

Substitute Guide: Principles of the U.S. Constitution

Grade: 8 **Subject:** Social Studies (U.S. History to Reconstruction) **Time:** ~45 min core + ~15 min extension
Social Studies

Learning goal (plain language)

Students learn the **five core principles of the U.S. Constitution** — popular sovereignty, limited government, separation of powers, checks and balances, and federalism — and practice recognizing each one in an example. They read two short summaries, study a diagram of the three branches, do **source analysis** (creator, date, type) on a short public-domain line from the Preamble, and finish by writing a short evidence-based explanation of which principle a scenario best shows. **You do not need a civics or history background to run this.** Everything students need is printed in their packet, and the separate answer key gives you every answer.

Standards alignment

Framework: 19 TAC §113.20 (Grade 8 Social Studies, U.S. History to 1877).

- **Primary — 8.15 (government/principles):** identifying the principles of the U.S. Constitution, including popular sovereignty, limited government, separation of powers, checks and balances, and federalism.
- **Skills — 8.29 (social studies skills):** analyzing a primary/secondary source by identifying its creator, date, and type, and using evidence to support a claim.

Provisional — pending educator verification against the current official TAC source.

(Standards are paraphrased here, not quoted, and this is **not** a claim of TEKS alignment. Please confirm the codes and wording against your official source. Prompts are kept non-partisan and in historical context.)

Setup Before class (5 min)

- Count and hand out one **student packet** per student.
- Confirm each student has a **pencil**. No calculators, computers, or textbooks are needed.
- Write the date on the board and remind students to fill in the name line.
- Keep the **answer key** with you — it is a separate file and is **not** in the student packet.

Materials What's needed

- Printed student packet (4–6 pages) per student.
- Pencil per student.
- This guide and the separate answer key (teacher only).
- No technology, no calculator, no textbooks, no safety hazards.

Timing Suggested pacing (~45–60 min)

Segment	Time	What students do
Start — Observe a source	5 min	Q1–Q2 warm-up on the Preamble excerpt
Build — Read the sources	5–10 min	Read Source A, Source B, word bank, branches diagram; Q3
Apply — Analyze the sources	20–25 min	Q4–Q8 (principle match, source analysis, why-the-framers, fact/interpretation/opinion, evaluate a claim)
Explain — CER	5–10 min	Q9 claim/evidence/reasoning on a scenario
Close — ACE	5 min	Articulate / Connect / Extend
Continue — early finishers	optional ~15 min	"Remove a check and predict"

Script Read aloud to start

"Today's assignment is a paper civics investigation called *Principles of the U.S. Constitution*. You will work by yourself with just a pencil — no computers or textbooks. First read the two short summaries and study the diagram of the three branches of government. Then answer the questions in order; if one is tricky, skip it and come back. Write in complete sentences where it asks you to explain. Everything you need is printed in the packet — you do not need to know any outside facts. Keep your answers non-partisan: describe how the system is designed to work, not which side you favor. You may quietly read the passages aloud to yourself. Put your name, class period, and date at the top now. You have about 45 minutes; raise your hand if you need help understanding a word."

Support When students ask for help

- **You may read any part aloud** to a student or the class.
- If they are stuck matching a principle to an example (Q4), point them to **Source A** and the **diagram** — each principle is described there.
- For "fact / interpretation / opinion" (Q7), point to the **Word Bank** definitions; an "opinion" usually ranks or prefers, an "interpretation" says "probably" or "because."
- Encourage the printed **sentence stems** for the CER (Q9) and ACE sections.
- Do **not** give answers; prompt with "What does Source A say that principle means?" or "Is that about the three *branches* or about the *nation and the states*?"
- It is fine if a student cannot finish the optional early-finisher task.

Access Accommodations & language support

- **Read-aloud** of any passage or question is allowed for all students.
- Point students to the **sentence stems** and the **Word Bank**. A quick glossary for reference: **principle** = a basic guiding rule; **branch** = one of the three parts of government; **popular sovereignty** = power comes from the people; **federalism** = power shared between nation and states; **veto** = the President rejecting a bill; **override** = Congress passing it anyway with a large vote.
- Extended time is fine; the core can stop after Q9 if time runs short.
- Students may answer in phrases if writing full sentences is a barrier, as long as the idea is clear.
- The packet is grayscale-safe — it prints and reads clearly in black and white.

Tools Allowed & not allowed

Allowed: pencil, the printed packet, quiet self-read-aloud. **Not needed / not allowed:** calculator (no math required), phones, computers, textbooks or outside sources (everything needed is in the packet).

Collect at the end: Collect every packet, whether finished or not, with names on them. Stack them for the teacher. Note on a sticky how far most students got and any questions that caused confusion. Answer key: The **answer key is a separate file** (answerkey.html) and is for the teacher only. Please do not hand it to students.

Teacher follow-up (for the returning teacher)

Watch for the common mix-up between **separation of powers** (three branches) and **federalism** (nation vs. states), and between **separation of powers** and **checks and balances** (a separate job vs. the power to limit another branch) — Q4 and Q8 target both. Also watch for students marking a reasoned "probably...because" statement about the framers' motives as a plain fact in Q7. A quick next-day sort of a few statements into fact / interpretation / opinion, plus a review of the veto/override example, would reinforce this well. The CER (Q9) responses show who can name a specific check and tie it to "one branch limiting another."

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