Civics - Volume 1 - Version 13

CARDINAL COMPASS - CIVICS NO. 1 - HANDS-ON LEARNING - WITH CARL THE CARDINAL

The U.S. Constitution with Carl

VOL. 1

Our Government's Rules, Jobs, and Limits

Who makes the rules for a whole country, and how can those rules change fairly? In this book you will write your own family constitution, change it the fair way, and sort the jobs of government in three activities you can do together at home.

A country is a very big group. This book shows how the group writes its rules down in one big rulebook that everyone can see, and how that rulebook itself can be changed, fairly, when a rule stops working.



Cover illustration: a columned building with a small dome, a flag flying, and red, white, and blue bunting.

Read together	Write together	Grown-up with you for every activity



Meet Carl - Citizen Carl

Carl the Cardinal is your guide. For this project, Carl is learning how a country writes its rules down so everyone can see them. He writes carefully, he listens to everyone, and he treats the rulebook like the promise it is. His green neckerchief and gold compass medallion stay on. Color your own Carl on the last page.

How to use this book: Pages 2-4 tell what the Constitution is and where it came from, including the argument that gave Congress two houses. Page 5 is the Rulebook Promises. Read it first, and read it well. Then do the three activities. Finish with the questions. Color Carl at the end.

Keep a notebook near you. Write your rules. Write your changes.

You will need, for all three activities: one big sheet for the family constitution (poster paper or taped sheets), markers or crayons, a pen for signatures, three big sorting sheets, the job cards printed in this book, tape, scissors for grown-up hands, and a notebook.

What is government?

Think of a game with many players. The game needs rules, people to make the rules, and a fair way to decide when a rule was broken. A whole country works the same way, only much bigger.

> **Government:** Government is the system people use to make and carry out public decisions and laws. People work toward safety and fairness through government.
>
> **Citizen:** a citizen is a member of a country. A citizen has rights in that country, and responsibilities in it too.
>
> **Law:** a law is an official rule that a government makes and people are required to follow.
>
> **Constitution:** the United States Constitution is our country's highest law. It sets up the national government, gives its parts different jobs, and limits what government may do. Laws and government actions must follow it. The Constitution and its amendments also protect important rights.
>
> **Branch:** a branch is one of the three parts of the federal government. Federal means having to do with the national government. Each branch has its own job.

One rulebook, three big jobs

A whole country needs its highest rules written down where everyone can see them. That rulebook is the Constitution, and it does three big things:

1. **It sets up the national government.**
2. **It gives the parts of the government different jobs.**
3. **It limits what government may do, and tells how the rulebook itself can be changed fairly.**

Leaders must follow the Constitution too. No leader stands above the rulebook.

Three branches, three jobs

The government of the whole country is the federal government. It has three branches.



Legislative - Makes the laws | **Executive - Carries out the laws** | **Judicial - Interprets and applies laws**

- **The Legislative Branch is Congress. It makes the laws.** Legislative means law-making.
- **The Executive Branch is led by the President. It carries out the laws.** Executive means carrying out.
- **The Judicial Branch is the courts and their judges. It interprets and applies the laws to cases.** To interpret means to explain what something means.

Why three parts, and not one? Splitting the jobs keeps any one part from having all the power. Each part watches the others. That watching is called checks and balances.

Watch them work together: Congress passes a bill, a proposal for a new law or a change to an existing law. The President may sign it or veto it: veto means to reject a bill. Congress can still pass it with enough votes. Courts decide cases and can say a law conflicts with the Constitution.

Later in this series: Book No. 3 explores elections.

We the People: a rulebook from 1787

A summer in Philadelphia

In the summer of 1787, the country was young. The states shared the Articles of Confederation, the country's first rulebook, but it was not working well. Delegates from 12 states met in Philadelphia. A delegate is a person sent to speak and decide for a group. The delegates had come to revise the Articles of Confederation, which means to fix it and make it better.

