



# WE THE PEOPLE

## The Citizen and the Constitution

Directed by the Center for Civic Education

# National Invitational Hearing Questions 2024–2025

## Unit 1: What Were the Founders' Basic Ideas about Government?

- 1. In his influential pamphlet, *Common Sense*, Thomas Paine wrote, "From the errors of other nations, let us learn wisdom." How did Paine's ideas encourage people to learn from history and avoid repeating past mistakes?**
  - What examples of republics and democracies did the Founders study, and how did these examples influence the way they wanted to govern?
  - How might the Founders' ideas about avoiding the mistakes of the past influence the way we approach current political challenges, such as the balance of power between branches of government or the role of the public in decision-making?
- 2. How did the ideas of Enlightenment philosophers like John Locke and the Baron de Montesquieu shape the Founders' beliefs about government and the relationship between citizens and their government?**
  - What was the concept of the social contract, and how did it influence the Founders' ideas about people's rights and government power?
  - How do these Enlightenment ideas influence modern government today? How do they still affect the relationship between citizens and their government?



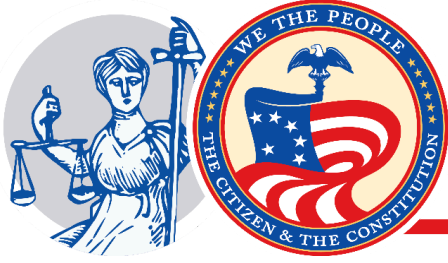
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### Unit 2: What Shaped the Founders' Thinking about Government?

- 1. Why is the Declaration of Independence considered an essential document for understanding the Founders' ideas about government, and what key ideas about rights and government are found in the document?**
  - Do the specific complaints against the king weaken the Declaration's broader ideas about rights and government? Why or why not?
  - How might the Declaration's argument for revolution, based on the right to resist unfair government, be interpreted differently today?
- 2. To what extent was the American Revolution a truly revolutionary event in terms of political, social, and governmental changes?**
  - How did the political philosophy of the Founders differ from British ideas of government, and what new principles did they introduce during the Revolution?
  - What was unique about the way states organized their governments after the Revolution, and was this process a break from past government structures, or was it an evolution of existing practices? Explain.



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### Unit 3: What Happened at the Philadelphia Convention?

- 1. How did the Framers' concerns about a strong national government influence the powers granted to the three branches of government in the Constitution?**
  - What specific experiences or events in colonial history shaped the Framers' distrust of centralized power, and how did they address these concerns when designing the new government?
  - What mechanisms did the Framers create to prevent any one branch from becoming too powerful, and how well do these mechanisms still work today?
  
- 2. Were the delegates at the Philadelphia Convention justified in creating an entirely new constitution as opposed to simply revising the Articles of Confederation? Why or why not?**
  - What was the purpose of the secrecy rule used at the Philadelphia Convention, and how did it influence the outcome of the debates?
  - Should certain government discussions, such as Supreme Court deliberations, be kept secret today? Why or why not?



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### Unit 4: How Was the Constitution Used to Establish Our Government?

#### 1. What does it mean to say that the Framers created a federal system of government?

- To what extent does the Constitution of 1787 reflect the concerns of both the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists regarding the balance of power between state and federal governments?
- How do state and federal governments influence people's lives today, and is this balance in line with what the Framers intended? Provide evidence to support your analysis.

#### 2. In *Marbury v. Madison* (1803), the Supreme Court established its power of judicial review. Should this power include the ability to review acts of Congress and executive orders, or should its use be more limited?

- The Court has sometimes avoided ruling on politically controversial cases by using the political question doctrine. What does this doctrine mean, and should the Court use it more often? Explain your answer.
- How have Supreme Court justices interpreted broad terms in the Constitution, such as *necessary and proper* (Article I, Section 8) or *due process* (Fifth and 14th Amendments), over time? Provide examples.



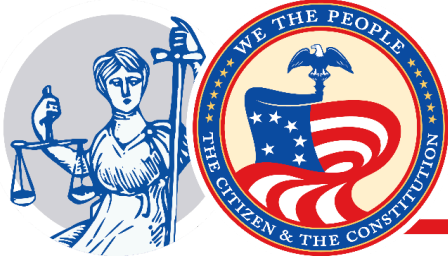
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### Unit 5: How Does the Constitution Protect Our Basic Rights?

- 1. To what extent does the United States Constitution protect the right to vote, and how have legal interpretations and historical events shaped this right over time?**
  - Should the U.S. Constitution or federal law provide additional protections to the right to vote? What kinds of protections could strengthen voting rights?
  - What actions, if any, should Congress take to increase voter turnout and ensure that all eligible citizens can easily participate in elections? Consider both legislative changes and practical measures that could improve voter engagement.
  
- 2. Is freedom of expression essential for protecting individual liberty and ensuring the functioning of a democratic government? Why or why not? How do the limits of this freedom reflect the balance between personal rights and the public good?**
  - Under what circumstances, if any, should the government have the power to limit freedom of expression, and what principles should guide these limitations?
  - How do students' rights to freedom of expression differ from those of adults in society?



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### Unit 6: What Are the Responsibilities of Citizens?

- 1. In his 1853 speech, “The Claims of Our Common Cause,” Frederick Douglass said, “By birth, we are American citizens; by the principles of the Declaration of Independence, we are American citizens; within the meaning of the United States Constitution, we are American citizens; by the facts of history, and the admissions of American statesmen, we are American citizens.” What makes someone an American citizen?**
  - How does the Constitution address citizenship?
  - How has the idea of who is an American citizen changed throughout history? Use examples to explain your answer.
  
- 2. August 16, 2024, marked the start of a celebration of the Farewell Tour of the Marquis de Lafayette. What challenges did America face during Lafayette’s Farewell Tour in 1824, and how are those challenges similar to the ones American democracy faces today?**
  - How did Lafayette’s actions during the American Revolution influence the development of civic duty and public service in the United States, and how did his Farewell Tour in 1824 help reinforce those ideals?
  - How did Lafayette’s Farewell Tour highlight the unique aspects of American democracy compared to other countries, and how have these aspects evolved over time?