amount of direct taxes Congress may levy on a state.
- 11) **amendment**—change or addition to a document or plan, such as the Constitution.
- 12) **amendment process**—rules for amending the Constitution. These are specified in the Constitution.
- 13) **Bill of Rights**—first 10 amendments to the Constitution.
- 14) **checks and balances**—system in which the power of each branch of government is balanced and checked by the powers of the other branches.
- 15) **confederationists**—in the late 1700s, supporters of the Articles of Confederation who wanted states to hold most of the power in a loose alliance or confederation.
- 16) **nationalists**—those who favored a strong national government in the late 1700s.
- 17) **delegate**—official representative of some group or body, like a state assembly.
- 18) **federalism**—system of government in which power is shared between the central (national) government and the state governments.
- 19) **exports**—goods shipped to other countries for sale or use.
- 20) **imports**—goods brought in from other countries for sale or use.
- 21) **Founding Fathers**—writers and framers of the Constitution; the founders.
- 22) **House of Representatives**—“lower” house of Congress in which the number of each state’s representatives is based on its population.
- 23) **Senate**—“senior” or “upper” house of Congress in which each state has two representatives, called Senators, regardless of its population.
- 24) **ratify**—approve and make official.
- 25) **judicial branch**—part of government that interprets the laws through its decisions in legal cases.
- 26) **executive branch**—part of government, headed in the United States by a president or governor, that carries out the laws.

- 27) **legislative branch**—law-making part of government.
- 28) **Preamble**—introductory part of the Constitution.
- 29) **Supreme Court**—highest level of the judicial branch of the federal government; the highest court in the country. There are also state supreme courts.
- 30) **anti-federalist**—opponent of the central government as defined by the Constitution; against its ratification.
- 31) **federalist**—supporter of ratification of the Constitution.
- 32) **constitution**—plan of government. In the United States, the Constitution is the supreme law and plan of the national government, adopted in 1789.
- 33) **popular sovereignty**—consent of the governed; power to govern comes from the people.