Once they met, the delegates decided it could not be fixed. They drafted a new Constitution instead. Draft means to write a first version and keep improving it.

It was hot work. The windows stayed shut so no one outside could hear. Inside, the writers talked. They argued. They listened. They changed their minds, and they wrote, and they wrote again. At the end of the summer, the delegates signed the finished rulebook in 1787: the Constitution of the United States. 39 delegates signed the Constitution. Signing was not the last step. The states still had to ratify it. Ratify means to formally approve.

Written in 1787

The ninth state ratified it in 1788

The new government began in 1789

James Madison helped plan the new government, kept detailed notes, and worked to win approval. He is often called the Father of the Constitution, but many people helped create it.



The writers met in Philadelphia in the summer of 1787. They talked, listened, and signed.

Three big words

The Constitution does not start with a king. It starts with three words: **We the People.**

Those words carry the whole idea. The government gets its power from the people it serves. The Constitution sets rules for the government and limits what leaders can do. The people wrote it, and the people can change it, in the fair way it describes.

In 1787, women and enslaved people were not allowed to take part, and the Constitution as first written protected slavery. Over time, amendments, laws, court decisions, and people's hard work changed rights and protections.

The same pattern in Virginia

Virginia runs the same pattern, from Richmond, our state capital. Virginia's lawmaking body is the General Assembly, made of the House of Delegates and the Senate of Virginia. It makes the laws. Virginia's executive branch is led by the Governor, who carries out the laws. Virginia's judicial branch is the courts of Virginia. They interpret and apply the laws to cases.

When the states could not agree

On page 3 you read that the delegates talked, argued, and listened. Their hardest argument was about Congress itself: **how many votes should each state have?**

The Virginia Plan: count the people

Virginia was one of the largest states. On May 29, Edmund Randolph of Virginia presented a plan worked out with James Madison and the Virginia delegates. It called for a Congress of two houses, with seats in both houses counted by population: more people, more seats. A state speaking for many people, the large states said, should have a stronger voice than a state speaking for only a few.

The New Jersey Plan: every state equal

On June 15, William Paterson of New Jersey presented a different plan: a Congress of one house, where every state would have an equal vote. The small states said that was fair: each state had joined the union as its own state, and if seats were counted only by people, the large states could outvote the small states every time, and the small states would hardly be heard.

Both sides had a real point

That is why the argument lasted for weeks in the hot, shut-up room. On July 2, the vote on equal votes in one house tied, five states to five. The whole work could have fallen apart right there. The delegates chose a small committee to find a way forward, and they kept talking.

A compromise from Connecticut

A **compromise** is an agreement where each side gives up part of what it wanted, so a fair plan can move forward. Delegates from Connecticut, including Roger Sherman, helped shape a plan that joined the two ideas, and on July 16, 1787, the delegates adopted it: the Great Compromise, or Connecticut Compromise.

The Great Compromise: two houses, counted two ways

The House of Representatives: seats counted by population, the Virginia idea. A state with more people has more representatives.

The Senate: every state equal, the New Jersey idea. Each state has two senators, large or small.

Try it with numbers

Imagine two made-up states. Maple State has 800,000 people. Pine State has 100,000. If the House gives one seat for every 100,000 people, Maple State gets 8 seats and Pine State gets 1. In the Senate, each gets 2 senators. Counted by people, Maple State is stronger. Counted by states, they stand equal. The compromise lets both counts matter.

Neither side got everything it wanted, and that was the point. The writers kept working, the rulebook was finished, and the compromise still shapes your life today: a bill must pass both houses of Congress, counted both ways, before it can become a law.

In your family: when you cannot agree, listen for the real point on each side first. Then look for a plan that honors both points. That is what the talks over your family constitution are for.

BEFORE ANY ACTIVITY

Rulebook Promises

Read this together with a grown-up before any activity.

Carl checks first: grown-up here, rulebook ready, and the promises read and understood together.



