



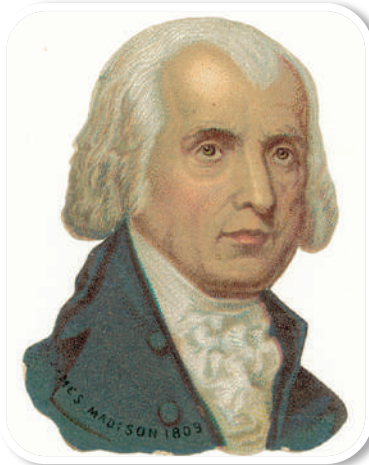
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Checks and balances

# Making the United States of America



James Madison



John Jay



Alexander Hamilton



Young Americans



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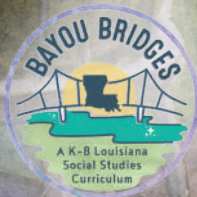
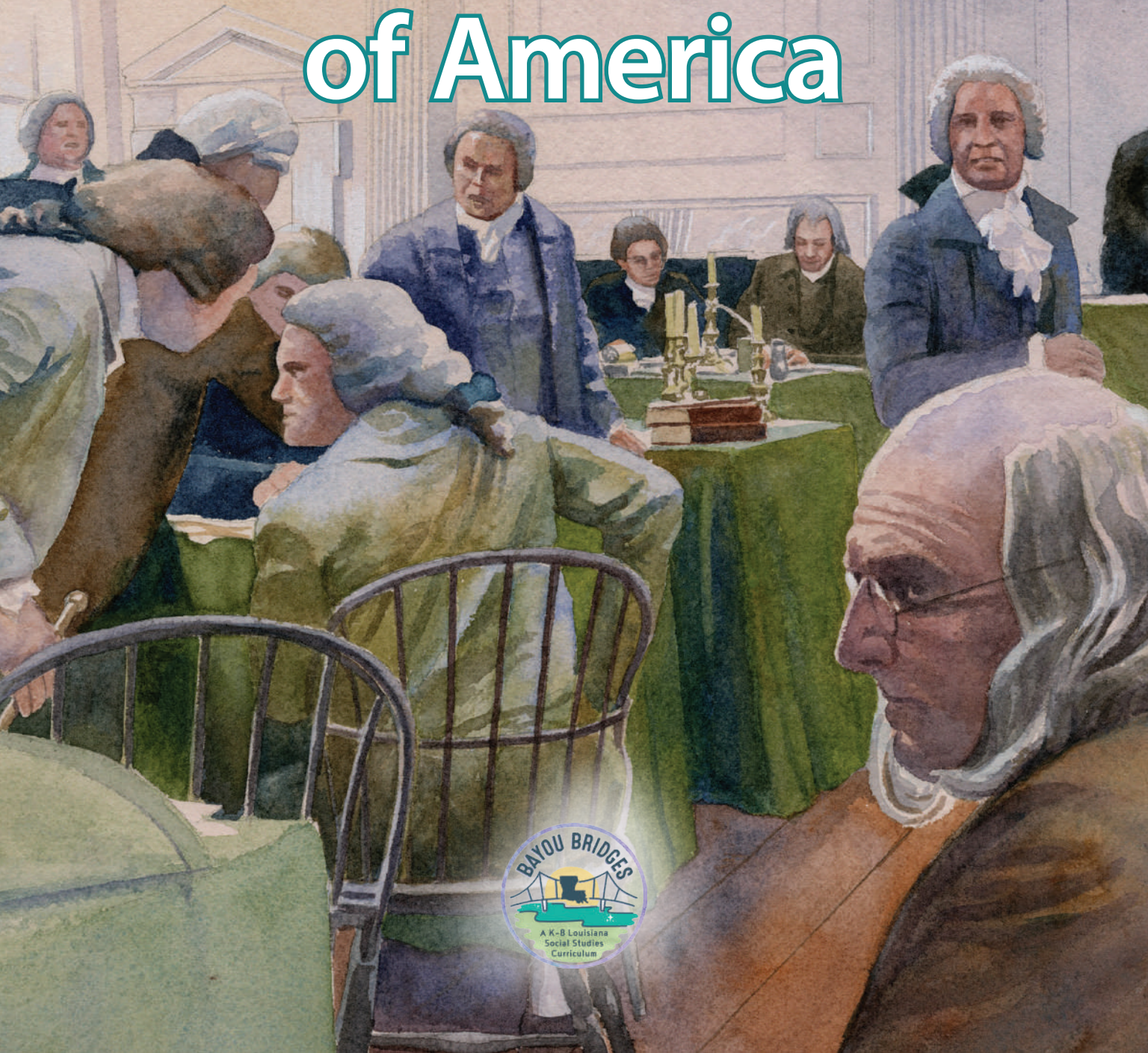
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# Making the United States of America



