People stopped taking care of each other and of their land, air, and water.

Glory isn't glorious anymore.

We learned in school about a country called America. They wrote a set of laws called The Constitution.

That's what we'll do. We'll make laws.

With Dan & Ann

A Hot Topics Supplement from
This comic book tells the tale of life in the fictional country called Glory. They based their constitution on America’s document. In order to understand the importance of the U.S. Constitution, you need to know the history of America before it was written.

In 1776, the king of England ruled the American colonies. Americans had to obey the king’s laws and pay the king’s taxes.

That all changed on July 4, 1776. For several years before that, people living in the American colonies were getting fed up with British rule. They didn’t feel that the king of England was taking their problems seriously. They didn’t believe he was helping them and they got angry and annoyed.

The colonial government then was called the Continental Congress. At a meeting in June 1776, a man from Virginia, Richard Henry Lee, read a paper he had written revealing why he thought the colonies should break free from England. Here is part of what he read:

“Resolved: That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved.”

You can see that what he was saying was that he thought the Colonies should be free states and not part of Great Britain. (England)

Many people agreed with him. Others wanted to remain loyal to Great Britain. Congress was about to take a three-week break. It was believed that after that recess, Congress would vote for independence from England. In order to get ready for that, they chose a committee of five men to write a statement explaining their choice to the world.

That “Committee of Five,” as it was called, included three of our most famous historic Americans – Ben Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams. The four members of the group asked Jefferson to write the first paper. They said that they would read it and make any changes they needed. That is exactly what happened.

Congress returned from its break on July 1, 1776. They met in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and voted to break free from England. They started to write the “Declaration of Independence.” They began with what Thomas Jefferson had written. They worked on it the rest of the day and for a few days after. Late in the afternoon on July 4, 1776, church bells could be heard all around Philadelphia. Those chimes of freedom announced that the Declaration of Independence was complete. Our new nation was born.

Clearly, the king of England didn’t like that at all. He wanted to maintain control of the colonies. He sent soldiers to America to fight the colonists for control. For the next several years, the Revolutionary War raged. The colonists won their freedom.
In 1787, the rules of the government of the 13 colonies were called “The Articles of Confederation.” Some of those rules were not clear. Others were not strong enough to give the government the power it needed to make the states work well together. The rules needed to be rewritten to solve these problems.

The 1787 Americans chose a group of 55 men to represent them at a meeting and to rewrite the rules. The 55 represented people from all walks of life. Almost all had fought in the Revolutionary War.

Those “Founding Fathers,” also called the framers, gathered in Philadelphia for the Constitutional Convention in May 1787. First to arrive was James Madison. He didn’t think that the rules should be rewritten. He thought that the framers should write an entirely new set of rules. (And that is what ultimately happened.) Madison wanted America to have a government run by the people — a new form of government called a republic. In a republic, all of the people elect a few people to run the government for them. Madison’s idea was that the government be divided into parts so that no one part would have too much power. He also believed that the federal government should have more power than each of the state governments had.

There was much for the framers to decide. How would each state get its fair share of power? Should they have the same amount of power? Or, should the bigger states be stronger? Would that be fair to the smaller states?

The debates raged on. There were some things that everyone did agree on. Those things led to the writing of the Constitution.

Everyone agreed that Congress didn’t have enough power and that the government should be set up in three departments — one for the president, one for the lawmakers and one for the judges.

They agreed that the states should have some power and that the national government should have power too. They just couldn’t quite decide which should have more. They all thought that we should have some kind of leader but had trouble deciding how we should choose the leader. Some of the framers didn’t think that Americans would do a good job voting for a leader in an election. They thought that the Congress should just pick a leader.

It’s obvious that writing the Constitution wasn’t easy. The framers had important choices to make.

Debating the Issues

Learning standards: engaging in activities to solve a problem, writing for fluency

1. It probably wasn’t easy for the 55 delegates to agree. It’s difficult to get lots of people to agree on anything unanimously. Check it out by trying this activity. Turn to the movie listings in the newspaper. Take a class vote of 1 movie to see tonight. Can everyone agree on the same movie? Why do you think that is so? Take the vote again, but this time, let a majority of the class choose the movie. Without a unanimous agreement, one where every person has to agree, is it easier to make a choice? The need for unanimous agreement was one of the problems that America had with the rules before they wrote the Constitution. Under the first set of rules, called the Articles of Confederation, no rule could be changed unless all of the politicians agreed. Imagine that -- all politicians agreeing!

2. Imagine that you are a reporter in 1787, just before the convention began. Write a headline and first paragraph for a news story about the convention. You’ll want to check the newspaper to see the style in which news stories are written.
Important Issues

The framers of the Constitution had to think about a lot of different issues in order to write the rules. There was much to think about before they could finish writing the Constitution. Here are some of the topics they had to talk about.

Slavery

When they wrote the Constitution, most of the black people in America were slaves. Slaves were valuable so slave owners did not want to give them up. There were many people that didn’t consider blacks as equal to white people. Those people didn’t have a problem with slavery.

Many of the framers of the Constitution were slave owners. Others, but not most, thought slavery was wrong. But, the framers weren’t deciding whether to end slavery. They were deciding how the slaves would count in figuring how much power the states would have. If each state’s power depended on how many people lived in that state, then would slaves count as people? That was the question. Some framers didn’t want slaves to count at all. Others, mostly from the South, wanted slaves to count as whole people. If they counted then the slave states would get more power.

In the end, they reached a compromise. A compromise is when each side in an argument gives in just a little. That way, neither side gets everything they want but each side gets a little of what they want.

And, that’s what happened with slavery. Each slave would count as 3/5 of a person. It was also decided that slave trade could continue for another 20 years.

Ladies First? Ladies Last? What About the Ladies?

The framers were all men. What about women? Why didn’t they have a say in the new rules?

Back when the Constitution was written, women worked in their homes. They didn’t take jobs. They didn’t serve in Congress or in the military. They couldn’t be lawyers or doctors or pretty much anything other than a housewife. Not that there was anything wrong with being a housewife. But, when it came time to write the country’s rules people believed that women did not have the experience in the world they needed to write good rules.

Not only were the women left out of the writing of the Constitution, they were also denied the voting on it. When it was written, women weren’t given the right to vote. Because, it was believed that since they spent all of their time at home, they couldn’t make important decisions like voting. And that didn’t change soon either. Women didn’t get the right to vote until 1920, more than 100 years after the Constitution was written! Now, things have changed and it’s probably only a matter of time until we elect the first woman President!

We the People In the News

Learning standards: writing editorials, evaluating the practices of government

What do you think the framers of the Constitution might think if they read today’s newspaper? Would they believe they had written a good plan? Would they think their plan was being followed?

Compromise was vital to the writing of the Constitution. Compromise is most difficult when the parties have wide differences in opinion. What might have happened if the slave states had been unable to compromise? Can you find an article in today’s news in which a compromise could solve a problem? Write about it.
Putting It All Together

Three Branches

Although the framers wanted a strong Congress, no one wanted it to be too strong. That’s why they decided to divide up the government power into the three branches of government. That way, no one branch would be too weak or too strong. And, each could check on the other, creating what is known as a system of “checks and balances.”

The Electoral College

The Founding Fathers declared that we would have a president. Then they had to decide how we would choose one. Remember this was before anyone knew about elections or political parties. Some of the framers were afraid that Americans wouldn’t be able to choose a good president. So, they set up what is called “The Electoral College.” What that means is that when Americans vote, they actually vote for people called electors. Those people then vote for the president. The reason it’s called a college is because back then a college was just a group of people with the same goal. So, even today, when you go to vote for a president, you are really picking an elector who wants the same president that you do. That elector is then supposed to go and vote for the president you both want.

On to Ratification

So on September 17, 1787, the final draft of the Constitution was ready for signing. Remember, there were 55 men at the convention. Only 39 signed. Why do you think that was so?

Well, some left before the convention was over. Others refused to sign because they didn’t agree with everything in the Constitution. Ben Franklin said that he didn’t think it was perfect but he thought it was as perfect as it could possibly be. He was smart enough to know that no group of 55 men would ever agree on every point. So, he felt that the fact that they had created such a good set of laws and put it together the way they did, was a very good thing.

