



North Carolina Constitution, 1776

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What is the structure and power of the state government?

Standards

Social Studies

(6-8) I.1.3, I.1.4, I.1.6, I.1.7, I.1.8; (9-12) I.1.3, I.1.4

8.C&G.1, 8.C&G.1.1, 8.C&G.1.2, 8.C&G.1.3, 8.C&G.1.5, AH.C&G.1.1, AH.C&G.1.2

8.H.1, 8.H.1.2, 8.H.2.2

English Language Arts

RI.6-12.4, RI.9-12.6, RI.11-12.8

L.6-12.4, L.6-12.6

Visual Arts

7.V.1.3, 7-8.V.3, B.V.3.3, I.V.3

6.CX.1.1, 6-8.CX.1.2, I-A.CX.1.1, I.CX.1.2

Standards for extension options

RI7-12.9, W.6-12.1, W.6-12.2

Objectives

- Analyze the 1776 state constitution.
- Identify and evaluate the structure and powers of the new state government in 1776.

Lesson Contents

Between 1774 and 1776, five Provincial Congresses met in North Carolina. These Congresses did three main things: they created a new government structure; they funded their efforts using bills of credit; and they organized a provincial army.

The Fifth Provincial Congress met in Halifax from November 12 to December 23, 1776, to write a state constitution. Delegates looked to John Adams' advice and to the new

constitutions from Virginia, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and New Jersey. On December 17, 1776, North Carolina's congress adopted the Declaration of Rights, and the next day, December 18, delegates approved the state constitution. The constitution provided for a bicameral legislature and listed eligibility requirements for representatives and voters. There was no popular vote to approve the constitution. As North Carolina leaders created a state government, they not only established rules, but also physical spaces to assemble for decision-making and symbols to create a state identity.

Primary Sources

North Carolina Constitution, December 1776,
digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/constitution-1776/787566

For extension option:

- **“Constitution House,”** General negative collection, N.53.12.11, State Archives of N.C., [flickr.com/photos/north-carolina-state-archives/33154626998/in/photolist-SvL8vY-2itdEW7-TcGw8g-T1iEDn-TcGw5F-RVhiNh-oHmWhZ-TazZi5-RYq4jS-2rdnS68](https://www.flickr.com/photos/north-carolina-state-archives/33154626998/in/photolist-SvL8vY-2itdEW7-TcGw8g-T1iEDn-TcGw5F-RVhiNh-oHmWhZ-TazZi5-RYq4jS-2rdnS68)
- C.J. Sauthier, **“Plan of the Town of Halifax,”** 1769, original in British Library, T.84.6.6., State Archives of N.C., [flickr.com/photos/north-carolina-state-archives/3059157070/in/photolist-5EjYPq-ZfWAbw-GpdSiT-GpdRVP-ZfWAYU-2fGjVGD](https://www.flickr.com/photos/north-carolina-state-archives/3059157070/in/photolist-5EjYPq-ZfWAbw-GpdSiT-GpdRVP-ZfWAYU-2fGjVGD)

Secondary Source

J. Byran Grimes, *Great Seal of the State of North Carolina: 1666-1909*, Raleigh: N.C. Historical Commission, 1909, digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/great-seal-of-the-state-of-north-carolina-1666-1909/2148975?item=2226321

Assignment Options

(files on thumb drive)

- **Background: 1776 North Carolina Constitution**
- **Activity: Transcribing Selections**
- **Selections & Questions: 1776 Constitution**
- **Activity: Finding Towns**
- **Background: State Seal**
- **Activity: State Seal Comparison**
- **Activity: Create a Wax Seal**
- **Exit Tickets**

Supplies Needed

- Projector (optional)
- 2 quills and ink bottle provided for optional hands-on activity
- Candle or crayon (optional)
- Lighter, for use with teacher supervision (optional)

Lesson Preparation

- Review the primary source, transcription, lesson folder contents, and slides to determine which options are appropriate for your students. Note that this box contains a variety of options from which teachers can select based on available time, learning goals, and student capacities.
- Access original document and transcription online to project for the class and zoom in as needed.
- Keep answer keys at hand for any handouts/activities you choose.
- Vocabulary terms for this lesson may be posted or projected to discuss as a class. If you prefer to distribute an individual handout, copy and modify the table in the “procedures” section below to print or create a quiz. This list can also be found in the **Glossary** in the **Cross-Lesson Activities** folder.
- Make copies of any handouts you choose.
 - **Activity: Matching Sets** (found in the **Cross-Lesson Activities** folder). If students have not yet completed this activity with a previous lesson, print pages 2-4 with 2 single-sided copies for small groups of students. Cut out the squares. Separate the principles and shuffle two copies of the definitions and examples.
 - **Document Analysis** sheet (found in the **Cross-Lesson Activities** folder) is an optional assignment for all lessons to be completed as individual work using the transcription. Print copies double-sided for each student or pairs.
 - **Background: Constitution**—Note: the content in this worksheet is the same as the **Background: Declaration of Rights** (previous lesson). Slides can substitute for background worksheets and may be more appropriate for upper levels. If selecting this worksheet, print a copies for each student.
 - **Activity: Transcribing Selections** includes 15 sections of the 22-page original document. Options:
 - Selections can either be projected for the class or provided on paper.
 - If using paper, use double-sided printing with enough copies of each for pairs or small groups to decipher the handwriting. For example, in

a class of 30 students, make 2 copies and cut out each selection to distribute to pairs. The transcribed passage is on the reverse for students to check their work.