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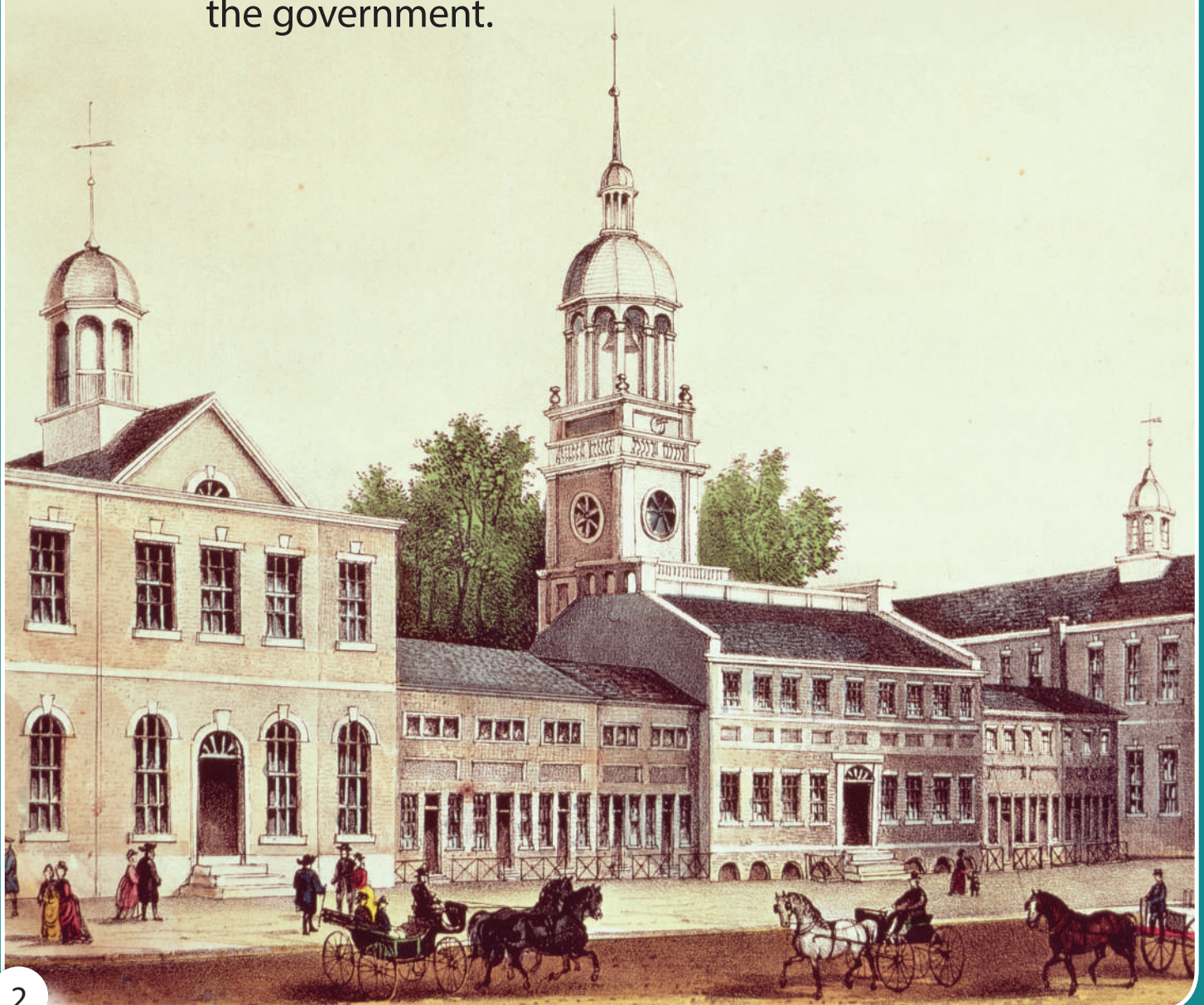
# Making the United States of America

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# Making the Constitution

After the Americans won their freedom from Great Britain, they needed to make a government for the United States. The first American government did not work very well. Some leaders wanted to make it better. One leader, a man named James Madison from Virginia, wanted to completely change the way the government worked and create a new structure for the government.

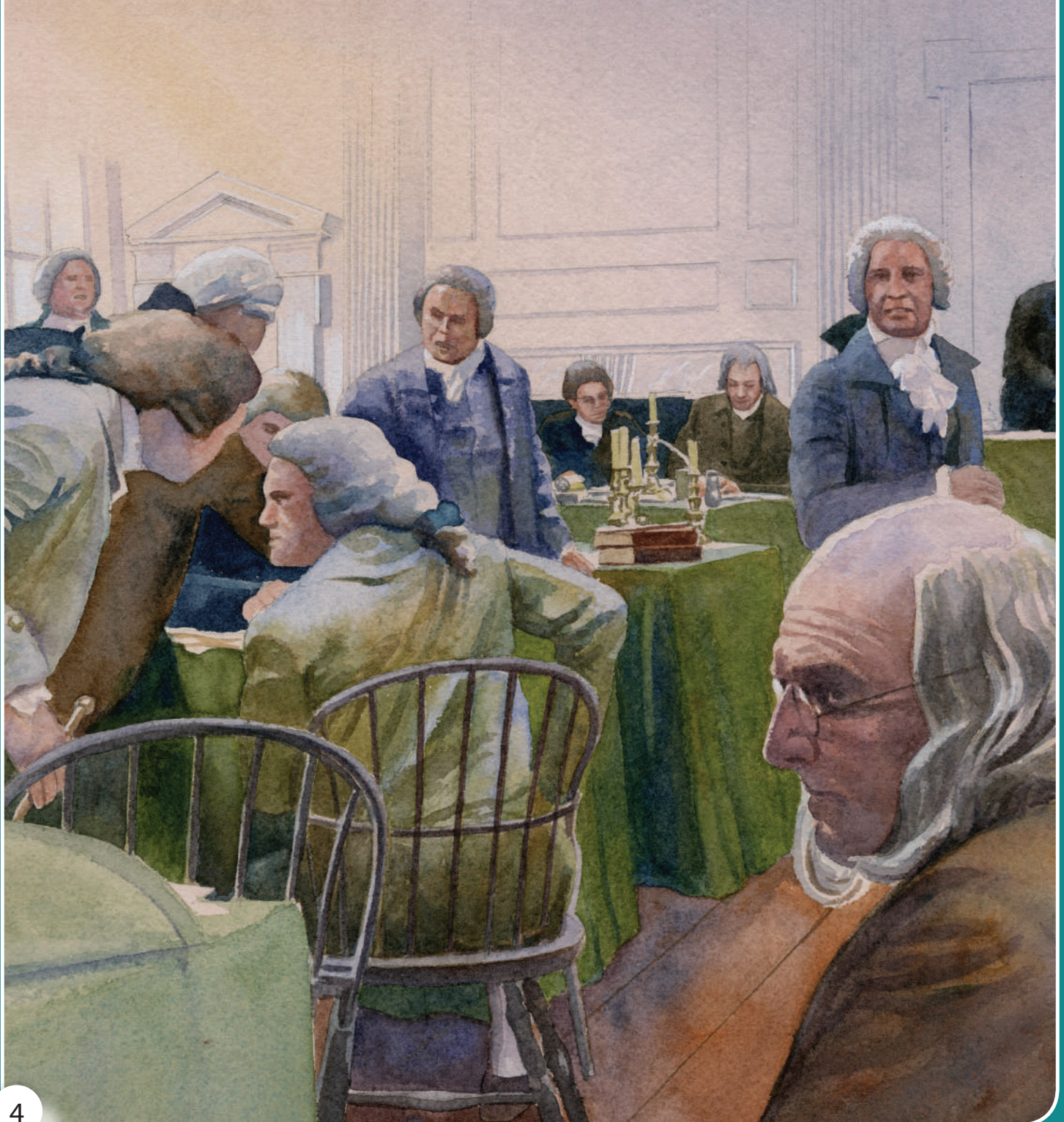


In May of 1787, leaders from the different states—including George Washington and Benjamin Franklin—traveled to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, for the Constitutional Convention. During this meeting, leaders decided what powers the new government should have.