So, the Constitution was signed. It still had to be sent to each state for acceptance or ratification. It was agreed that the Constitution would pass if only 9 of the 13 states accepted it.

Learning standard: understanding the core democratic values of the Constitution

The framers gave a great deal of thought in designing the job of president. Where is our president today? See if you can find any news about the president in the newspaper. Find one article and summarize it. What is the first thing you’d do if you were elected president? Is that a job you would want?
People from all around the world sailed on ships to Glory because they wanted to be free. They picked the name Glory because it means “perfect happiness” and “great honor.” When they got there, they found great freedom. Everyone was happy.

They ate what they wanted.

They played any games they wanted.

People shared nicely.
One day, things changed.

People helped each other.

People stopped taking care of each other and of their land, air, and water.

We learned in school about a country called America. They wrote a set of laws called The Constitution.

That's what we'll do. We'll make laws.

Glory isn't glorious anymore.
Yeah, that's right. I don't think we need a leader. We can all just take care of ourselves.

I don't think we need rules. I want to do whatever I want. I don't want anyone telling me what I can do.

And if there is a leader, it should be me.

No! I should be the leader.

Stop talking all at once! No one can hear what anyone else is saying.

See, if we had a rule or law about talking just one at a time, that would make it so that everyone could talk and everyone could hear what others were saying. That kind of law would make life easier for all of us.

What's a law?

How are we going to pick a leader?

Like bike helmets.

We could make a law saying that kids have to wear bike helmets so that they are safe. Our government would make the law, and then we'd have police check and make sure kids wear helmets.
We'll need to pick a group of leaders to write our laws. In America, a group called the Founding Fathers wrote their Constitution. Let's gather the Founding Fathers of Glory.

Oh, that's right. Of course, we'll have women in the group, too. We'll gather the Founders of Glory to write our Constitution.

And we want all the different kinds of people in Glory to have the same rights.

That's it. In Glory, people of all colors and all kinds are going to live free and happy.
So the framers of Glory held a meeting. It was called The Glorious Constitutional Convention.

Glory, we've got a problem.

First, I think we should have a leader.

How should we pick a leader?

We should vote.

 Glory is made up of lots of different parts. What if each part of Glory sends people to help the leader?

That way, all of Glory will help to run the country. That will be fair to everyone.

It's not good for just one person to make all the rules. A leader is a good thing, but he or she should have some help.

Glory will be a democracy, just like America.
What's a democracy?

A democracy is a country run by its people. And because there are too many people to all run the country at once, they pick representatives to help run the government and speak for them.

Well, I think that the biggest parts of Glory should send more people to work in government than the smaller parts.

That's no good. Then the smaller parts of Glory won't have any say in the way things go.

Okay

That's good

Okay

What if each part of Glory sends two people to work in government? Is that fair?
The people of Glory decided that Glory should be a democracy. They know that each part of Glory will send representatives to help run the government. Now they have to decide what those representatives will do and how the government will be set up.

I think that the leader should be called the president. And the president should have the most power of anyone in Glory. He or she should make all of our decisions.

But it would make life easy. None of us would ever have to decide anything. I think just one powerful leader is a good idea.

No, that’s a bad idea. Then we have just one person choosing for all of us. That would be too much like having a king.

Don’t you see? Making decisions might be hard, but it will be worth it because then everyone will be happy with the choices.

Well, that’s true.

Well, that’s true.

How about if one group of people makes the laws and then the president looks them over to decide whether he likes them? Then, after the laws are passed, another group will make sure those laws work the way they should.

That’s a glorious idea. Our government will have three parts – a leader, a group that makes laws, and a group that makes the laws work. They can all work together to make sure life in Glory is fair to all of us.

Okay, that’ll work, but what if we change our minds about any of the laws? What will we do then?
What if we write this Constitution and find out that some of it isn’t good? What will we do then?

We can change it if we have to. Let’s have a law that says that the Constitution can be changed by the government if it has to be.

The Americans did that. They wrote something called the Bill of Rights, and it was a list of 10 things they wanted to change in their Constitution.

Yes, and those weren’t even all the changes. They made more when they needed to.

We can do that too.

We can do that too.

We can do that too.
A Kid’s Life in 1787

The American Constitution was written in 1787. It explained how the government would work and what laws the people would obey. While grownups were writing it, what do you think kids at that time were doing? What was life like in 1787?

Kids back then played games, a lot like kids do today. That is, they played games when they weren’t helping out around the house, and that’s what they did much of the time. You might know some of the games they played. You might even play some yourself.

They played tag, hopscotch, and hide and seek. They played with toys like yo-yos, jump ropes, puzzles, kites, spinning tops, cards, and see-saws. And you know what? Those games taught them some great lessons. They learned skills that would help them grow up and live good lives.

Learning how to aim and throw taught them skills that they could use when they hunted for food. Games like hide and seek taught them how to solve problems and how to follow directions.

Sometimes they would just make up games to play. That taught them how to use their imaginations and to think.

There were no toy-making factories. There were no toy stores. Toys were made by hand, often by the kids themselves. They might make dolls out of corn cobs and rags, or they might make tops or yo-yos out of a bit of wood and string. Making their toys taught them how to make things with their hands. Kids who were good at that could grow up to be craftsmen and to make things to sell. Playing hopscotch and jump rope taught them how to take turns and obey rules. You know, like obeying the rules in the Constitution.

What games do you play? What toys do you like?

Draw a comic of yourself playing a game. It could be a video game, a sport, a board game or one that you made up. Under it, write a few sentences telling what you learn from playing that game.

Learning standards: summarizing, drawing conclusions

Imagine that an alien has come here from another planet and that you have to tell him about what life is like here. He was last here in 1787, so you have to tell him how things have changed. You have today’s newspaper to help you. Choose words and pictures from the paper to give the alien an idea what life is like today. How is it like life in 1787? How is it different?

Look through the comic strips in the newspaper. Write a story about what the kids in the comics are doing.
A Kid’s Life in 1787

Now you know a bit about what kids played. But who were their playmates?

Most families had six or seven children. Kids could always play with their brothers and sisters. If their neighbors lived nearby, they could play with the neighbors’ kids too. Adults back then were really busy with work and didn’t have time to watch children closely. Children were trusted to look after themselves most of the time.

During the winter, the family would spend lots of time together inside the house. They might sit near the fireplace in the kitchen to stay warm. Other rooms that didn’t have fireplaces might be too cold because the fire was the only heat in the house. They didn’t have heaters like we do today.

While sitting there, the father might work on his tools, getting them ready for spring. The mother might sit at her spinning wheel and make wool to use for clothes. She might sew or fix clothing. The children would work too. They might be making butter in a churn (a tool that whips cream until it turns into butter). Or they might wrap the wool spun by the mom onto a card to keep it from getting knotted. But if the children had time, they could play. They might play a homemade board game or try to say tongue-twisters, until they started giggling.

Have you ever tried to say a tongue-twister? Try this one. Read it as fast as you can, then try to say it again and again:

**Rubber Baby Buggy Bumpers**

And then try:

**Betty bought butter, but the butter was bitter, so Betty bought better butter to make the bitter butter better.**

And:

**She sheared six shabby sick sheep.**

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**We the People In the News**

Learning standard: writing with a purpose

Find something in the newspaper that you and your family could do together. Then write an invitation to a family member asking him or her to join you in that activity.
The Bill of Rights

As the Constitutional Convention ended, many of the framers thought that there was one big problem with the Constitution. It didn’t list the peoples’ rights. Some thought a list, or bill, of rights was absolutely needed. Others were tired and wanted to go home. They were worried that if they had to write a bill of rights, it might stop the whole convention. Then the Constitution wouldn’t be finished. Still others thought that such a bill just wasn’t needed.

So, more debate took place. Finally a choice was made. No bill of rights was written. But, when the Constitution was sent to each state to be voted on and accepted, many states insisted that a list of rights be added. So, before all the states voted on the Constitution, the Bill of Rights was added on. There were 10 changes, or amendments, to the Constitution. The ten were ratified, or accepted, at the same time. They came to be known as the Bill of Rights. Only nine of them are actually rights.

