

# LESSON 3

## Constitution in Crisis

### LESSON ASSIGNMENTS

Pay very close attention when watching the video program. Review the video objectives and be prepared to record possible answers, in abbreviated form, as you view the video. The titles and numbers of the textbook chapters may differ from the video program. Keep in mind that the video program examines contemporary examples to illustrate your government in action. An attempt is made to show how you can participate in the political arena and bring about changes in the political process.

#### **Video:**

“Constitution in Crisis,” from the series, *Voices in Democracy: United States Government*.

#### **Activities:**

One or more activities may be assigned to this lesson. Refer to your syllabus.

### OVERVIEW

This lesson examines several constitutional crises: the Civil War, the Watergate scandal, the implementation of the Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that called for the desegregation of public schools, and a president’s assassination. These sections also examine the ability of our constitutionally structured system to deal effectively with such crises. In this lesson, you will evaluate the role the president, the Congress, and the Supreme Court each played in resolving these crises. A constitutional crisis resolution promotes the continued importance of the Constitution in our democracy during changing times.

### LESSON GOAL

Explain the challenges the United States Constitution has weathered during crisis situations.

### VIDEO OBJECTIVES

The following objectives are designed to assist you in identifying the most significant aspects of the video segment of this lesson. You should take succinct notes while viewing the video.

1. Explain the role the U.S. Constitution played before and following the Civil War.
2. Explain the challenge that school integration at Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957 presented to the U.S. Constitution and the nation.
3. Describe the constitutional crisis that arose when President Kennedy was assassinated and how the Twenty-fifth Amendment resolved it.
4. Describe the constitutional roles of each branch of government in resolving the Watergate Crisis.

## WEB ACTIVITIES

These activities are not required unless your teacher assigns them. They are offered as suggestions to help you learn more about the material presented in this lesson.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/national/longterm/watergate/front.htm> contains a complete overview of the Watergate scandal, 25 years later, from the newspaper (*The Washington Post*) that first broke the story.

Review the “Watergate Chronology.” Scroll down to the July 23, 1973 section and read the “Post Story” about Nixon’s refusal to hand over the presidential tape recordings to the Senate Watergate committee or the special prosecutor.

Explain the “executive privilege” argument with reference to the Watergate tapes.

Does the doctrine of separation of powers apply to the Watergate Tapes?

Access the link to “The Reforms” and read the “Special Prosecutors” commentary.

What was the reform suggested and what was the impact?

Why was a special prosecutor appointed during the Clinton presidency? What was the final outcome?

## PRACTICE TEST

After watching the video and reviewing the objectives, you should be able to complete the following Practice Test. When you have completed the Practice Test, turn to the Answer Key to score your answers.

### MULTIPLE-CHOICE

Select the single best answer.

1. In which of the following cases did the U.S. Supreme Court rule that Congress had no power to exclude slavery from any of the territories of the United States?
  - A. Marbury vs. Madison
  - B. Dred Scott vs. Sanford
  - C. Plessy vs. Ferguson
  - D. Brown vs. Board of Education
2. Initially, according to Craig Rains (a white student), the Little Rock situation was a
  - A. states rights vs. the Federal Government issue...
  - B. states rights vs. a public school board issue
  - C. Federal Government vs. the people issue
  - D. people vs. a public school board issue
3. Which of the following is NOT a step in filling the vacant office of Vice President?
  - A. The president nominates a new vice president
  - B. The nominee will take office, if confirmed
  - C. The Supreme Court must approve the credentials of the nominee
  - D. The House and Senate must approve the nominee in a majority vote
4. The Watergate case raised two constitutional questions. One was whether the President is subject to judicial process, and the second was whether the presidential tapes were covered by what is known as...
  - A. executive agreement
  - B. executive privilege
  - C. presidential exemption
  - D. judicial executive
5. Which of the following statements is NOT accurate?
  - A. The executive branch is responsible for making the laws
  - B. The judicial branch interprets the law
  - C. President Nixon was impeached by the House of Representatives
  - D. The legislative branch makes the law

### ESSAY/PROBLEM QUESTIONS

6. Analyze the Dred Scott Supreme Court decision and indicate what were the two most significant aspects of the decision itself.
7. Explain how the provisions in the Twenty-fifth Amendment made it possible for Gerald Ford to become vice president and president.

## ANSWER KEY

The following provides the answers and references for the practice test questions. Video objectives are referenced using the following abbreviations: V=Video Objectives.

1. B Ref: V 1 (Video)
2. A Ref: V 2 (Video)
3. C Ref: V 3 (Video)
4. B Ref: V 4 (Video)
5. C Ref: V 7 (Video)
6. Ref: V 1 (Video)
7. Ref: V 4 and 7 (Video)