The biggest promise in this book

We change a rule only the way our rulebook says a rule can change. A change never happens just because someone is loudest.

Our promises

- A grown-up stays with you for every activity. If the grown-up leaves, stop and wait.
- We write rules we can really keep.
- Everyone gets heard before a rule changes.
- A change follows the rule we wrote for changing, never just because someone is loudest.
- Signing means we mean it.
- Scissors are grown-up work. Scissors stay in grown-up hands.

Good rulebook habits

- Read the rulebook out loud before you decide anything. A rule everyone can hear is a rule everyone can follow.
- Say your idea kindly, and listen to every idea, even one you did not think of first.
- When a change is made, write it down with its date, so the whole family can see what changed.

Why promises come first

The writers of 1787 made their agreements before they signed. Your family does the same. These promises are how your small rulebook stays fair for everyone who lives by it, big or small, loud or quiet.

What would you do? The popular idea

Imagine a leader has an idea most people like a lot. Crowds cheer for it. But the rulebook does not give the leader the power to do it alone, and doing it would take away a protected choice.

Carl asks three questions first. Popularity: do many people like it? Liking is not permission. **Rules:** does the rulebook give this leader this job? If not, the leader must use the fair way the rulebook provides, or leave it alone. **Rights:** does it protect everyone's rights?

A good leader follows the rulebook even when breaking it would be popular. Rules that bind leaders protect everyone, the people who cheered and the people who did not.

ACTIVITY 1

Write a Family Constitution

Question: Can your family write its own small rulebook, the way the writers of 1787 wrote a big one? **Time:** About 30 minutes, then one week of living by it. **Mess:** None.

You will need

One big sheet for the family constitution (poster paper or taped sheets); markers or crayons; a pen for signatures; tape to hang it up; a notebook.



> **Amendment:** an amendment is a change or addition to the rulebook, made the way the rulebook itself allows. Your constitution needs its own amendment rule: the fair way your family will change a rule.

Do it: step by step

1. **Talk first.** What rules would help your family live well together? Take ideas from everyone.
2. **Write three to five rules.** Start with low-stakes practice rules: shared cleanup, game turns, and where materials live. A family rule can never take away anyone's basic needs, safety, or turn to be heard, and grown-ups stay responsible for safety.
3. **Write the rules on the big sheet.** Leave room below for a change later, and room at the bottom for signatures.
4. **Write your amendment rule into the constitution, before anyone signs.** Copy this one, or write your own: "More than half of the family members taking part must agree to a change. A tie leaves the old rule in place." More than half means more than half of the people taking part. Everyone gets a chance to speak before the family decides. If someone is away, the family waits for them or follows the plan it wrote.
5. **Sign it.** Each person signs in their own way at the bottom: a name, a mark, a drawing, words said aloud for a grown-up to write down, or a grown-up writing for them. These are learning promises for practice.
6. **Hang it up** where everyone can see it. Live by it for the week.

How the real rulebook does it

Changing the U.S. Constitution takes two big steps: first a change is proposed, then enough states approve it.

For grown-ups: proposed by two-thirds of both houses of Congress, or by a convention called when two-thirds of state legislatures ask; it takes effect when three-fourths of the states approve it; the President does not approve amendments.

Our family activity is a model. It is not the way the United States changes its Constitution.

Turn to page 7 and copy your constitution into the record, so this book keeps it.

ACTIVITY 1 - RECORD SHEET

Our Family Constitution: The Record

Copy your family's constitution here, so this book keeps a record of it. If you need more room, copy it into your notebook instead.

Our rules:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Our amendment rule, in our own words:

Signed by:

Date:

Read it back

Read your constitution out loud, all the way through. Did everyone hear every rule? Did everyone sign in their own way? A rulebook that everyone has heard and signed is a promise the whole family made together.

Everyone signed: Yes / Not yet **Our amendment rule is written in:** Yes / Not yet

Keep this record with your notebook. On the next page, after some days of living by your rules, your family considers a change to one rule, the fair way.

ACTIVITY 2

Change the Rulebook

Question: What is the fair way to change a rule that is not working? **Time:** About 20 minutes, after some days of living by your constitution. **Mess:** None.

You will need

Your family constitution, hanging where everyone can see it; a pen; this page for the log; a notebook.

Do it: step by step

1. **Live with your constitution first.** This activity can happen days later, after your family has lived with its constitution for a while.
2. **Pick one rule that is not working.** Say out loud what makes it hard to keep.
3. **Propose the change in words.** Say clearly what the rule would say instead.
4. **Talk it through.** Who does the change help? Who does it make things harder for? Everyone gets heard before you decide.
5. **Use the amendment rule your family wrote. If you chose our sample rule, more than half must agree.**
6. **Write the change down, with its date.** If the change is adopted, write the change into the constitution and cross out the old rule. If it is not adopted, write the proposal in the amendment log below and the old rule stays.
7. **Log the proposal and outcome below,** so this book keeps the record.

Remember what an amendment is: a change or addition to the rulebook, made the way the rulebook itself allows. Your family considered a change the fair way, and the rulebook worked just as it was written, whichever way the decision went.

Amendment log

The rule we considered:

Our proposed change:

Who it helps, and who it makes things harder for:

Outcome (circle one): adopted / not adopted Date: _____

ACTIVITY 3

Sort the Jobs

Question: Can you tell which branch does which job? **Time:** About 20 minutes. **Mess:** Low. Paper scraps go in the recycling.

You will need

This page; three sheets of ordinary paper for the sorting headings; scissors for grown-up hands; a table or the floor for sorting. No scissors? A grown-up can copy each job onto its own slip of paper instead.

Grown-up step: the grown-up cuts out the seven job cards below, on the dashed lines. Mix the cards up. Read each card out loud.

One word first: a **bill** is a proposal for a new law or a change to an existing law. One card below is about a bill.

Sorting setup: take three separate sheets of ordinary paper. Write one heading at the top of each sheet: "Legislative - Makes the laws," "Executive - Carries out the laws," and "Judicial - Interprets and applies laws." Sort the seven cut cards onto the three sheets.

Writes new laws as a group	Votes on whether an idea becomes a law
The President signs a bill passed by Congress to make it law	Carries out the laws every day
Leads the team that does the country's work	Decides what a law means in a court case
Decides in a court case whether a law conflicts with the Constitution	Your turn: name one more job, and guess its branch

Your three sheets: Legislative - Makes the laws | Executive - Carries out the laws | Judicial - Interprets and applies laws. Lay the sheets side by side and place each card on its sheet.

Stuck on a card? Ask: is this job about making a law (Legislative), doing the work of a law (Executive), or interpreting and applying a law to a case (Judicial)? Check your sort on page 12, after you finish.

Closer to home: Virginia

The nearby government with the same three branches is Virginia's state government, from page 3: the General Assembly makes the laws, the Governor carries them out, and the courts of Virginia interpret and apply them to cases. Towns organize their work in different ways. With a grown-up, look up how your own town or county organizes its jobs. A family works differently again: you wrote your rules on page 6, you live by them each day, and you change them only the fair way your rulebook describes.

What we learned

- The United States Constitution is our country's highest law. It sets up the national government, gives its parts different jobs, and limits what government may do. Laws and government actions must follow it. The Constitution and its amendments also protect important rights.
- The Constitution starts with We the People. The government gets its power from the people it serves.
- Government is the system people use to make and carry out public decisions and laws. A citizen is a member of a country, with rights and responsibilities in it. A law is an official rule that a government makes and people are required to follow.
- The federal government has three branches. The Legislative Branch is Congress, and it makes the laws. The Executive Branch is led by the President, and it carries out the laws. The Judicial Branch is the courts, and it interprets and applies the laws to cases.
- Virginia runs the same pattern from Richmond. Its legislative branch, the General Assembly, makes the laws. Its executive branch is led by the Governor, who carries out the laws. Its judicial branch, the courts of Virginia, interprets and applies the laws to cases.
- In the summer of 1787, delegates from 12 states met in Philadelphia to revise the Articles of Confederation, and drafted a new Constitution instead. 39 delegates signed it. It was written in 1787, the ninth state ratified it in 1788, and the new government began in 1789. Ratify means to formally approve.
- In 1787, women and enslaved people were not allowed to take part, and the Constitution as first written protected slavery. Over time, amendments, laws, court decisions, and people's hard work changed rights and protections.
- Congress passes a bill, and the President may sign it or veto it. Veto means to reject a bill. Congress can still pass the bill with enough votes. Courts decide cases, and they can say a law conflicts with the Constitution.
- A rulebook can change, fairly. An amendment is a change or addition to the rulebook, made the way the rulebook itself allows. Your family wrote its amendment rule before signing and decided by that rule.

Look back at your pages

Look at your family constitution record from Activity 1. Which rule worked best? Look at your amendment log from Activity 2. What change did you propose, and was it adopted? Look at your job sort from Activity 3. Which card was hardest to place, and why?

Draw or write: pick the moment that mattered most: your signature on the big sheet, the talk that changed a rule, or the moment a card clicked into its branch. Draw it in your notebook. Write one sentence about what fairness looked like.

Keep being a citizen

Listen to everyone. Write rules you can really keep. Change rules only the fair way, never just because someone is loudest.

Now think like the writers of 1787. The questions are on the next page.

Questions to talk, write, and wonder about

Take your time on this page. Pick the questions you like best. Talk about them, write what you think, and say why you think it. Page 12 offers possible discussion points to compare with your ideas.

Start with the big one

The Constitution starts with "We the People," not "I the King." Why do those three words matter so much?

Think about who holds the power in each opening. In one, one person decides for everyone. In the other, the people decide together.

Back to the rulebook

Why does a rulebook need a fair way to change itself?

Think about your family constitution. What would happen if a rule stopped working, and no one was allowed to change it, ever?

What could go wrong if the loudest voice could change the rules alone?

What if one loud voice could change a rule your family likes at breakfast, and change it back at lunch? Who would stop being heard?

Back to the limits

The Constitution sets limits on what leaders can do. Why do those limits protect everyone?

What could happen if the rulebook did not bind the leader too?

A leader's popular idea goes beyond the power the rulebook gives. What should the leader do?

Use Carl's three questions from page 5: Is it popular? Do the rules allow it? Does it protect everyone's rights?

Think like a citizen

Virginia and the whole country both organize government into three branches: Legislative, Executive, and Judicial. Why does splitting the jobs into three parts help?

Think about fairness

Could a rule still be unfair even if most people agree? What should your family do then?

Agreement matters, and so does treating every person fairly.

What if a rule helps most people but unfairly hurts one person?

Think about whether helping most people is enough, and whether there is a kinder way.

Why is changing a constitution harder than changing an ordinary law?

Think about why a change to the highest law should take wide agreement and care.

Your next investigation

What question would you investigate next, and who could you ask? What answer would change your mind?

Check your thinking

Possible discussion points - read after you try. Compare these with your own ideas from page 11. There can be more than one good way to say each one.

The big one: "I the King" would mean one person holds all the power. "We the People" means power starts with the people, and rules bind leaders too.

Changing the rulebook: no rulebook gets everything right forever. A fair way to change it, written inside it, lets it fix itself without breaking.

The loudest voice: if the loudest voice could change the rules alone, quiet voices would stop being heard, and no one could trust a rule to stay a rule.

Limits on leaders: limits keep any one leader from doing whatever they want, so the people's rights stay written down where everyone can see them.

Three parts: no one part can make an unfair law, carry it out, and call it fair, because the jobs are split among the three branches.

