THE CONSTITUTION WITH CARL

Volume 12 - The Eleventh Amendment - States in Federal Court

States in Federal Court

Central question: Can a person sue a state in federal court?





The Bill of Rights ended with Volume 11. The Constitution kept growing after 1791, and so does this series. The Eleventh Amendment was the first change added after the Bill of Rights, and it arrived quickly, because the young country had just watched a court case almost nobody expected.

This amendment is about doors. A lawsuit is a formal complaint brought into a court, and every court has a door. This book asks one question from several sides: when a person believes a state owes him money, or has treated him unfairly, which courthouse door, if any, may he use?

The rule has a name you will meet on many pages: **sovereign immunity**. It means a government cannot be sued without its consent. The states were sovereign, self-governing and answerable to their own people, before the Constitution existed. They joined the Union as sovereigns, and this amendment guards a piece of that standing: a state cannot be dragged into federal court by an individual who was never given the right to bring it there.

Watch the exceptions as carefully as the rule. The amendment never closed every door, and this book will not pretend it did.

For ages 7 to 11. Level Up boxes reach to age 13.

START HERE

Meet Carl and the Four Strands

Carl the Cardinal is Sovereign Carl in this volume. He stands between two wooden doors, holding a plain state seal. One door leads into a state court. The other leads into a federal court. Carl's job is not to lock doors, and it is not to fling them open. His job is to read the rule written over each door and send every visitor to the door the Constitution assigns him.

The four strands, kept separate

Strand	What it is
THE WORDS	The amendment itself, in ORIGINAL WORDS, plus a PLAIN LANGUAGE EXPLANATION set apart from it.
THE HISTORY	Evidence from before and around 1795 about why the words were added.
COURTS HAVE SAID	Named cases with years. This is interpretation by judges, labeled as interpretation.
STILL DEBATED	Real disputes that remain. Stated fairly, never as settled fact.

How to use this book

- Read the words aloud first. Then read the explanation.
- Write, draw, point, or dictate your answers. All of those count.
- Every lawsuit in the activities is fictional. The real cases are on the Courts Have Said pages, with their real names and years.
- One guardrail runs through the whole book: this amendment is never a rule that "a state cannot be sued." States can be sued in several ways this book names. The amendment closes one door, for one kind of visitor.
- Family Talk is where the family viewpoint lives. It is never presented as a court holding.

CARL'S TWO QUESTIONS

Carl asks the same two questions about every lawsuit in this book. **First:** who is really being sued, the state itself, or an official? **Second:** has the state agreed to come? Learn to ask those two questions in that order, and most of this amendment's puzzles solve themselves. The sorting activity on page 13 is built on them.

MEET CARL BOX

Carl in this volume is a keeper of doors. A seal is a promise pressed into metal: this government stands behind its word. Carl holds the seal gently and takes the promise seriously, and he expects governments to do the same. A closed door, in Carl's keeping, is never an excuse for a broken promise. It is a sign that says: this argument belongs in a different room.