The leaders at the meeting decided to keep their talks a secret. They didn't want anyone to find out what they said before they made up their minds about the new government. So they met in a room inside what is now called Independence Hall and nailed the windows shut!

That summer was very hot. The leaders inside didn't always agree with one another and sometimes got angry. Someone said that it was hard to tell if the men were sweating because they were hot or because they were angry.





Some of the men at the convention did not want to give one person—the president—too much power. During that long, hot summer, each leader had to compromise. This meant that they all had to accept that they would not get everything they wanted.



Finally, on September 17, 1787, the state leaders finished their work and signed what they called the Constitution of the United States. It was a plan for a new system of government. The United States would be a democracy—a government system in which people choose leaders to represent them and make laws for the country.

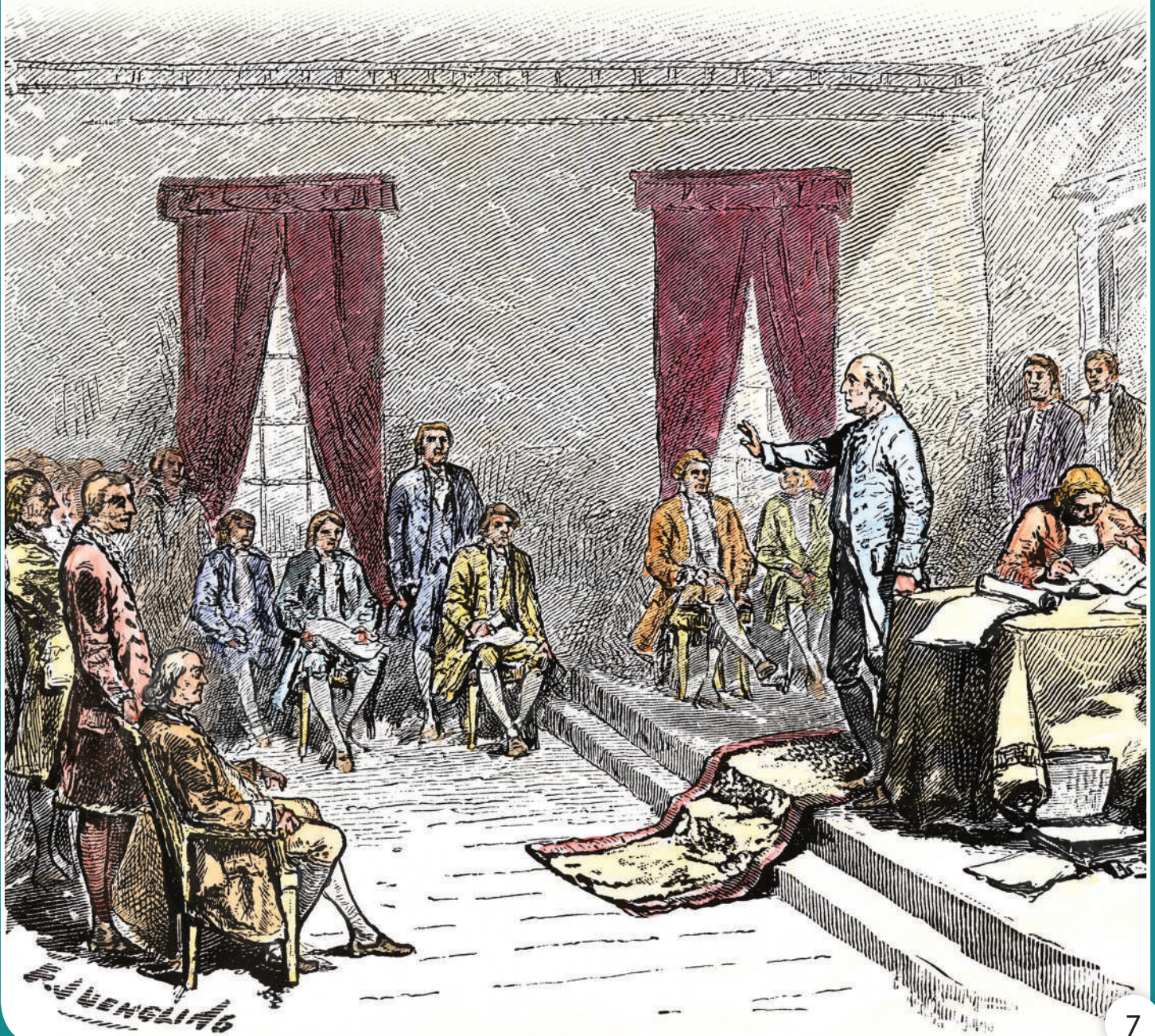
The Constitution is thought to be one of the most important documents ever written. James Madison is known as the Father of the Constitution, a title he earned for working hard to make sure that the Constitutional Convention happened.