Since then, there have been many other amendments, or changes to the Constitution but only the first ten are part of what’s known as the Bill of Rights.

So, why so much fuss about rights? Americans have always been fighting for their rights. The first people who came to this country from England came because they wanted the right to choose their religion. They didn’t want the government to choose for them. They fought the Revolutionary War for the right to rule themselves. Later they fought the Civil War for the right for all people to live free. Americans believe in protecting their rights.

Here are the ten amendments listed in the Bill of Rights.

**1st Amendment:** Freedom of (or from) religion. Freedom of speech. Freedom to assemble. Freedom to petition the government.

**2nd Amendment:** Right to bear arms. (That means weapons like guns.)

**3rd Amendment:** Freedom from quartering soldiers.

**4th Amendment:** Freedom from unreasonable searches and seizures. Warrants must only be issued upon probable cause, and shall be specific.

**5th Amendment:** Criminal indictments must be by grand jury. Freedom from double jeopardy. Freedom from testifying against oneself. Right to face accusers. Right to due process. Right of just compensation for takings.

**6th Amendment:** Right to speedy trial. Right to impartial jury. Right to be informed of the charges upon which the accused is held. Right to face accusers. Right to produce witnesses for the accused. Right to legal counsel.

**7th Amendment:** Right to jury trial in civil cases. Facts found by a jury cannot be reexamined by another court.

**8th Amendment:** Freedom from excessive bail or fines. Freedom from cruel or unusual punishment.

**9th Amendment:** The listing of a right in any other part of the Constitution does not imply that other unlisted rights do not exist.

**10th Amendment:** The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people.

Since the Constitution was written there have been more than 10,000 amendments suggested. Only 27 amendments have passed. Women were given the right to vote in the 19th Amendment in 1920. Slavery was outlawed in the 13th Amendment. The 26th Amendment in 1971 lowered the voting age to 18.

Debate this question with your class – is today’s federal government following the principles stated in the Bill of Rights? Use details from today’s newspaper to support your argument.
What is in The Constitution?

The words known as The Preamble start the Constitution.

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.

Taken bit by bit, the Preamble is quite simple. It says that the framers were talking for everyone – “We the People of the United States.” It says that they loved their country and just wanted it to work better, “In Order to form a more perfect Union.” It said that it was important to keep the country safe, “promote the general defence.” (Note: defense was spelled differently back then.) And it said that they would be free, “secure the blessings of Liberty,” which was very important since they had broken from England in order to be free.

The Constitution goes on to describe how the government will be set up. It describes the three branches of government – the Legislative, the Judicial and the Executive.

**Legislative Branch**

This branch of government is the Congress. That is made up of two groups, the Senate and the House of Representatives. The Constitution spells out how these people get elected and what their jobs will be.

**Executive Branch**

The Constitution explains how we choose a president and vice-president, how long they will serve and what the powers of those offices are.

**Judicial Branch**

The Constitution set up the Supreme Court and all the courts below it. It also stated that juries would decide guilt or innocence at trials.

**The States**

The Constitution sets rules for the states. It says that each state would respect the rules and laws of every other state. It also gave the power to Congress to accept new states into the Union.

**Amendments**

The Constitution also gave Congress the power to change or amend the Constitution as needed. That way, as times changed, the rules could change to meet the needs of the people.

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Check the newspaper to see if you can find an article about each of the branches of government. Summarize each one you find.
Another Look Back at Colonial Times

Nursery Rhymes in Colonial Times

You probably remember some nursery rhymes from when you were little. Colonial kids recited rhymes too. And some of those rhymes can teach you about life back then.

Do you remember:

**Jack be nimble.**
**Jack be quick.**
**Jack jumps over the candlestick?**

Maybe you pictured a boy leaping over a candle. But candlesticks were actually hanging sticks used to dry newly made candles.

How about this one:

Lucy Lockett lost her pocket,
Sally Fisher found it,
Not a penny was there in it
Just a ribbon 'round it.

Did you wonder how Lucy could have lost her pocket? After all, your pockets are usually part of your clothes, and they don't come off, so how did she lose it? Well, in Colonial times, a girl’s pocket was a cloth bag that held things girls wanted to carry around, like a wallet or sewing stuff. The bag would be tied around her waist with a ribbon. Now you see how Lucy could have lost her pocket – it fell off!