Unfair, even if most agree: yes, a rule can still be unfair even when most people agree to it. That is why a family rule can never take away anyone's basic needs, safety, or turn to be heard.

Helps most, hurts one: helping most people does not by itself make a rule fair. Look for a way to write the rule that helps without unfairly hurting anyone.

Harder to change: the Constitution is the highest law, so changing it takes two big steps and wide agreement.

The popular idea (page 5): a leader may not do a thing just because most people like it. First ask Carl's three questions. Is it popular? Do the rules give this leader this job? Does it protect everyone's rights? If the rules say no, the fair way is to propose the idea the way the rulebook provides, or to work to change the rulebook by its own amendment steps. Popularity is not permission.

The Great Compromise (page 4): the large states wanted seats counted by population, and the small states wanted every state equal. Neither side won everything. Congress got two houses: the House of Representatives, counted by population, and the Senate, where every state has two senators. Each side gave up part of what it wanted, and the writers could finish the rulebook together.

Sort the Jobs, Activity 3: the answers

Legislative: "Writes new laws as a group," "Votes on whether an idea becomes a law."

Executive: "The President signs a bill passed by Congress to make it law," "Carries out the laws every day," "Leads the team that does the country's work."

Judicial: "Decides what a law means in a court case," "Decides in a court case whether a law conflicts with the Constitution."

Say it back: pick one answer above and say it in your own words to a grown-up. Then turn the page for the words to keep, the Preamble, and the grown-up sources.

Words to keep - and go further

Words to keep

Government	The system people use to make and carry out public decisions and laws
Citizen	A member of a country, with rights and responsibilities in it
Law	An official rule that a government makes and people are required to follow
Constitution	Our country's highest law. It sets up the national government, gives its parts different jobs, and limits what government may do. Laws and government actions must follow it
Branch	One of the three parts of the federal government. Federal means having to do with the national government. Each branch has its own job
Legislative	The branch that makes the laws
Executive	The branch that carries out the laws
Judicial	The branch that interprets and applies laws to cases
Bill	A proposal for a new law or a change to an existing law
Amendment	A change or addition to the rulebook, made the way the rulebook itself allows
Delegate	A person sent to speak and decide for a group
Ratify	To formally approve
Veto	To reject a bill
Compromise	An agreement where each side gives up part of what it wanted, so a fair plan can move forward
Senate and House	The two houses of Congress. In the House of Representatives, seats are counted by population. In the Senate, every state has two senators

Go further

- **Visit:** visit a place where government works: the Virginia State Capitol in Richmond, or your city or county government building.
- **Draw:** draw the Virginia State Capitol in Richmond. Label the building Virginia State Capitol. Add: Virginia's General Assembly meets here.
- **Count:** with a grown-up, find out how many representatives Virginia has in the House of Representatives, and say Virginia's two senators out loud. One count comes from Virginia's population. The other is the same for every state.

The Preamble: read it aloud, together, slowly

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

For grown-ups: sources to explore together

Ben's Guide to the U.S. Government: https://bensguide.gpo.gov
National Archives, The Constitution: https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution
National Archives, Amending the Constitution: https://www.archives.gov/federal-register/constitution
USA.gov, Branches of Government: https://www.usa.gov/branches-of-government
Congress.gov, Constitution Annotated: The Great Compromise of the Constitutional Convention: https://constitution.congress.gov/browse/essay/artI-S1-2-3/ALDE_00001313/

Coloring page: Citizen Carl

Print this page and color Citizen Carl with his tall scroll and rulebook.

Color guide: Carl red crest and body. Mask black. Eyes amber-brown. Beak orange. Feet orange. Chest cream. Neckerchief green. Compass medallion gold. Scroll cream. Book navy with gold page edges. Or pick your own colors for everything else. There is no wrong way to color Carl.



Citizen Carl: tall scroll in one wing, rulebook under the other, neckerchief and medallion on. Keep him with your civics notebook.