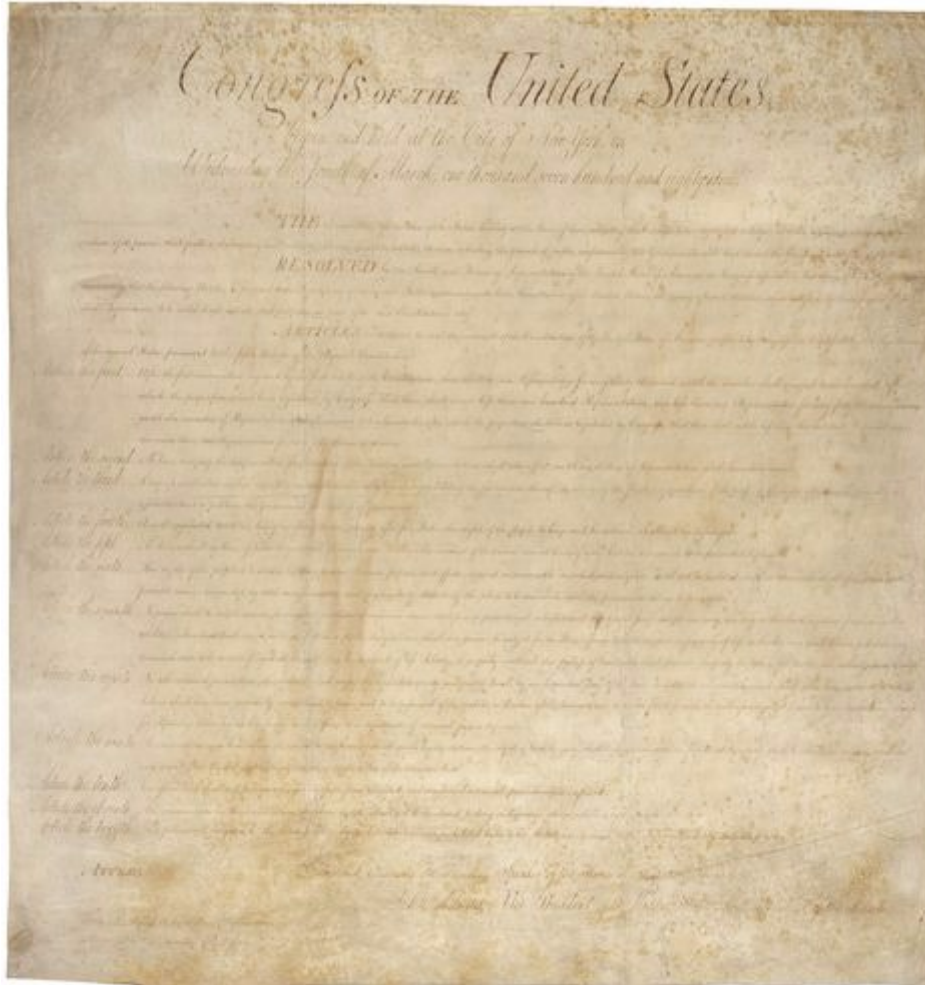


American Government - The Bill of Rights Part I

by ReadWorks



page one of the Bill of Rights

The Constitution of the United States was written in 1787, but the government it created couldn't rule over people's lives until one more step was taken. Each state had to vote to ratify, or approve of it.

By 1789, eleven states had ratified the new government. Their votes were enough to put the Constitution into effect. Two states, however, refused to sign it- North Carolina and Rhode Island. Critics in these states objected that a Bill of Rights had not been included. They worried that without a Bill of Rights the government might eventually become too strong. It might be unjust and put people in jail without a reason. It might take away a person's ability to speak freely, or keep some books from being written. They wanted people's rights spelled out so the government could never take them away.

The "founding fathers," who created the Constitution, knew the document would have to be flexible in order to survive over time. They knew they would have to allow amendments. In their first session of Congress in 1789, they agreed to add a Bill of Rights. James Madison led the way. Of the 15 amendments he suggested, 10 were eventually ratified by the states. They were made a permanent addition to the Constitution. These first 10 amendments are known as the Bill of Rights.

The Bill of Rights became part of the Constitution on December 15, 1791. Some rights, such as freedom of speech and the press, support democracy. Others, such as the right to a trial by jury, are important for justice. The ideas for these rights are very old. They date back to ancient Greek and Roman civilizations. Without them, we wouldn't enjoy the freedom we do as a nation today.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Why did North Carolina and Rhode Island not ratify the Constitution at first?

- A. They wanted a Bill of Rights to be added.
- B. They wanted to take away power from state governments.
- C. They thought it made the federal government too weak.
- D. They wanted to send it to the King of England.

2. Why does the author describe the fears that critics in North Carolina and Rhode Island had about the Constitution?

- A. to show that many people were opposed to the Bill of Rights
- B. to describe the arguments that they had against the Bill of Rights
- C. to explain why they wanted the Bill of Rights added
- D. to show that some states did not want to be part of the union

3. The author says that critics wanted people's rights "spelled out" to mean

- A. they wanted the founding fathers to explain them.
- B. they wanted the founding fathers to explain them.
- C. they asked Madison to use simple words in his writing.
- D. they wanted those rights to be made official.

4. Read the following sentences: "The 'founding fathers,' who created the Constitution, knew the document would have to be **flexible** in order to survive over time. They knew they would have to allow amendments."

The word **flexible** means

- A. able to be understood easily
- B. rigid and resistant to change from outside
- C. fast and strong
- D. able to bend or change without breaking

5. This passage is mostly about

- A. rights that people in different countries have all over the world.
- B. the founding fathers, and why they wrote the Constitution.
- C. early additions to the Constitution and why they were added.
- D. How bills become laws, and how laws become amendments.

6. Why did North Carolina and Rhode Island want a Bill of Rights added to the Constitution?

7. Based on this passage, explain why the Bill of Rights would help the Constitution survive over time.

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.

_____ two states refused to ratify the Constitution, the Bill of Rights was added.

- A. After
- B. In spite of
- C. Before
- D. Meanwhile

9. **Vocabulary Word:** justice: fairness in the way people are treated.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: