Name: _____ Date: _____

Why Changing the Constitution Is Hard on Purpose

Circle group

The Constitution was written to last. Its authors knew that a nation changes over time. So they included a way to change the document. It is described in Article Five. The process is hard on purpose. Changing the nation's highest law should need wide agreement. It should not depend on a narrow majority on a single day.

The usual path has two main stages. First, an amendment must be proposed. In the path used for every amendment so far, two thirds of the members of both the House and the Senate must vote yes. Second, the amendment must be ratified. That means three fourths of the states must approve it. Each state decides through its legislature, or sometimes through a special convention. The president has no formal part in this process and no veto over it.

This hard standard explains why the Constitution has been amended only twenty-seven times. Thousands of changes have been suggested. Most never got enough support. The first ten amendments are called the Bill of Rights. They were added within a few years after the Constitution was approved.

Because the bar is so high, an amendment that succeeds usually shows broad agreement. The slow pace can be annoying to people who want quick change. But it also keeps a nation from changing its foundation in the heat of a passing argument. Ordinary laws are much easier to change. That is why the Constitution is called the supreme law of the land.

Questions

1. Which part of the Constitution tells how it can be changed?

_____

_____

2. How many votes in Congress are needed to propose an amendment?

_____

_____

3. How many of the states must ratify an amendment?

_____

_____

4. How many times has the Constitution been amended?

_____

_____

5. Why did the authors make the process hard on purpose?

_____

_____

6. How can a slow pace help protect a nation?

_____

_____

Words to know

amendment: a change or addition to the Constitution
ratified: formally approved so that it becomes official
legislature: the group that makes the laws for a state or nation
veto: the power to say no to a law
foundation: the basic part that everything else rests on

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

Why Changing the Constitution Is Hard on Purpose

Triangle group

The Constitution was written to last, but its authors knew that a nation changes over time. They included a way to alter the document, described in Article Five. The process is deliberately demanding. Changing the nation's highest law should require wide agreement, not just the wishes of a narrow majority on a single day.

The usual path has two main stages. First, an amendment must be proposed. In the path used for every amendment so far, two thirds of the members of both the House and the Senate must vote in favor. Second, the amendment must be ratified, which means approved by three fourths of the states. Each state decides through its legislature, or in some cases through a special convention. The president has no formal role in the amendment process, and no veto over it.

This demanding standard explains why the Constitution has been amended only twenty-seven times. Thousands of changes have been suggested over the years, but most never gained enough support. The first ten amendments, known as the Bill of Rights, were added within a few years of the Constitution's approval.

Because the bar is so high, an amendment that succeeds usually reflects a broad agreement across regions and communities. The slow pace can be frustrating to people who want quick change, but it also protects a nation from altering its foundation in the heat of a passing argument. Ordinary laws, in contrast, can be changed much more easily, which is why the Constitution is called the supreme law of the land.

Questions

1. Which part of the Constitution describes how it can be changed?

_____

_____

2. How many votes in Congress are needed to propose an amendment?

_____

_____

3. What share of the states must ratify an amendment?

_____

_____

4. How many times has the Constitution been amended?

_____

_____

5. Why did the authors make the process so demanding?

_____

_____

6. How can a slow pace protect a nation?

_____

_____

Words to know

amendment: a change or addition to the Constitution
ratified: formally approved so that it becomes official
legislature: the group that makes the laws for a state or nation
veto: the power to say no to a law
foundation: the basic part that everything else rests on

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

Why Changing the Constitution Is Hard on Purpose

Square group

The Constitution was composed to endure, yet its authors understood that a nation inevitably changes over time. They therefore included a mechanism for altering the document, which is described in Article Five. The process is deliberately demanding, because changing the nation's highest law ought to require broad agreement rather than merely the wishes of a narrow majority on a single day.

The usual path has two principal stages. First, an amendment must be proposed. In the path that has been used for every amendment so far, two thirds of the members of both the House and the Senate must vote in favor. Second, the amendment must be ratified, which means that it has to be approved by three fourths of the states. Each state reaches its decision through its legislature or, in some cases, through a special convention. The president has no formal role in the amendment process and holds no veto over it.

This exacting standard explains why the Constitution has been amended only twenty-seven times. Thousands of changes have been suggested over the years, but the great majority never attracted enough support. The first ten amendments, known collectively as the Bill of Rights, were added within a few years of the Constitution's approval.

Because the bar is set so high, an amendment that succeeds generally reflects a broad agreement across regions and communities. The slow pace can be frustrating to people who want swift change, yet it also protects a nation from altering its foundation in the heat of a passing argument. Ordinary laws, by contrast, can be changed far more easily, which is why the Constitution is called the supreme law of the land.

Questions

1. Which part of the Constitution describes the mechanism for altering it?

_____

_____

2. How many votes in Congress are required to propose an amendment?

_____

_____

3. What share of the states must approve an amendment for it to be ratified?

_____

_____

4. How many times has the Constitution been amended?

_____

_____

5. Why did the authors make the process so demanding?

_____

_____

6. In what way can a slow pace protect a nation?

_____

_____

Words to know

amendment: a change or addition to the Constitution
ratified: formally approved so that it becomes official
legislature: the group that makes the laws for a state or nation
veto: the power to say no to a law
foundation: the basic part that everything else rests on

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

For the teacher: Why Changing the Constitution Is Hard on Purpose

Each student sheet carries a shape, not a level. The same topic and facts, written three ways.

Circle: Why Changing the Constitution Is Hard on Purpose

Easier · 246 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 5.8

1. Article Five.
2. Two thirds of the members of both the House and the Senate.
3. Three fourths of the states.
4. Twenty-seven times.
5. Changing the highest law should need wide agreement, not a narrow majority on one day.
6. It keeps a nation from changing its foundation in the heat of a passing argument.

Triangle: Why Changing the Constitution Is Hard on Purpose

This passage · 256 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 9

1. Article Five.
2. Two thirds of the members of both the House and the Senate.
3. Three fourths of the states.
4. Twenty-seven times.
5. Changing the highest law should need wide agreement, not just a narrow majority on one day.
6. It stops the nation from changing its foundation in the heat of a passing argument.

Square: Why Changing the Constitution Is Hard on Purpose

Harder · 278 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 10.7

1. Article Five.
2. Two thirds of the members of both the House and the Senate.
3. Three fourths of the states.
4. Twenty-seven times.
5. Changing the highest law ought to require broad agreement rather than a narrow majority on a single day.
6. It protects a nation from altering its foundation in the heat of a passing argument.