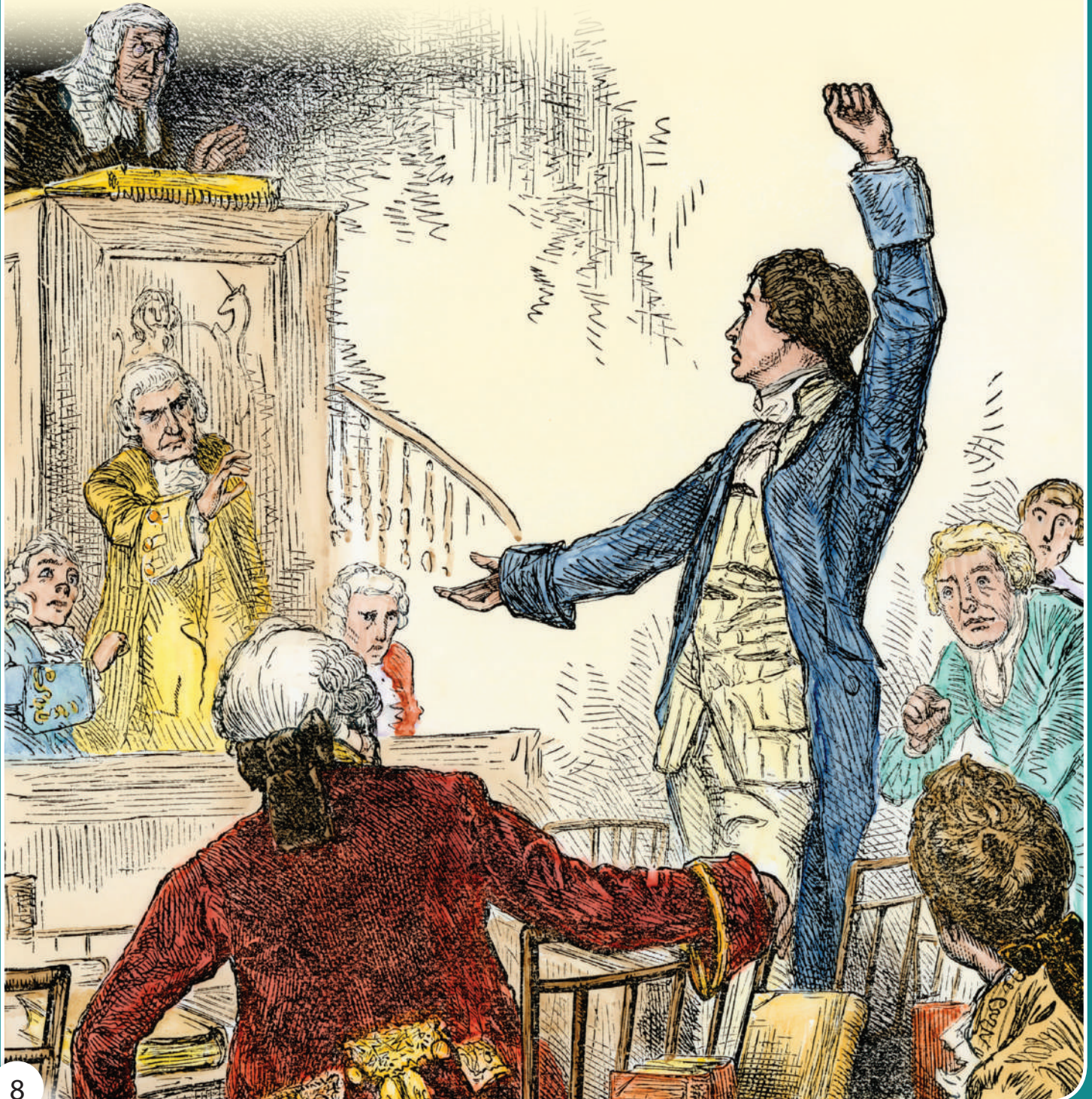
The leaders who helped make the United States a country are known as our Founders.

To “found” something means to establish or create something new.

Each state had to decide if it would approve the Constitution. This meant that the people in each state had to figure out for themselves if they thought that the Constitution was a good idea. The new American government could begin only if at least nine of the thirteen states voted yes.



Today, it might be hard to imagine that anyone was against the Constitution. But some of the most famous Americans of the Revolutionary War were worried. Patrick Henry of Virginia thought the new Constitution gave too much power to the national government.



One big worry was that the Constitution did not list the rights and freedoms that all Americans should have. Some people wanted the Constitution to have a bill of rights that protected their rights and freedoms. A bill of rights is a list of rights that all people should have.

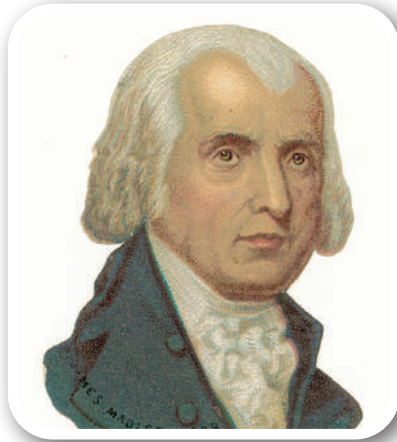


They wanted Americans to know they had freedom of religion and freedom of speech. It was also important that newspapers had the freedom they needed to share news and information with readers. A bill of rights would list other freedoms, too.

The people who supported the Constitution were sure that it would make life better for Americans. They believed that if the United States remained thirteen separate states, the states could be destroyed by other countries in war or by disagreements with one another. Only by acting together—as one United States under the Constitution—could the country last.



James Madison and two other men—John Jay and Alexander Hamilton—wanted Americans to understand how the Constitution worked. They hoped Americans would realize that the Constitution was a good idea and would support it.



James Madison



John Jay



Alexander Hamilton

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T H E  
**FEDERALIST:**  
ADDRESSED TO THE  
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N U M B E R I.

