

# Our National Government

By Phyllis Naegeli



<sup>1</sup> For many years, a **king** ruled America. His name was George. He lived in England. After fighting a big war, George needed money. He started to tax America. The people were very mad. They did not want to pay money to England. If they had to pay, however, they wanted a part in the English **government**. The king wouldn't listen to them. So, they fought for their **freedom**. And they won!



<sup>2</sup> America became a new country. There were thirteen **states** in America. The people needed a government that would be fair. It also needed to unite them as a free country. The states had fought hard to be free. They wanted to stay free. Many did not want a strong government to rule over the states.

<sup>3</sup> In 1781, a group of men met in Philadelphia to plan a new government. The first time they set up a plan, the government was weak. America discovered many problems with the government. It could make laws, but it could not make the people obey them. Everyone knew that the government had to be changed. The states sent men to another meeting. This time they knew they needed a strong government. But, they also knew the states needed to have **rights**.

<sup>4</sup> They talked a lot about what to do. Some states were small. They wanted to be sure that they had an equal voice in the new government. The big states wanted to be sure that all of their people would be heard too. The men who were meeting **debated** and argued. Finally, they decided how to set up the government. The new government would have three sections called branches.

<sup>5</sup> The first branch they planned was the **legislative branch**. They called it the **Congress** and divided it into two houses, the Senate and the House of Representatives. The Senate made the small states happy. Each state would have two senators. The House made the larger states happy. Population would decide how many people would serve each state in the House.

<sup>6</sup> The legislative branch would make the laws. It would also decide how much money the government could spend. It gave the Congress the power to **approve** decisions made by the executive branch. No one would have complete power in the government. The Congress would also have the power to remove government officials from office if they broke the law.

<sup>7</sup> The second branch they planned was the **executive branch**. One person would be the leader of this part of the government. The leader would be called the **president**. Some people wanted the president to serve for life. Many people didn't like this idea. It was too much like having a king. So, they decided the president would serve four-year terms. They also said that whoever served as president had to be thirty-five years old and a natural born citizen. The leader of our country needed to be experienced and loyal to America.

<sup>8</sup> Today in the executive branch, many departments help carry out the laws made by Congress. All this is done under the leadership of the president. The president is given the power to approve or **veto** laws. He also chooses judges, **ambassadors**, and department leaders. In

addition, the president makes treaties with other countries. The Congress, however, has to approve these decisions. This keeps the president from becoming too powerful.

<sup>9</sup> The third branch of the government was the **judicial branch**. When it was first planned, it was only the **Supreme Court**. Later, the Congress added U.S. District Courts and U.S. Appeals Courts. The courts have the power to decide if laws are fair. They also hear legal cases when federal laws are broken. The Supreme Court is called the highest court in the land. In most cases, its decision is final.

<sup>10</sup> When the plan for the government was finished, it was called the **Constitution**. When the states were deciding if they liked it or not, some people were concerned that the people's rights were not written down. This was changed in 1789 by adding the first ten amendments to the Constitution. These amendments are called the **Bill of Rights**.

<sup>11</sup> Our government was planned to keep us a free nation. Free from a king. Free from **absolute** rule. People have a voice in what the government does. All because a king decided to tax America.

Name \_\_\_\_\_



Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Our National Government

<p>1. Why did America fight for freedom from England?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>2. What was wrong with the first government America had?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A The smaller states weren't represented.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B It was too weak.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C It was too strong.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D It was too much like England's.</p>
<p>3. Which house of Congress made the smaller states happy?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>4. Which of the following IS <b>not</b> a power of the legislative branch?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A To decide how much money the government can spend</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B To approve decisions of the executive branch</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C To appoint ambassadors</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D To make laws</p>
<p>5. What is the name of the highest court in the land?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A The Supreme Court</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B The U.S. Appeals Court</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C The U.S. District Court</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D None of the above</p>	<p>6. At what age can a person become president?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A Thirty-five</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B Thirty</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C Twenty-one</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D Twenty-five</p>
<p>7. The Bill of Rights lists the rights given to the people.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A False</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B True</p>	<p>8. The president serves eight-year terms.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A False</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B True</p>



## Our National Government

**The Congress has two houses: the Senate and the House of Representatives. How did this settle the conflict between large states and small states?**



Date \_\_\_\_\_

**What do you think it would be like in America if the government couldn't make people obey the laws?**

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# How Our Constitution Has Changed, Part 1

By Phyllis Naegeli



<sup>1</sup> Isn't it funny how things change? Kids grow up. People change their minds. Did you know our Constitution has changed, too? That's right. It is called a "living document." That is because it can be changed. Article 5 of this great document even tells how to change it. It's a good thing it's in there! We've had to use it a few times.

