

Teaching the Constitution in September

It's Actually the Law ...

Public law: "Each educational institution that receives Federal funds for a fiscal year shall hold an educational program on the U.S. Constitution on Sept. 17 of such year for the students served by the educational institution."

By [Cathy Travis](#), Author, [Constitution Translated For Kids](#)

Constitution Day is September 17. Federal law mandates that public schools at all grade levels teach the rights and responsibilities under the United States Constitution on September 17. Many schools are either teaching the Constitution that day, or one day the following week.

This resource offers ideas for teachers/educators for planning Constitution Day activities and lessons. There are lots of sources out there and lots of good people dedicated to finding ways to teach young people about the Constitution of the United States, our only common birthright.

When I last circulated this around, many teachers that said it was useful in their classrooms. Many suggested other items to include, such as letter drafts for events, which are now included.

The hardest part of planning for an event in September is that it follows the summer hiatus and competes with all the other school starting activities. Early planning is central to a successful Constitution Day. I hope these suggestions help you teach the everyday applications of the Constitution in the context of our national life.

Begin your planning by personally touching base with people who could be interested in helping your school with financial resources or guest speakers (local law firms, a bank, local merchants, the local newspaper, a local politician, or area civic organizations). A local bank, law firm, merchant, or Chamber of Commerce may be willing to purchase materials for your students; you won't know till you ask. The book ([Constitution Translated For Kids](#)) is available for educational discounts (40% off list price) when bought in [bulk](#), or ask me more about it (author.travis@gmail.com).

It may be best to send a letter to the group you are soliciting, so when the request gets moved around everybody is hearing the same thing. I've drafted a short letter at the end of this note you can use to base your initial contact.

Get the students involved if you can, maybe give them extra credit; it will mean more to them – give them greater ownership – if they are involved in planning, or contacting possible guests.

Try to get free resources as much as possible. Online resources are rather plentiful (outlined below for younger, mid level and college students); many Congressional offices will offer free copies of the U.S. Constitution you can give young people to take home with them; and the free [Teacher's Guide](#) for my book is actually enough for a teacher to use (at most grade levels) to teach the Constitution.

These events have resonance for the entire community, so try to involve area (and student) government, newspapers, and radio or TV stations. The First Amendment to the Constitution guarantees freedom of the press, so members of the media will automatically be drawn to events that celebrate their freedom to do what they do.

When you contact members of the news media, email and/or fax a notice of your event – well in advance – to an editor (newspaper) or a news director (radio/TV) that says you will be celebrating Constitution Day, note the time and place of the event, any distinguished guests that will

be involved, and be sure reporters have a contact name and number for you or another event organizer so they can follow up with questions or directions. A draft follows at the end of this document.

Call the news organization in the days after your contact with them to follow up (ask for whoever makes assignments) and gauge their interest. It is always best to call newsrooms before noon; very best time is just after 10 am. When you invite guests for the program, try to invite a newspaper editor or a TV news director to talk about the importance of a free press.

Younger students:

The youngest students might learn better by [coloring](#) pictures (provided by USconstitution.net) that generally depict aspects of the Constitution. Students can also draw their own pictures of a newspaper, their church, a gathering of people, somebody talking ... other images that invoke some aspect of constitutional rights. Then post the pictures in the classroom or hallway during Constitution Week, and talk about what they mean.

USconstitution.net also focuses on [younger](#) children in terms of explaining the constitution; teachers can literally print out that page, and read it to younger classes.

The National Education Project offers a “refrigerator door [Bill of Rights](#)” for teachers to print out for students to post in their home.

The National Education Project also offers a “[Three Constitutions](#)” poster for schools. The “Three Constitutions” poster has images of 3 copies of the constitution ... 2 of them signed by 2 different sets of Supreme Court justices (one by the last all-male court and one including the first female justice, Justice Sandra Day O’Conner). The last image of the constitution is for students to sign, to reiterate their ownership of the rights and responsibilities of our only common birthright. Ask a local merchant or newspaper to purchase them for your school or classroom.

The Center for Civic Education’s [We the People](#) program also offers lessons for elementary school classrooms.

Mid-level/older students:

The [Teacher’s Guide](#) for *Constitution Translated for Kids* is an excellent teaching resource to use (at most grade levels) to teach the Constitution.

Get students involved by:

- Having an essay contest on the question: "Should we remove the 4th Amendment privacy protections since we need greater security?" ... or “Do young people have any rights at all?” ... or “Should we repeal the 2nd Amendment to keep schools and streets safer?”
- Organizing a voter registration for the community using students,
- Putting up “free speech boards,” where students can say things that are on their mind on Constitution Day,
- Sponsoring a debate for classrooms divided over 2 sides on a particular issue,
- Having students put together a petition exercise; have them find something they want to change, help them figure out who has the power to change it, and have them write a petition to do that.

[Annenberg Classroom/Resources for America’s teachers](#) offers an online video of U.S. Supreme Court Justices Stephen Breyer, Anthony Kennedy and Sandra Day O’Connor talking about the essence of

constitutional government and the United States Supreme Court. It was taped in May, 2006. Users wanting to see the videos must register with Annenberg, but there is no cost. Video length is 32 minutes.

[In Congress Assembled](#) from the Library of Congress offers excellent, free, lesson plans for teachers and classrooms.

The National Archives – which houses the original Constitution, our “founding document” – offers a [digital classroom](#) with a number of free, downloadable resources about primary sources, activities and training for educators and students. They have online exhibits and their teaching resources follow national history and civics standards.

