

Unit #1: The Constitution & Executive Power

During this unit, our class will examine the roots of the U.S. Constitution and the power structure it set up. Attempting to avoid the dangers of a government that has too much power, the Founders originally set up an extremely weak central government under a document called The Articles of Confederation. The Articles, however, proved to be wholly inadequate to the needs of the new nation.

Following a revolt of Massachusetts farmers called Shay's Rebellion, 55 men met in Philadelphia to amend the Articles, but they quickly chose to scrap that plan of government. The new structure of government forged during this Constitutional Convention of 1787 created a much stronger central government, but that also had built-in limits: three federal branches (executive, legislative, and judicial) that could check and balance each other, a system of federalism in which the individual member states retained significant powers, and a Bill of Rights that specified limits on government power. Within the structures the Founders set up, what are the appropriate roles of national vs. state government power and executive (presidential) vs. legislative (congressional) power have been debated and yes, even fought over, right up to the present day.

We will also scrutinize the executive power established in the Constitution. We will delve into the powers the president has and how through industrialization, economic crises, and war, presidential power has grown immensely over time compared to what the Founding Fathers intended. We will explore the federal bureaucracy that has evolved over time to carry out the hundreds and hundreds of functions required in a nation of over 300 million people. We will analyze current and past presidential actions to determine if such actions were appropriate uses or abuses of presidential power.

During this unit, we will explore the following "Essential Questions":

What is the Constitution, and how did it become our structure of government?

In what ways does the Constitution divide up and limit government power?

To what degree and why has presidential power grown over time?

How much power should the president have & what constitutes an abuse of presidential power?

What is the Bureaucracy, how does it affect our everyday lives & why is it called "The 4th Branch of Government?"

Unit Assignments:

Current Event HW Article: Due Thurs. 1/19

Questionnaire Plus One Page about Self Plus Syllabus Quiz: Fri. 1/10

Completed Constitution Search: Due Fri. 1/17

Federalist Papers Socratic Seminar: Block Day, Thurs. 1/23

Federalism HW Article Due: Mon. 1/27

****Presidential Power Textbook HW Assignment Due: Fri. 1/31***

Presidential Abuse of Power Presentations: Block Day, Thurs. 2/6 & Fri. 2/7

Exam: Block Day, Thurs. 2/13

Unit Assignments Packet Due: Fri. 2/14

***Textbook HW #1 due Fri. 1/31:** Read Chapter 14 (pp. 390-97, 405-7 (on line-item veto)) and answer the questions referenced below in complete sentences-- Due Friday 9/6: Page 392 #1-6; Page 397 #1-7; Page 408 #1, 2, 4; Pp. 410-11 #11, 15, 31