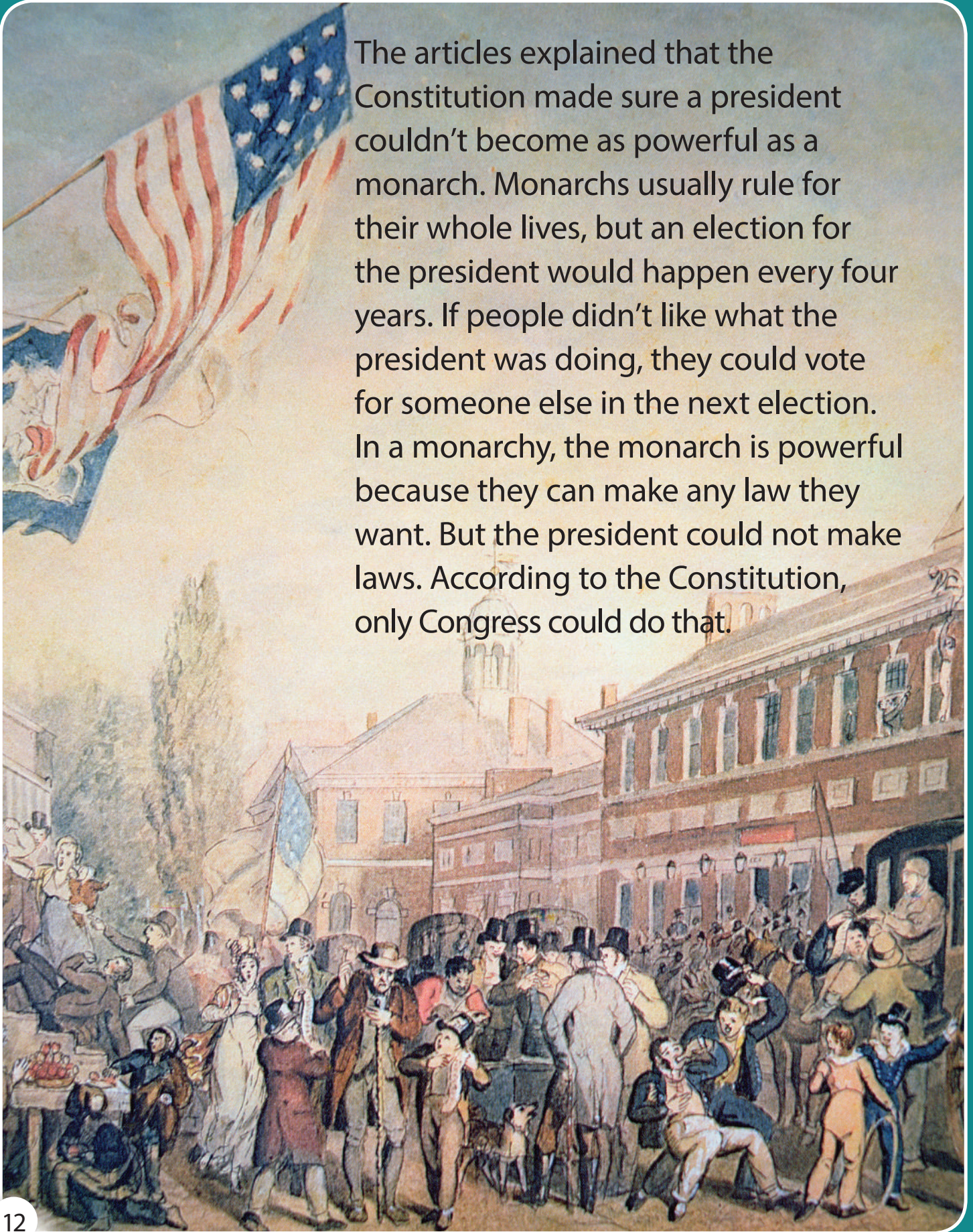
*Introduction.*

**A**FTER an unequivocal experience of the inefficiency of the subsisting federal government, you are called upon to deliberate on a new constitution for the United States of America. The subject speaks its own importance; comprehending in its consequences, nothing less than the existence of the UNION, the safety and welfare of the parts of which it is composed, the fate of an empire, in many respects, the most interesting in the world. It has been frequently remarked, that it seems to have been reserved to the people of this country, by their conduct and example, to decide the important question, whether societies of men are really capable or not, of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend, for their political constitutions, on accident and force. If there be any truth in the remark, the crisis, at which we are arrived, may with propriety be regarded as the æra in which that

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James Madison, John Jay, and Alexander Hamilton taught people about the Constitution in a series of newspaper articles. They wrote more than eighty articles. These articles were soon made into a book called *The Federalist*.

The articles explained that the Constitution made sure a president couldn't become as powerful as a monarch. Monarchs usually rule for their whole lives, but an election for the president would happen every four years. If people didn't like what the president was doing, they could vote for someone else in the next election. In a monarchy, the monarch is powerful because they can make any law they want. But the president could not make laws. According to the Constitution, only Congress could do that.





The thirteen states voted on the new Constitution. Nine states voted yes, and the Constitution became the law of the land. Later, the other four states also voted yes. New elections were held following the new Constitution, and George Washington became the first president of the United States of America.



The first three words of the Constitution are the biggest on the page: “We the People. . . .” This means that our government gets its power to make laws from the people—not from a king or a president. “We the People” also means that we decide what the laws should be. This is an important part of having a democracy.



The Constitution is based on many important ideas, called principles. One principle is equality under the law. Everyone must follow the law, including our leaders. No one can break the law just because they are in charge. Another important principle in the Constitution is fair treatment for all. This means that all people should be treated the same, regardless of what they believe, where they come from, or what they look like.

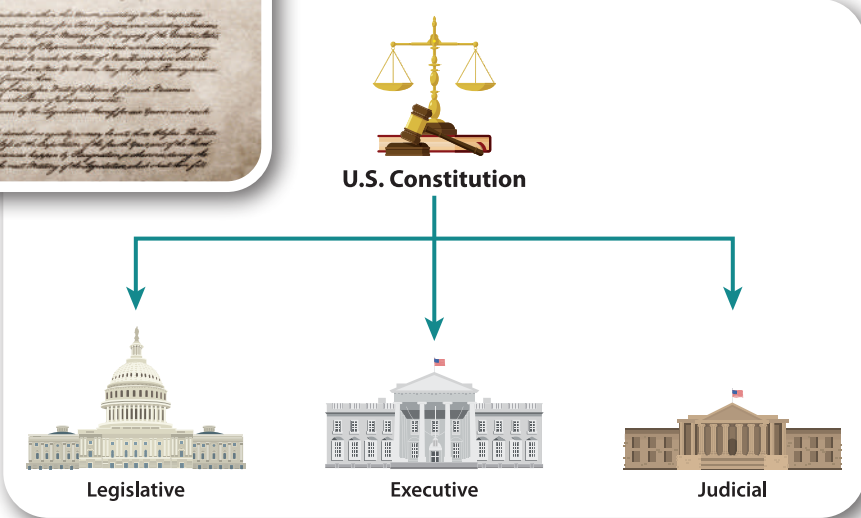


The Founders who wrote the Constitution knew it would need to be changed in the future. Being able to change, or amend, the Constitution helps our government protect all people. It also makes sure the Constitution lasts over time!



# The Three Branches of Government

The Constitution includes many important ideas—like equality under the law and fair treatment for all—that protect people in our country. It also has ideas that shape our government. One idea is limited government. This means that people should have the right to stop the government from having too much power. How does the Constitution do this?



One way is by dividing the national government into three parts. Each part has its own jobs and responsibilities. This is called separation of powers. The three branches of government are the legislative branch, the executive branch, and the judicial branch.

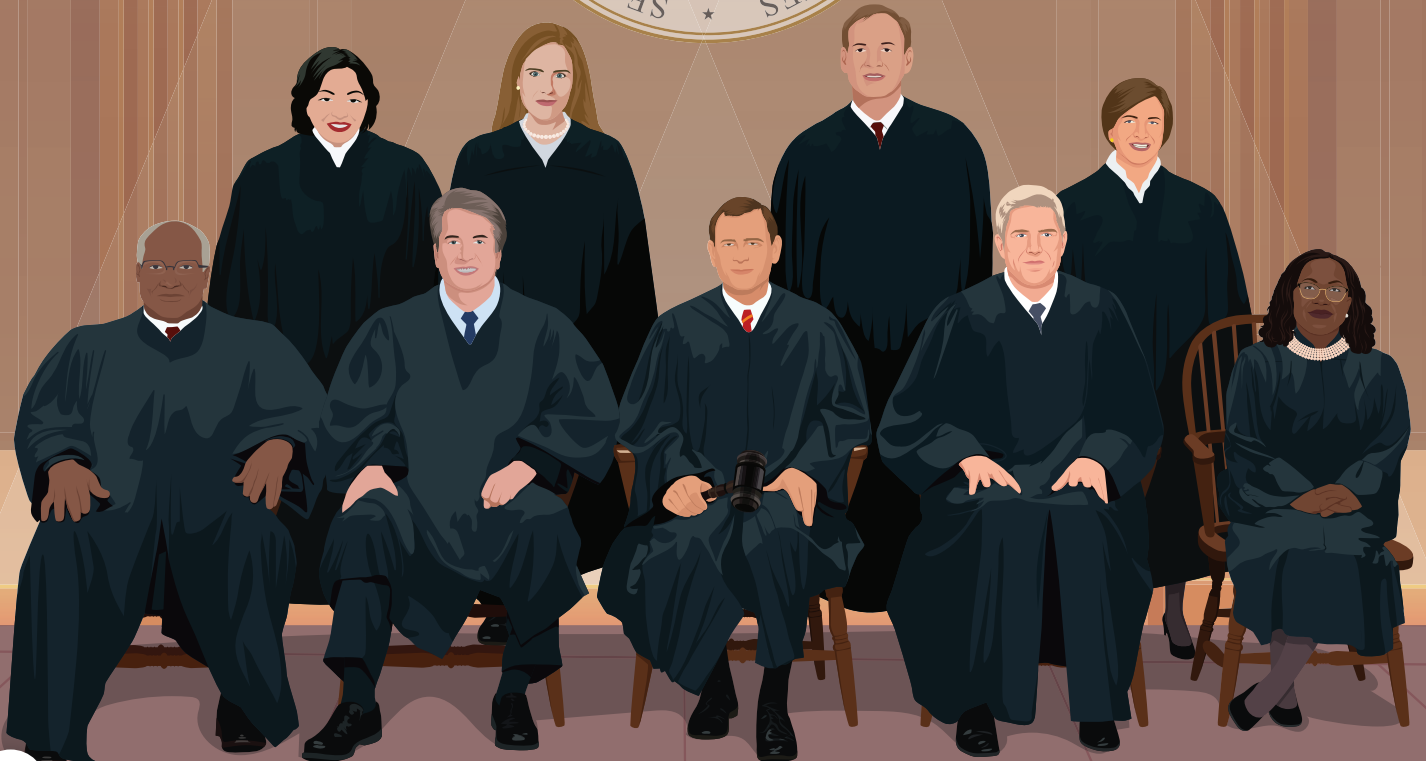
Congress makes up the legislative branch of government. Congress has two parts: the House of Representatives and the Senate. The word *legislate* means to make laws. Members of Congress are chosen by voters to make laws for the entire country. Congress meets at the Capitol building in Washington, D.C.



The president of the United States is the leader of the executive branch. Voters choose the president every four years. The executive branch has many different jobs. One job of the president is to approve and sign laws made by Congress. Then, the people who work in the executive branch make sure the laws are followed. The president lives at the White House in Washington, D.C.



The judicial branch is made up of courts and judges. The Supreme Court is the highest court in the land. There are also national courts. An important job of the judicial branch is to decide whether laws passed by Congress follow the Constitution. The judicial branch also decides whether people have broken the law and what should happen when they do.

