

# GOVERNMENT BY CONSENT: A NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

## Teacher's Guide

### Lesson 3

### The Constitution in Crisis

**Video Synopsis:** In times of national crisis, the Constitution plays a critical role. Riveting film footage of the assassination of President Kennedy, the civil rights conflict, and Watergate reveal the Constitution's stabilizing effect on the country.

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**Overview:** Most of us do not even think about the Constitution of the United States until a crisis situation arises. But, like a road map on a dark night, the Constitution guides the government and its people in acting during a crisis. It serves as a source of stability and strength, when otherwise chaos would reign.

This lesson addresses five situations, involving presidents of the United States, that created constitutional crises for our country: Andrew Jackson's defiance of a Supreme Court order regarding the Cherokee Indians, Abraham Lincoln confronted with the Civil War, Dwight D. Eisenhower facing the defiance of a court order by Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus, John F. Kennedy's assassination followed by Lyndon Johnson's succession to the presidency and the resulting vacancy in the vice-presidency, and the events leading to Richard Nixon's resignation. During these crises, the United States truly depended on the Constitution to guide the nation through each situation and to provide solutions to its problems.

The results of these crises show that the Constitution works. When the constitutional order of the United States government is challenged, the 200-year-old document proves to be a stabilizing force because of society's belief in it. Its adaptability keeps it alive and relevant. And its authority as the cornerstone of the United States government remains as strong as when it was first ratified. The people of the United States are committed to the ideal that everyone, with no exceptions, is subject to the rule of law.

**Learning Objectives:** After watching the video program, your students should be able to:

- Explain how the Constitution is effective during a crisis.
- Describe what Constitutional crises Presidents Jackson, Lincoln, and Eisenhower faced.
- understand the concept "rule of law" and why the Constitution worked in the Watergate Crisis.

**Key Words:**

Constitutional crisis  
Line of succession  
Executive privilege  
Watergate

National stability  
Adaptability  
Impeachment  
Twenty-fifth Amendment

**Focus Questions:** Before viewing the program, have students read over the following questions to help focus their thoughts. After the presentation, have them write out their responses to help them remember these important points and/or discuss their answers with the class. Some of the focus questions make good topics for classroom debate.

1. Why is the Constitution effective during a crisis?
2. What is the significance of *Worcester v. Georgia*?
3. What crisis did the Civil War pose for the Constitution?
4. What constitutional crisis occurred when Arkansas Governor Faubus refused to obey orders of the federal courts?
5. What crisis did President Kennedy's assassination create?
6. How did the Twenty-fifth Amendment help in solving a constitutional crisis?
7. What constitutional crisis did President Nixon create?

**Getting Involved:**

1. Your students might find it interesting to locate a copy of their state constitution and compare its length and contents to that of the U.S. Constitution. Have them discuss why the Constitution's brevity and lack of specificity might be two of its greatest strengths.
2. Have students contact the American Civil Liberties Union nearest them for information on current challenges to the First Amendment. One such challenge concerns censorship on the Internet. Groups such as the Christian Coalition and the Family Research Council are battling the ACLU in support of censoring the Internet.

*Government by Consent* is a series of twenty-two 30-minute video programs. Title of the programs: 1. Government and You; 2. The Living Constitution; 3. The Constitution Crisis; 4. Federalism; 5. Local Government; 6. Political Participation; 7. Interest Groups; 8. The Power of PACs; 9. Government and the Media; 10. Political Parties; 11. Nominating a President; 12. Presidential Campaigning; 13. Congressional Elections; 14. Congress; 15. The Legislative Process; 16. The Presidency; 17. The President and Congress; 18. The Bureaucracy; 19. Domestic Policy; 20. Foreign Policy; 21. The Judiciary; 22. The Judicial Selection Process.

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