- **Selections & Questions: Constitution, 1776.** The selections in “Activity: Transcribing Selections” are transcribed in this file. This can be projected for an all-class discussion or printed for work in pairs. If choosing the print option, print 15 copies double-sided for 30 students.
- Decide whether students will complete **Activity: Constitutional Timeline**, found in the **Cross-Lesson Activities** folder, as individual work or as a class discussion. If individually, print page 1 for each student. If as a class, replicate the chart on a large piece of paper to tape to the wall.
- **Activity: Finding Towns.** This can be projected for the class to identify towns in the [State](#) and [streets in Raleigh](#) as a group or printed double-sided. Students should identify the 6 towns on the state map and streets on the “Plan of the City of Raleigh” and discuss why Raleigh was created as the location for the capital. If using a worksheet option, print double-sided, 1 copy for each student.
- **Background: State Seal.** The [early versions of the seals](#) may be projected to discuss as a class or print the 2-page background sheet double-sided for students to review before completing the activity worksheet. For the print option, print 1 copy for each student.
- **Activity: State Seal Comparison.** Distribute to students to complete individually. Print 1 copy for each student. Find answers in the combined background-activity answer key.
- **Activity: Create a Wax Seal.** This may be done as a teacher-led station or handed out as individual directions. [Note adults should supervise younger students using lighters and melting wax.] Print enough copies for each student to draw their own seal designs and explain their choices. If the wax seal is assigned as homework, purchase (or crowd-source) additional metal buttons for students to take home.
- **Exit Tickets**—print and cut, 4 tickets per page (8 copies for 32 students)

Background Knowledge

(5 minutes)

Facilitate a class discussion with these guiding questions: *what is government? Why do we need it? Who decides its form?*

Procedure

- If a review of terms, fundamental principles, and structure of government is needed, pass one principle from the **Activity: Matching Sets** to each group. In a class of 30, groups of 3 or 4 may work together to match 1 of the 9 principles to the correct definition and example. (See p. 1 of the handout for an answer key and additional time challenge options.) (20 minutes)
- Review or distribute vocabulary terms necessary to understand the document. Discuss any additional terms that cause students comprehension difficulty during the lesson. (10 minutes)

abject	the state of being extremely unhappy, poor, unsuccessful, etc.
absolve	declare (someone) free from blame, guilt, or responsibility
accounted/able	to be responsible for a specific set of tasks
anarchy	absence of government, usually causing disorder
denominate	call; name
fleet	a group of ships sailing together, or under the same ownership
jurisdiction	the official power to make legal decisions and judgments
premises	what a document is about
pretense	a claim, especially a false one
ratify	sign or give formal consent
reciprocal	given, felt, or done in return
sedition	act in a way that persuades others to rebel against authority
tenements	a building occupied by more residences than its design
thereto	relating to a place, thing, matter, circumstance
“to wit”	something comes to mind—often used to give examples

- Pass out **Background** worksheet and allow students to complete. Review fact-check answers using key. (15 minutes)
- Ask students: *What do we need to know to read documents from the 1770s?*
Answers will vary and should include a reminder that spelling and grammar were not standardized and may be different than what we expect today. Reading cursive is a challenge but can be fun, like completing a puzzle, and is a way to look closely at the document and identify its meaning. The **long “s”** letter looks like an “f” and is a common stumbling block in transcription. (5 minutes)

- Put students in pairs or small groups for jigsawing. For example: in a class of 30, form 15 groups of 2 or 3. Distribute **Activity: Transcribing Selections** for students to begin transcriptions. Have each pair work to decipher the handwriting and write on a piece of notebook paper. After 10 minutes (depending on selection size) have them check their work against the transcriptions in **Selections & Questions: 1776 Constitution**, either projected for class discussion or printed for work in pairs. 15 different students can then read a transcribed selection aloud to the class. Ask the class: *How hard was the selection to read? What was especially challenging?* Ask the students to evaluate aspects of government to answer *what makes a good government? Does the first state constitution provide for good government?*
(25 minutes; 10 for transcribing; 10 for reading aloud; 5 for discussion)

Modification—skip the transcription activity and lead discussion from the transcribed passages.

- Pass out **Document Analysis** sheet, along with the full transcription or **Selections**. This activity may work best in conjunction with the **Selections**. (20 minutes)
- Distribute copies to pairs of students or project **Selections & Questions: Constitution, 1776**. Students will check their work for the activity “Transcribing Selections” and discuss the accompanying questions in pairs or as a class with the projected file. (20 minutes)
- Allow time for students to complete the 1776 section of **Activity: Constitutional Timeline**. Ask: *Who is missing?* If continuing to work with the DocsBox for additional lessons, have students keep their completed chart and page to complete the 1835 section at another time. (10 minutes)
- After referring to the 3rd section of the constitution, project the file for class discussions or distribute copies of **Activity: Finding Towns** for individual work. For the printed option, distribute red pencils or markers for students to circle town names. (10 minutes)
- Seal activity—Distribute **Background: State Seal** or project images for the class to discuss on pp. 16, 17, 20, 23, and 24 of *The Great Seal of North Carolina*. If using the projection option, ask students these questions about each image: *What are the words on the seal? What do they mean? Why might leaders have selected those phrases? What images do you see? What activities are the female figures doing; what objects are they holding? What values do these activities and objects represent?* Use information in **Background & Activity: The State Seal Answer Key** to guide class discussions.

- Distribute **Activity: State Seal Comparison** for individual student work. (20 minutes)
- **Activity: Create a Wax Seal**—This may be done as a hands-on station activity in conjunction with additional stations: paper acid-testing activity from the introductory lesson (folder 1), **What Are Archives?** and writing with a quill pen.

Or, this sheet can be distributed to individual students. For this option, you may need additional metal buttons. Provide space in the classroom for students to display their wax seals and seal designs. (15 minutes)
- Pass out **Exit Tickets**. Two are provided as options or if lesson extends multiple days. (5 minutes)
 - *What worked well in the 1776 state constitution?*
 - *What needed to change?*

Modifications

- Student pages could be shared with students needing to take notes individually, with vision issues, or who have issues focusing (even if the slides are being used collectively).
- Students could be paired with a higher-achieving or differently behaving student for extra support.
- Students could be given extension activities if they finish early or need more challenging or independent work. These can be done independently or collaboratively.

Extension Options

- Write an essay comparing the 1776 NC Constitution to the [Declaration of Independence](#), the [U.S. Constitution](#), or additional 1776 state constitutions. (PA, VA, DE, NJ, NH)
- Write two newspaper articles from opposing perspectives—one for a North Carolina paper and one for a British paper in April 1776—announcing the Halifax Resolves and pledge of N.C. leaders to promote independence from Great Britain.
- Find 3 county names on the 1779 “A New and Accurate Map of North Carolina,” that no longer exist or never existed ([Bute](#), [Dobbs](#), [Pelham](#)). Write a 3-paragraph essay synthesizing information about why these counties disappeared or never came to be using entries from Carolana.com, NCPedia, and additional DNCR online sources.

Students should evaluate the significance of the names and changes.

dc.lib.unc.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/ncmaps/id/149/rec/5

- The last change to the state seal was made in 1971. The state has changed in many ways since then. Encourage students to create a seal to represent North Carolina today. Explain why they chose certain visuals, words, or dates and what values those represent. [Note: if using the lesson plan for the 1971 constitution, this illustrated essay would also fit with that set.]
- Investigate where the first state constitution may have been written. Use the 1769 Sauthier map, “Plan of the Town of Halifax,” and a view of “The Constitution House,” found in the **Primary Sources** folder for this lesson, along with “Historical research report for the Constitution House, Halifax, North Carolina,” to explain your claims in an essay. digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/historical-research-report-for-the-constitution-house-halifax-north-carolina/747681

Field Trip Connection

Visit Historic Halifax, where the 5th Provincial Congress met and established North Carolina’s first state constitution, historicsites.nc.gov/all-sites/historic-halifax/plan-your-visit

Recommended Resources

National Archives, “**The Long S**,” *Pieces of History* blog, prologue.blogs.archives.gov/2021/12/14/the-long-s/

State Democracy Research Initiative, University of Wisconsin Law School, “**North Carolina’s Constitution**,” 50constitutions.org/nc

Biography of **Richard Caswell**, presiding officer of the Constitutional Convention of 1776 and later 1st governor of N.C., ncpedia.org/caswell-richard-research-branch-nc

Biographies of 5 additional delegates to the N.C. Constitutional Convention, law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/conlaw/marrynorthcar.html

A History of **Bloomsbury**, or Wake County courthouse, carolana.com/NC/Towns/Bloomsbury_NC.html

Historic Sites, history of the **N.C. capitol**, historicsites.nc.gov/all-sites/north-carolina-state-capitol/history

The **myth of Pelham County**, carolana.com/NC/Counties/pelham_county_nc.html

The **demise of Bute County**, dn-cr.nc.gov/blog/2016/01/20/old-bute-county-one-history-books

The **demise of Dobbs County**, dn-cr.nc.gov/blog/2023/12/14/dobbs-county-f-25

The Avalon Project includes **transcribed versions of many state constitutions**. Use the search field to find specific states. avalon.law.yale.edu/default.asp

J. Bryan Grimes, ***The Great Seal of the State of North Carolina: 1666-1909***, Bulletin no. 5 of the North Carolina Historical Commission, 1909.
digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/great-seal-of-the-state-of-north-carolina-1666-1909/2148975?item=2226342

Simple **wax seal tutorial**, mypoppet.com.au/makes/diy-wax-seal-household-items/