The National Constitution Center created a [Teacher Resources Section](#) to help teachers locate materials for teaching the Constitution, and other civics-related topics, to students of all ages. Teachers of elementary, middle, and high school will find lesson plans and ideas for a variety of classroom activities.

The American Bar Association's [Conversations on the Constitution](#) Program offers discussion and debate about the meaning of some of the Constitution's concepts and clauses that have been the subject of ongoing constitutional debate. Conversation topics include: separation of powers, advice and consent of the Senate, establishment of religion, and unreasonable searches/seizures.

Colleges:

The [American Democracy Project](#) offers some of the resources noted here, plus others for undergraduate use in college classes.

LETTER DRAFTS TO USE FOR EVENT PLANNING:

These drafts are just outlines; there are no hard and fast rules when making your pitch. The things that are capitalized and bolded below are where you need to fill in the pertinent information for your particular event. Drop or add anything you want, make these letters your own.

– CT

DRAFT FOR INVITING FUNDERS/SPEAKERS:

Dear:

This is to invite you to participate in an event that celebrates our unique American heritage here in the United States: a Constitution Day celebration at **NAME OF SCHOOL** on September **DATE/YEAR** at **PLACE (I.E., GYM, CAFETERIA, BALL FIELD, ETC)**.

Constitution Day is September 17. Federal law now mandates that public schools at all grade levels teach the rights and responsibilities under the United States Constitution on September 17, or around that date.

We have just begun our planning and hope to raise enough money to give students a book, *Constitution Translated for Kids*, as well as pocket sized Constitutions for middle school and older

students. One box of 30 books costs \$305.10, plus shipping (and offers a free teacher's guide). **IF YOU HAVE OTHER THINGS YOU JUDGE YOU'LL NEED FUNDERS TO PAY FOR, LIST THE ITEM AND THE COST FOR YOUR CLASSROOM HERE.**

FOR YOUR FUNDERS: We hope you can join us for our event so we can recognize the generosity of the patriots who are making this event possible.

FOR PROSPECTIVE SPEAKERS: We hope you or someone from your office can attend this event to personalize the government that "We the People" elect to serve us, and to offer a special message about our Constitution for the children who will be tomorrow's citizens and leaders.

I am the contact for our school's event [**ADD PHONE NUMBER, and EMAIL ADDRESS**]; please feel free to contact me about your participation, or with any questions about our Constitution Day Celebration.

I hope you will consider being part of this unique event.

Many thanks,

**NAME OF CONTACT
TITLE
PHONE NUMBER, PLUS CELL NUMBER**

**DRAFT FOR ASKING YOUR MEMBER OF CONGRESS FOR FREE COPIES OF POCKET SIZED CONSTITUTIONS:
(IF YOU DON'T KNOW WHO YOUR REPRESENTATIVE IS, GO TO THIS LINK, SELECT YOUR STATE, PUT IN YOUR ZIP CODE AND IT WILL PROVIDE THE NAME AND CONTACT INFO FOR THEM: <https://forms.house.gov/wyr/welcome.shtml>)**

Dear Representative **NAME** – or Senator **NAME**:

This is to invite you to participate in an event that celebrates our unique American heritage here in the United States: a Constitution Day Celebration at **NAME OF SCHOOL** on September **DATE/YEAR** at **PLACE (IE, GYM, CAFETERIA, BALL FIELD, ETC)**.

Constitution Day is September 17. Federal law mandates that public schools at all grade levels teach the rights and responsibilities under the United States Constitution on September 17, or around that date.

We have just begun our planning, and hope to give pocket-sized Constitutions to our older students. I know your office routinely gets the pocket-sized Constitutions free from the Government Printing Office, and this is to request **NUMBER** for our school's Constitution Day Celebration.

We also hope you, or someone from your office, can attend this event to personalize the government that "We the People" elect to serve us, and to offer a special message about our Constitution for the children who will be tomorrow's citizens and leaders.

I am the contact for our school's event [**ADD PHONE NUMBER, and EMAIL ADDRESS**]; please feel free to contact me about your participation, or with any questions about our Constitution Day Celebration.

I hope you will consider being part of this unique event.

Many thanks,

**NAME OF CONTACT
TITLE
PHONE NUMBER, PLUS CELL NUMBER**

**DRAFT FOR INVITING MEMBERS OF THE MEDIA, CALLED AN “ADVISORY” ...
ADVISORIES ARE NOT USUALLY SENT TO NEWS ORGANIZATIONS UNTIL 2-3
WEEKS OUT FROM THE EVENT. THEN YOU FOLLOW UP THE WEEK BEFORE AND
THE DAY BEFORE THE EVENT. YOU CAN CALL YOUR LOCAL PAPER OR TV
STATION TO GET FAX # OR EMAIL ADDRESS FOR THE ASSIGNMENTS EDITOR:**

ATTENTION ASSIGNMENTS EDITOR:

Daybook Advisory

**DATE OF THE EVENT
TIME
PLACE, ADDRESS**

NAME OF SCHOOL will hold a Constitution Day celebration at **NAME OF SCHOOL** on
September **DATE/YEAR** at **PLACE (IE, GYM, CAFETERIA, BALL FIELD, ETC)**.

Constitution Day is September 17. Federal law now mandates that public schools at all grade levels
teach the rights and responsibilities under the United States Constitution on September 17, or around
that date.

We invite you to cover this event, which celebrates our founding document that lists “freedom of the
press” in the First Amendment. Our distinguished guests for the day include: **LIST GUESTS**.

Contact: **NAME, PHONE NUMBER, PLUS CELL NUMBER**