Riddle Me This

Colonial children had lots of fun making up riddles for their friends. See whether you can answer some of these.

**What kind of a room is not in a house?**

**What has teeth but doesn't chew?**

**What has three feet but doesn't walk?**

**What falls but never gets hurt?**


Learning standards: writing and solving riddles

You can write some fun riddles using the ads in the newspaper. Find an ad that has lots of pictures, and write a riddle about one of the items in the photos. For example, if you find an ad for an appliance store and see a picture of a refrigerator, your riddle might be, “I’m big and really cold. You can fill me with food and drinks. What am I?” Exchange your riddles with a friend and see whether you can solve each other’s.
The First Amendment

The First Amendment says:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."

The first part talks about religion. It says that people can choose their religion. Elsewhere in the world, countries may have a religion for all the people but here in America, we are free to choose.

The next part addresses freedom of speech. People can say what they choose without fear that they will be punished for it. If you don’t like the President, you can say so and you aren’t breaking any laws. Can you say anything you want? No. It’s against the law to say untrue things that might hurt people. So, you can’t yell “Fire” in a crowded place, for example, when there is no fire. People might panic and get hurt running out because of what you said. You can’t say things about other people that are not true that might hurt them. So, if you say that someone committed a crime against you and that isn’t true, you are hurting that person. That is against the law. Simply put, the First Amendment says that you have freedom of speech as long as what you say is true and can’t hurt anyone.

A Free Press

This freedom allows news organizations, like newspapers, magazines, the Internet, television and radio news, etc. to say what they want without fear of reprisal or punishment. The government can’t tell news organizations what to report. But, just like the freedom of speech that you have, the news people also can’t say things that aren’t true.

Freedom of the press makes it easy for news organizations to protect people. It is said that the press, the news organizations, are like watchdogs for people. The news people watch what the government is doing and they make sure it is honest. What if the government ran the newspapers and the other news organizations?

Thus, in America, we have the freedom to express ourselves without fear. This doesn’t mean that everyone agrees, though. Sometimes people want to make laws about free expression. For example, have you read Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire? Or perhaps you read To Kill a Mockingbird or Catcher in the Rye or Huckleberry Finn? If you have then maybe you’ll understand the Constitutional debate about them. Because, at some point, each of those books was banned from school libraries and fell victim to censorship.

Some people thought that those books should not be read in public schools. Others believe that such censorship violates First Amendment rights. The First Amendment says that we have freedom of expression. That counts for books, too. That means that if a school district says certain books are not allowed, a person in that community can take the school to court. The court can decide if the First Amendment right is being denied.

Censorship and First Amendment rights also apply to school newspapers. Some people believe that the students writing those newspapers should be able to write as they please because of freedom of the press. Others believe, and the courts have often ruled, that school newspapers are part of the school curriculum and, therefore, are subject to school control. What do you think?

In small groups, identify and discuss news stories related to the Bill of Rights. Explain the ways in which the news items connect to the Bill of Rights.
Look Here to Learn More

On the Web

Kids can read all about the Constitution at:
http://www.usconstitution.net/constkids4.html
See pictures of the Constitution at:
http://www.usconstitution.net/constpix.html
The text of the Constitution can be read at:
http://www.law.emory.edu/FEDERAL/usconst.html
Here’s information about the Constitution that was put together by kids:
http://library.thinkquest.org/11572/
Check out current Constitutional issues on that site, too.
Check out the National Constitution Center at:
http://www.constitutioncenter.org
Ben’s Guide to the Constitution is interesting. Look at it at:
The White House offers Constitution information at:
http://www.whitehouse.gov/kids/constitution/
* Please note that websites change frequently.

Books

• Constitution Translated for Kids by Cathy Travis
• We the Kids by David Catrow
• The U.S. Constitution and You by Syl Sobel
• Shh! We’re Writing the Constitution by Jean Fritz

You’ve read all about the Constitution. On these lines, write a paragraph telling some of what you learned. Take it home and read it to your parents so that they, too, can learn all about the Constitution.