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The authors of the Constitution could not have imagined that, in 200 years, people would be exploring outer space or going from coast to coast in a few hours. Nor could they have imagined all the changes in daily living that would occur. Today, we claim the protection of the Constitution, written when there were only a few million people in the United States. The Constitution now protects more than 331 million Americans. Almost everything about the United States has changed, except the Constitution. It is truly an outstanding document that has withstood the test of time.

However, the Constitution has changed in some significant ways. In upcoming units, you will see how the Constitution is officially amended. Officials who operate the government under the rules of the Constitution continually interpret its meaning. The Constitution allows much freedom to do this (and is referred to as a *living document*). It is an essential guide for the government and safeguards our liberty. It is flexible and brief enough to allow for adjustments. For example, the Constitution sets strict rules for making laws to ensure they are just and democratic.

Nevertheless, the Constitution also gives Congress the power to make laws. This allows our Congress to make laws in areas that did not even exist when the Constitution was written. Space exploration and the internet are two examples. Can you think of others?

Quotes on the Constitution

Two centuries of growth and unrivaled prosperity have proven the foresight of the 55 men who worked through the summer of 1787 to lay the foundation of the American government. In the words of Archibald Cox, former solicitor general of the United States, "The original Constitution still serves us well despite the tremendous changes in every aspect of American life because the framers had the genius to say enough but not too much.... As the plan outlined in the Constitutional Convention succeeded, as the country grew and prospered both materially and in the realization of its ideals, the Constitution gained majesty and authority far greater than that of any individual or body of men."

Quotes from the Founding Fathers give insight into the attitude and mindset of the time:

"Let our government be like that of the solar system. Let the general government be like the sun and the states the planets, repelled yet attracted, and the whole moving regularly and harmoniously in several orbits." — John Dickinson

"The happy Union of these States is a wonder; their Constitution a miracle; their example of Liberty throughout the world." — James Madison

"Our new Constitution is now established, and has an appearance that promises permanency; but in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes." — Ben Franklin

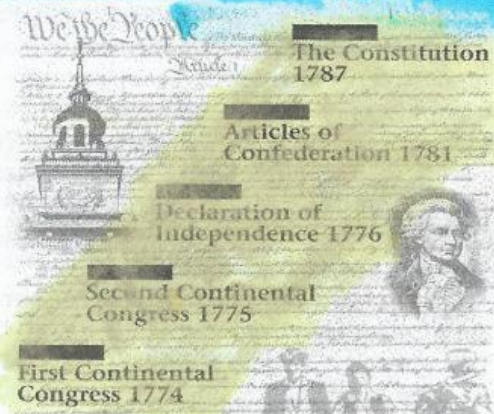
"The Constitution is the guide which I will never abandon." — George Washington

As courts interpret, we are governed by laws, treaties, and customs within the Constitution's framework. Later, you will study judicial review and the amending process, helping you better understand how the Constitution is changed.

The Constitution has lasted because it:

- provides for a government by the people;
- provides for a government that can act when in danger;
- provides for a federal union where people retain certain rights and powers in their states;
- guarantees individual rights even when the individual's views are unpopular or in the minority;
- has preserved the Union;
- provides the leaders of our government an opportunity to interpret the Constitution and apply it to changing times;
- has provisions for orderly changes.

STAIRWAY TO THE CONSTITUTION



The chart above shows the documents and events leading up to the signing of the Constitution in 1787.

QUESTIONS

TRUE OR FALSE? Write a **T** or **F** in the space provided.

- ☐ 1. Changing the interpretation of the Constitution is what makes our Constitution weak.
- ☐ 2. The Constitution allows for subjects that did not exist in 1787.
- ☐ 3. The Constitution can be changed only through rebellion and revolution.
- ☐ 4. Over 500 delegates attended the Constitutional Convention and signed the Constitution.

EVENTS IN ORDER. Write the numbers **1-4**, indicating which historical event happened first (1), second (2), third (3), or fourth (4).

- 3 The ratification of the Articles of Confederation.
- 4 The adoption of the United States Constitution.
- 1 The beginning of the American Revolution.
- 2 The signing of the Declaration of Independence.