<sup>2</sup> A change to our Constitution is called an amendment. The first ten changes list our rights. They are called the Bill of Rights. They are special freedoms we have. The other changes are important, too.

<sup>3</sup> The eleventh change says states have to be sued in their own courts. A long time ago, a man from one state sued another state. The Supreme Court said it had to hear the case. It agreed with the man. People were mad. They said the Supreme Court should have stayed out of it. Congress agreed. The 11th Amendment was passed.

<sup>4</sup> The next change was about the way we pick our president. Electors have always picked our president. They used to cast one vote. The winner would be president. The runner-up would be vice president. It worked for a while. Then there was a tie. The House had to choose the president. It took thirty-six tries to reach a decision. The 12th Amendment was added. Now electors vote once for president. Then they vote for vice president. This way works better.

<sup>5</sup> The next three changes helped our country come together after the Civil War.

<sup>6</sup> The thirteenth change ended slavery. President Lincoln said the slaves were free. We needed a strong law to keep it that way. The new rule was passed by Congress. It ended slavery in America for good.

<sup>7</sup> Citizens' rights were made clear by the fourteenth change. It says all people count. Everyone will be represented in Congress. Everyone born in America is a citizen. It said all men 21 and over could vote. It also made some rules for people from the Confederate states. Their leaders could not hold office again. Their war debts became void. No one would get money for freeing his or her slaves. The states had to agree to the amendment to come back into the Union.

<sup>8</sup> Change fifteen said that states could not use race, color, or being a former slave to keep someone from voting. It didn't give anyone the right to vote. States could use other ways of deciding who could vote. Now former slaves had the chance to vote.

<sup>9</sup> It was quite a few years before any other changes were made. But our "living" Constitution continued to be adjusted to help us.



Name \_\_\_\_\_



Date \_\_\_\_\_

## How Our Constitution Has Changed, Part 1

1. What is a change to our Constitution called? <input type="radio"/> A An article <input type="radio"/> B An appeal <input type="radio"/> C An addition <input type="radio"/> D An amendment	2. Which article of the Constitution tells how it can be changed? <input type="radio"/> A Article 1 <input type="radio"/> B Article 5 <input type="radio"/> C Article 3 <input type="radio"/> D Article 7
3. What are the first ten amendments to the Constitution called? <input type="radio"/> A Articles <input type="radio"/> B The Bill of Rights <input type="radio"/> C The Declaration of Independence <input type="radio"/> D None of the above	4. The reason for the three amendments written after the Civil War was to reunite our country. <input type="radio"/> A False <input type="radio"/> B True
5. Slavery is illegal in America. <input type="radio"/> A False <input type="radio"/> B True	6. How many times do electors cast a ballot for president and vice president? <input type="radio"/> A One; the winner is president, the runner-up is vice president <input type="radio"/> B One ballot is cast for each <input type="radio"/> C As often as they want until their candidate wins <input type="radio"/> D None of the above

Name \_\_\_\_\_



Date \_\_\_\_\_

## How Our Constitution Has Changed, Part 1

7. Which of the following is not a part of the 15th Amendment?

- ☐ A States can't use age to keep someone from voting.
- ☐ B States can't use color to keep someone from voting.
- ☐ C States can't use race to keep someone from voting.
- ☐ D States can't use being a former slave to keep someone from voting.

8. The Supreme Court always hears a case when a state is sued.

- ☐ A False
- ☐ B True

Name \_\_\_\_\_



Date \_\_\_\_\_

**What do you think about the amendments written after the Civil War? Do you think they were fair to the Confederate states? Why or why not?**

# How Our Constitution Has Changed, Part 2

By Phyllis Naegeli



<sup>1</sup> In the 20th century, many things happened. There were two world wars. We became a world power. Our country grew and changed. Our laws had to change with us.

<sup>2</sup> The sixteenth change to the Constitution allows an income tax. Before this change, the government couldn't tax people directly. Now the Constitution says it's okay.

<sup>3</sup> The Seventeenth Amendment changed the way senators are elected. State legislatures used to pick senators. Now the people elect their senators. This helps to make them accountable to the people they serve.

<sup>4</sup> The eighteenth change said alcohol was illegal. Many people didn't like alcohol. They wanted it to be against the law to drink it. They believed it would make people good. Congress agreed. The change was approved in 1919. But the law was hard to enforce. There weren't enough agents to find those who disobeyed. Some people said their rights were taken away by this amendment. It was repealed by Amendment 21 in 1933. That means it was cancelled. It is the only amendment that has been repealed.

<sup>5</sup> Amendment 19 gave women the right to vote. In the mid-1800s, women started asking to vote. It took a long time for women to get this right. One amendment went to Congress in 1877, but it didn't pass. Finally in 1919, Congress acted. After that, women who meet the set age can vote.

<sup>6</sup> The twentieth change set the dates for when a president takes office. It also says when people who serve in Congress start work. Before it was changed, the president would start on March 4. That was a long time after an election. Now the president takes an oath on January 20. The elected people in Congress go to work on January 3. It's better for them to start sooner.

<sup>7</sup> The twenty-second change says a person can only be president two times. Franklin D. Roosevelt was president four times. Many people didn't like it. They asked Congress to change it. They said a person should only be president twice. Congress passed the 22nd Amendment. It was accepted quickly.

<sup>8</sup> The next change gave people in Washington, D.C., the right to vote for president. Before 1960, they couldn't. They didn't have electors because D.C. wasn't a state. The 23rd Amendment gave them electors. Now people who live in D.C. can vote for president.

<sup>9</sup> The twenty-fourth change got rid of the poll tax. People had to pay poll taxes before they could vote. It was hard for some people to pay them. States liked them because it helped raise money. It took a long time to stop them. In 1964, they were finally gone for good.

<sup>10</sup> The twenty-fifth change tells when the vice president should take over for the president. If a president is sick or dies, the vice president takes over. Sometimes it's permanent. Other times, it's just until the president is better.



<sup>11</sup> The next change gave people eighteen and over the right to vote. Many young men were drafted into the army to fight in Vietnam. If they weren't twenty-one, they couldn't vote. People said that wasn't fair. This change gave them the right to vote. There were millions of new voters in 1972.

<sup>12</sup> Amendment 27 took over two hundred years to be added. It says Congress can't raise its pay mid-term. It was part of twelve amendments proposed in 1789. Ten of them became the Bill of Rights. This one sat around for many years. Around 1990, someone decided it should be added. They worked hard, and it passed.

<sup>13</sup> Our Constitution has had many changes. Many more have not been passed. It keeps changing as we change. It is a "living document" to keep us free!

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Name \_\_\_\_\_



Date \_\_\_\_\_

## How Our Constitution Has Changed, Part 2

1. Congress is allowed to tax people's income. <input type="radio"/> A False <input type="radio"/> B True	2. Who elects senators according to the 17th Amendment? <input type="radio"/> A The president <input type="radio"/> B State legislatures <input type="radio"/> C The people of the state the senator serves <input type="radio"/> D Congress
3. Which is the only amendment that was repealed? <input type="radio"/> A 18 <input type="radio"/> B 21 <input type="radio"/> C 12 <input type="radio"/> D 19	4. Which president is the only one to have served more than two terms? <input type="radio"/> A Teddy Roosevelt <input type="radio"/> B Franklin D. Roosevelt <input type="radio"/> C Abraham Lincoln <input type="radio"/> D Harry S. Truman
5. At what age will you be able to vote? <input type="radio"/> A Eighteen <input type="radio"/> B Twenty-one <input type="radio"/> C Twenty <input type="radio"/> D Sixteen	6. When does a newly elected president take office? <input type="radio"/> A January 3 <input type="radio"/> B January 20 <input type="radio"/> C March 4 <input type="radio"/> D November 15
7. Which amendment was part of twelve sent to the states in 1789? <input type="radio"/> A 27 <input type="radio"/> B 16 <input type="radio"/> C 20 <input type="radio"/> D 19	8. The vice president takes over for the president when the president can't do his job. <input type="radio"/> A False <input type="radio"/> B True



## How Our Constitution Has Changed, Part 2

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