THE CONSTITUTION WITH CARL

Volume 24 - The Twenty-third Amendment - Washington, D.C. Votes for President

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Central question: What about the people who live in the capital?





Every state in the Union chooses electors, the people who cast the Electoral College votes for President. But the capital city is not a state. It is a district, a piece of land set apart for the seat of the national government, and for more than a century and a half the hundreds of thousands of Americans who lived there could not vote for President at all. They paid federal taxes, served in the armed forces, and raised their families in the shadow of the Capitol, and on election day the choosing of the President went on without them.

In 1961 the Twenty-third Amendment changed that, in a careful and limited way. It did not make the District a state. It gave the District electors, counted as if it were a state for this one job, with a cap that keeps its number small. This book reads those words closely, counts the arithmetic they set up, and tells how the capital's people got their presidential vote, and what they still do not have.

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

START HERE

Meet Carl and the Four Strands

Carl the Cardinal is District Carl in this volume. He stands before the Capitol dome holding two things: a blank ballot, and a small plain flag. The ballot is blank because Carl's books never tell a voter how to vote. The flag is plain because the District's own story is the subject here, not any party's banner. Carl's job in this volume is to read one short amendment very carefully, because almost everything about the capital's place in the nation turns on a few exact phrases in it.

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	How the District came to be, how its people lost the presidential vote in 1801, and how they won it back in 1961.
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.
- The counting exercises use the real numbers of the Electoral College today, and one small make-believe union of states where you can watch the cap do its work.
- Keep three kinds of places straight: states, the District, and the territories. They are neighbors on the map, but the Constitution treats them differently, and page 13 sets them side by side.
- Family Talk is where the family viewpoint lives. It is never presented as a court holding.

CARL'S ONE DISTINCTION

Carl keeps one distinction in front of him from the first page to the last: **for one job, and one job only, the District counts as if it were a state.** That job is choosing electors for President and Vice President. For every other job, senators, representatives, the powers of a state, the District remains what Article I made it: the seat of government, governed by Congress. Most confusion about this amendment comes from letting the one job swell into all the others, or from shrinking it to nothing. It is neither. It is three electors, real and counted, and nothing beyond them.

MEET CARL BOX

Carl holds the flag gently in this volume, because the people of the District are not an argument to him. They are neighbors: families, soldiers, clerks, teachers, and children who grow up in the capital's streets. Whatever a reader concludes on page 14 about the debates that remain, Carl asks that the people themselves be pictured first, at their kitchen tables and their polling places, as fellow citizens whose city happens to hold the nation's front porch.