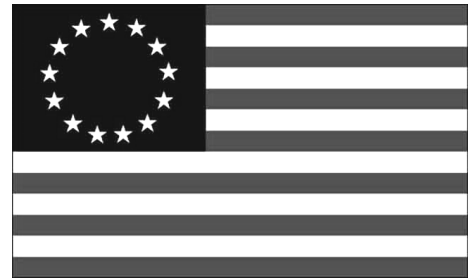


You've Got Rights!

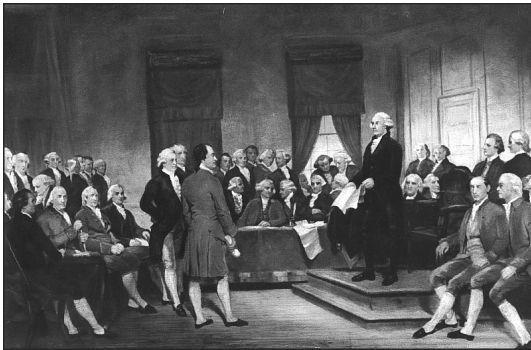
Name: _____

We Defeated the British... Now What?

The year is 1791. After a bloody war against the British, the American colonists have won their independence. The new Americans are excited, but some people are afraid about what rights they'll have under a new government. They've already suffered under the heavy hand of the British king. Now, some American leaders want to create a list of rights to define what rights American citizens will have.



The first United States flag



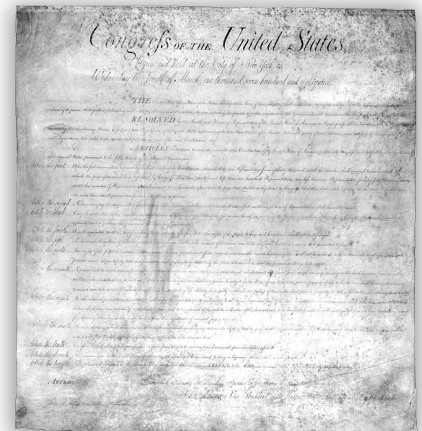
American leaders met in private to discuss what the new Constitution should include. An artist in the 1800s imagined what the scene might have looked like and painted this image of George Washington talking to the group. Washington was a federalist.

Leaders of the new United States of America have already written a Constitution that explains exactly how the new government will work. The only problem? It can't take effect until it's approved by the new states. And there are some state leaders who don't like it. Known as the **Anti-Federalists**, these people don't even like the Constitution. They fear a strong central government, and they are demanding that the Constitution include a list of citizens' rights. Without such a list, they warn the national government will violate people's rights. They're threatening to stop the Constitution from being approved unless a list is added.

But another group, known as the **Federalists**, insists the Constitution alone is enough to protect citizens' rights. They warn that it's impossible to list every single right that citizens should have. But once rights are written, the government could take advantage by violating rights that aren't on the list.

Both sides are convinced they're right. To move forward, they hammer out a compromise: The Bill of Rights. Instead of including a list of rights in the main part of the Constitution, they add it as the first ten **amendments**, or changes, to the Constitution. One of these amendments assures that the rights listed are not the only rights citizens have.

There are three main categories of rights: individual freedoms, protections against government abuse and power, and rights of people accused of crimes. In a few minutes, you'll read the actual text of the Bill of Rights and compare it to the Pamphlet of Protections you created.



The original Bill of Rights

More and More Rights

As time went on, later amendments added more rights to the Constitution. Amending the Constitution is not an easy process—and it's not supposed to be. But the difficult process has meant that important rights were slow to evolve. After the bloody Civil War was fought between the northern and southern states, African Americans who had been enslaved in the United States gained their freedom. In the 1860s and 70s, the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments added rights for former slaves and people of color. In the 20th century, the 19th and 26th Amendments added voting rights for women and citizens as young as 18. Even today, people are campaigning to amend the constitution to add rights for groups that are still disadvantaged.



Suffragettes in the 1910s fight for women's right to vote. Women won the right in 1919.