U.S. Constitution  
“The Highest Law in Our Land”

* The U.S. Constitution explains how our whole government works and lists the basic freedoms of all Americans (i.e. freedom of religion and opinion).
* Because of the Constitution, new leaders can’t make a new law that is unfair.
* The U.S. was a brand new country and had a government that did not work very well so the “Framers” met to find a new way of running the country. From May to September 1787, “Framers” met to decide what should be in the Constitution.
* The government has three Branches:
  1. **Legislative Branch** (Makes Laws)
  2. **Executive Branch** (Enforces Laws)
  3. **Judiciary Branch** (Interprets Laws)
* There were only 13 states at the time when the Constitution was created (CT, DW, GA, MD, MA, NH, NJ, NY, NC, PA, RI, SC, VA). Several men (or representatives) from each state (except Rhode Island) met to discuss ideas. There were a lot of debates… and a lot of compromises…
* The Constitutional Convention met for 4 months, but the 55 delegates were rarely all together because of poor weather and difficult travel. About 35 delegates were present during the process of writing the Constitution.
* There are 3 parts to the Constitution:
  1. **Preamble** 🡪 Tells WHO is writing and WHY
  2. **7 Articles** 🡪 HOW the government will work
  3. **Bill of Rights** 🡪 List of amendments (or additions) that Constitution writers thought were important. Names our rights and freedoms as Americans.

Mount Rushmore National Memorial,   
South Dakota

* Sculpture of U.S. Presidents:
  1. **George Washington** (1)
     + Considered the founder of USA
     + Developed our nation’s government
     + Won freedom from Great Britain during the American Revolution
     + Most prominent face on Mount Rushmore
  2. **Theodore Roosevelt** (3)
     + Guided the nation during quick economic growth
     + Supported building the Panama Canal
     + Helped eliminate corporate monopolies by supporting the working man
  3. **Abraham Lincoln** (16)
     + Lead our nation during tough times of the Civil War
     + Fought against slavery
  4. **Thomas Jefferson** (26)
     + Wrote the Declaration of Independence
* Fun facts:
  1. It took 6.5 years to carve the memorial into granite on the southeast side of Mount Rushmore with the help of hundreds of workers using dynamite, jackhammers, chisels, and drills (1927-1941).
  2. The heads are 60 feet (18 meters) tall and represent the first 150 years of the United States and its’ independence, democratic process, leadership in world affairs, and equality.
  3. Geologists estimate that the granite at Mount Rushmore National Memorial will erode only 1 inch ever 10,000 years!
  4. Mount Rushmore is named after Charles E. Rushmore, an Attorney in New York City, who was visiting the Black Hills (the area where the memorial is) to check on some title of property. The year was 1884. Rushmore was shown the sculpture and when a miner who lived close by told him it hadn’t been named, they decided to start calling it Rushmore.
  5. Gutzon de la Mothe Borglum was the person in charge of carving Mount Rushmore and there was 340-400 person crew carving at any given time! Luigi Del Bianco was the chief carver.

The Three Branches of Government

1. **Legislature** 🡪 (Congress) Makes laws; congress members are elected by the American voters. Split into two parts: House of Representatives and Senate. When Congress passes a new law, the House of Representatives and Senate must agree to the exact same law (if they don’t agree, the law doesn’t pass).
   * + *Senate* (Upper House)
       - Two Senators from each state, elected by the people. Represent the interests of all the people. [Members serve 6 year term. The newest session began January 3, 2013.]
     + *House of Representatives* (Lower House) AKA “The House”
       - Each state has at least one Representative, but larger states have more. The people in each state elect their Representative(s) have the right to present concerns to their Representative(s). There are 435 Representatives. [Members serve 2 year term. The newest session began January 3, 2013.]
2. **Executive** 🡪 Enforces laws; the President is the head of this Branch and the Vice President and Secretaries of all departments are included.
   * + The *Cabinet* makes up the heads of the 15 executive departments.
       - Department of… Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Education, Energy, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Housing and Urban Development, Interior, Justice, Labor, State, Transportation, Treasury, & Veterans Affairs
     + The members of the *Cabinet* are appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. They are often the President’s closest confidants (friends, or “go-to” people). The *Cabinet* members all take the title of *Secretary*, except for the head of the *Justice Department*, who is called the *Attorney General*.
     + The Presidential line of succession:
       - President, Vice President, Speaker of the House, Senate President pro tempore, Cabinet offices in the order they were created…
3. **Judiciary** 🡪 Interprets the law (decides what it means); includes all federal courts (all the way up to the Supreme Court). State courts are under national courts. The last court of appeal is the Supreme Court and what happens there is final (there is no appeals court higher than the Supreme Court).

Sources:

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