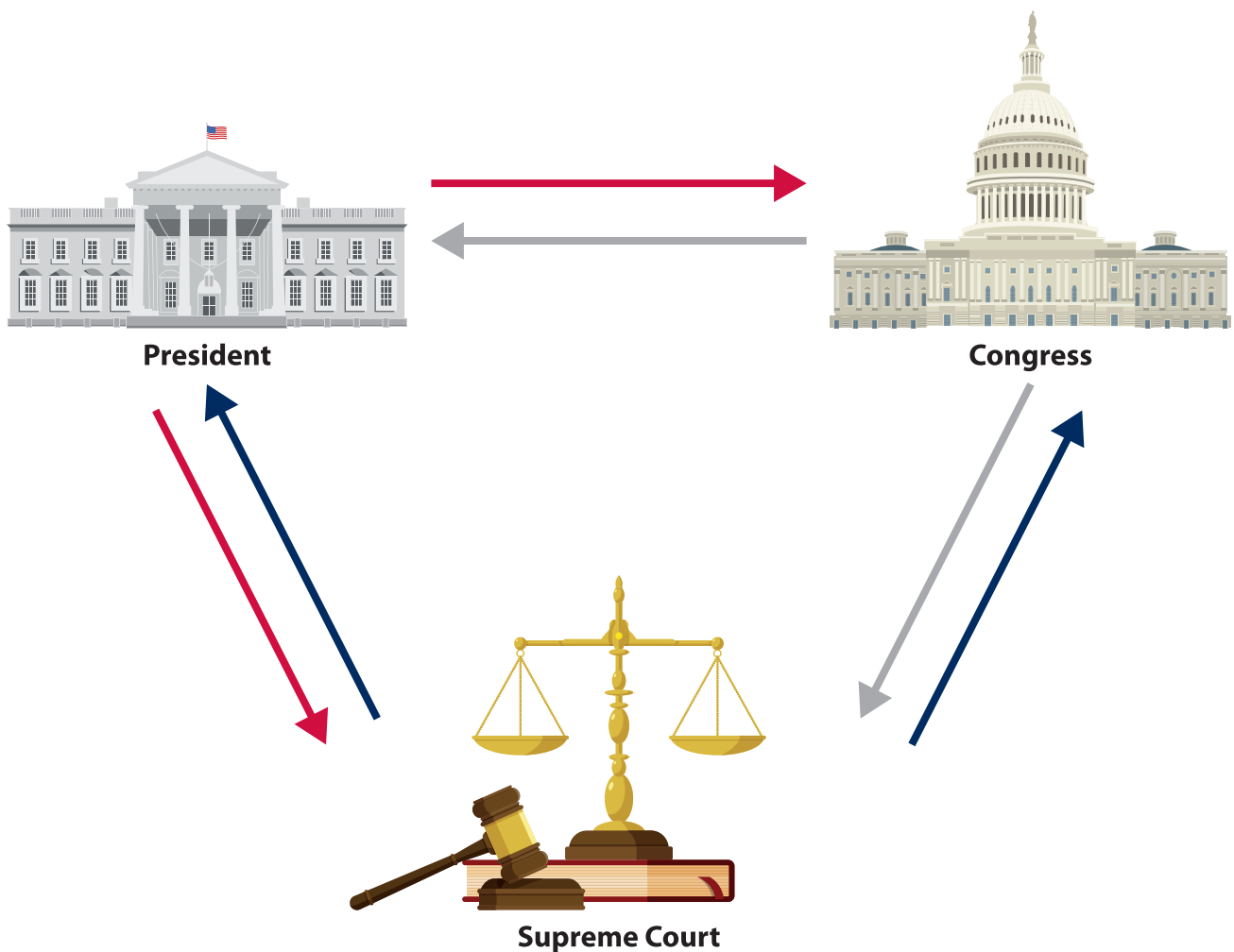




How else does the Constitution make sure there is limited government? Think about a scale. When one side weighs more than the other, the scale is no longer balanced. The Founders thought of the government as a giant scale. The Constitution makes each branch of government very powerful—but not too powerful! This is because the Founders included checks and balances.

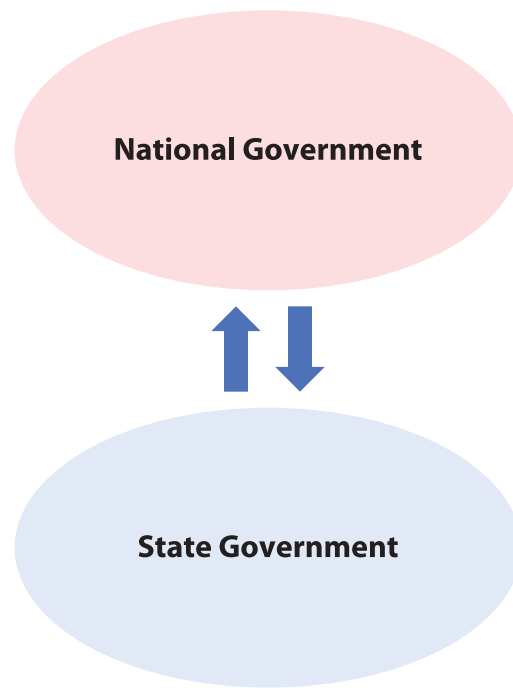


Checks and balances stop one branch of government from being more powerful than the others. For example, Congress makes laws for the country. But the president can veto, or say no to, those laws. Another example is that the president is commander in chief of the armed forces, but only Congress can declare war. Power is spread out and balanced among the three separate branches. Each branch has the ability to check, or stop, the other two.



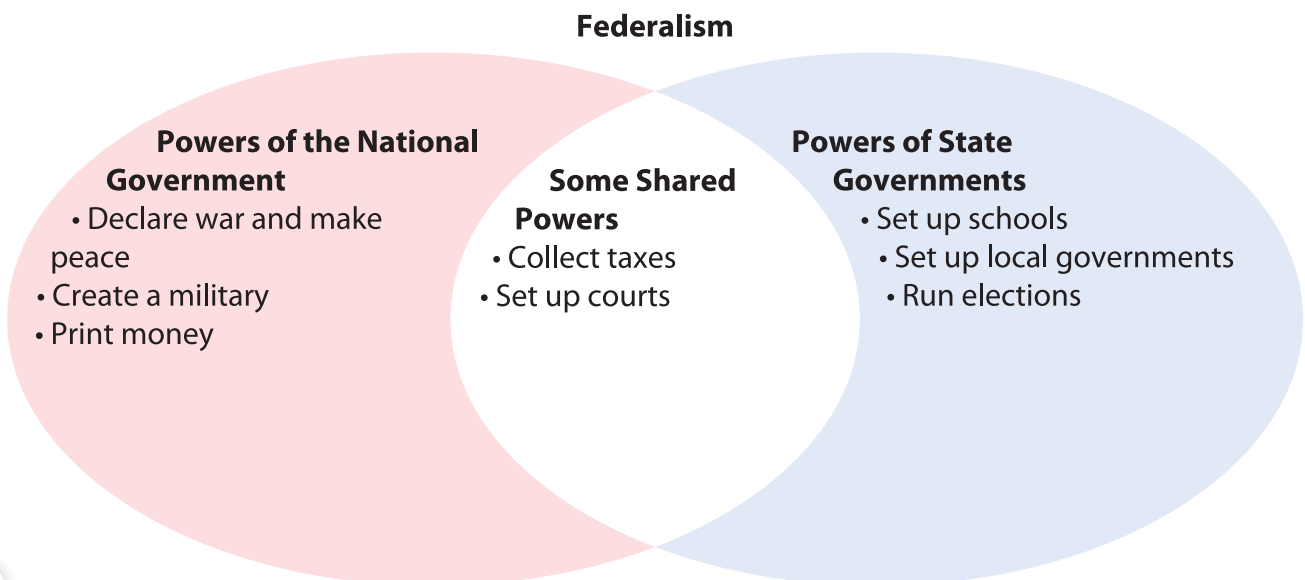
When the Constitution was written, the territory of the United States was much smaller than it is today. There were fewer people living here, too. Even so, the Founders saw that people from different parts of the country had different needs. They knew it would be hard for the national government to meet everybody's needs. So they included another idea in the Constitution called federalism.

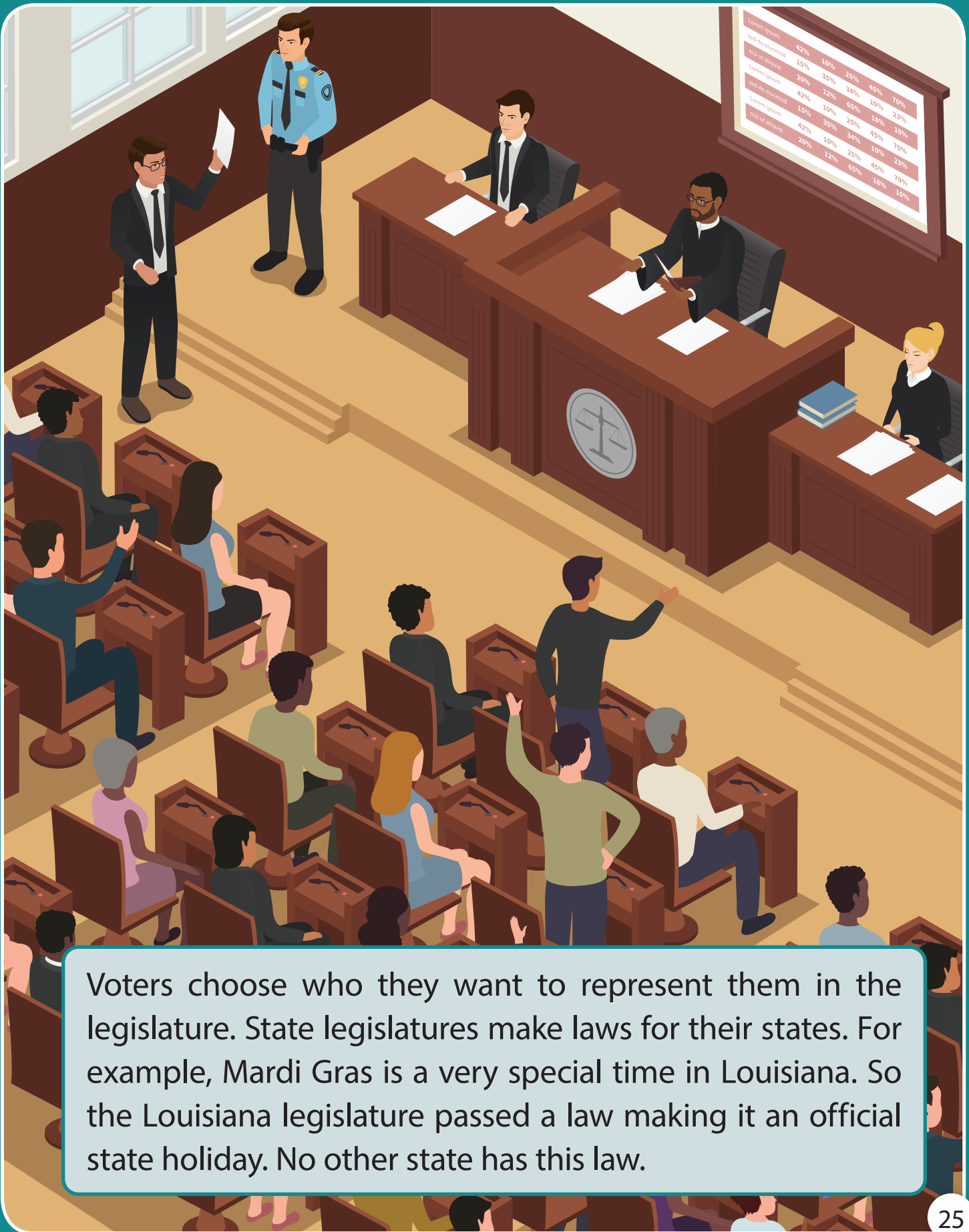




Federalism gives powers to the national government and to the state governments. Some of these powers are shared. Some powers are just for the national government, and some powers are just for the states.

State governments are a lot like the national government. They have their own constitutions. They also have three branches of government.





Voters choose who they want to represent them in the legislature. State legislatures make laws for their states. For example, Mardi Gras is a very special time in Louisiana. So the Louisiana legislature passed a law making it an official state holiday. No other state has this law.

Each state has a governor. The governor is a lot like a president. They lead the executive branch and make sure state laws are followed. Governors also suggest ways to make their states better places to live. States also have their own courts and judges. Judges hear cases about state laws.



States also have local governments. Local governments get their powers from the state. Local governments meet the needs of the people who live there. For example, local governments run police and fire departments. They are also responsible for things like transportation, fixing roads, and collecting trash.



Louisiana is divided into different types of local governments. Some of them are called parishes. These are the same as counties in other states. Louisiana also has cities, towns, and villages. Some local leaders are chosen by voters, and others are appointed.



Some cities and towns elect a mayor as their leader. A mayor's job is like a president's or governor's job. They make suggestions about local laws and how the city should spend its money. Mayors also work to keep people in their town or city safe.



Federal, state, and local governments have a lot in common. They work to stop problems from happening and find ways to fix them when they do. For example, governments at all levels take care of roads and bridges. This keeps people safe as they travel from one place to another. Roads and bridges also help local economies by connecting businesses and business areas. Governments help keep order by making laws. The national, state, and local governments also work together to improve people's lives.

#### Levels of Government



Federal



State



Local



# Citizenship

What does it mean to be a good citizen? Being a citizen comes with many different responsibilities, or things that we should do. One responsibility of good citizens is to follow rules and laws.



Rules let us know what we can and cannot do in our community. One example of a rule is not running in the classroom. This rule keeps accidents from happening.

Laws are rules that the government makes. The national government makes laws for all citizens in the country to follow. State governments make laws for people in their state to follow. Local governments make laws for people who live in their community. One photo explains that swimming is not allowed in this water. What law do you think the second photo shows?



We follow the law to keep ourselves and others safe. Another reason to follow the law is to prevent disagreements. Following the law helps us know what we are supposed to be doing and when. Police officers respond when someone breaks the law. Judges decide what the consequences are.



Another way to be a good citizen is by showing civic virtue. Civic virtues are things that we do to make our community, state, and country a better place. Showing civic virtue is something that people of all ages can and should do!





One of the most important civic virtues is voting in elections. People who are eighteen and older choose leaders to represent them in the government. Voting is one way citizens tell the government how they would like their community, state, or country to be run. Voting is what makes our government a democracy!

Sometimes people want to make their communities better by becoming a leader in the government. To become a leader, they run for an office like city council. When someone runs for office, they share their ideas about how to make their community better. Then, voters decide whether they like those ideas. Running for office is a civic virtue just like voting.



People can show civic virtue by working together on a committee. A committee is a group of people working together toward a goal. Committees come in different sizes and have many different goals. Some committees may work on local projects, like planting trees in a park.



Other committees may work on issues that affect people in a state or the whole country. For example, one committee in the Louisiana state government works on building new roads. Another works on projects to make Louisianans healthier and safer.



Volunteering is one more way to show civic virtue. When we volunteer, we give our time—even just a few minutes—to make our community better. This might mean helping an older neighbor carry something heavy. It could also mean helping at an animal shelter.



People of all ages can volunteer! Think about your community. What ways can you work to make it better?

Then



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