

# A More Perfect Union

A Discussion Guide  
for Elementary School  
Teachers



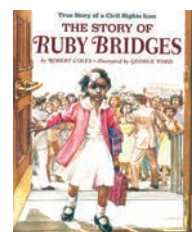
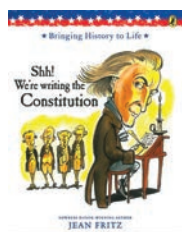
NATIONAL  
ENDOWMENT  
FOR THE  
HUMANITIES

# A More Perfect Union

## Classroom sets of books to assist with civics education in Kentucky elementary schools

Thanks to a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities “A More Perfect Union” initiative, Kentucky Humanities is pleased to provide you with this classroom set of 10 copies each of six outstanding books to assist you and your students in exploring a variety of themes in civics and American history.

The books selected for this project reflect ideas and principles that are central to American democracy, such as unity, equality, liberty, the common good, the power of voting, and representative governance. The theme “A More Perfect Union” draws attention to the contemporary relevance of the language that America’s founders chose as a means for articulating the basis for the systems and institutions that form the American government.



The books provide opportunities for a wide range of activities in the classroom, with goals of:

- Supporting you in delivering a quality humanities education experience,
- Increasing students’ knowledge of themes related to American democracy,
- Positively affecting reading-related attitudes and behaviors,
- Helping students to connect the books and related discussions to other personal stories, events, film, and creative works,
- Helping students make personal connections to themes in American democracy,
- Helping students employ collective learning strategies and to learn from each other.

Information about each book, along with sample discussion questions, key vocabulary, activity ideas, and related resources are included in this guide to get you started.

We hope you and your students will enjoy these meaningful books. After you receive and use the books, we ask that you take a few minutes to complete the project evaluation found at <https://www.kyhumanities.org/programs/a-more-perfect-union/a-more-perfect-union-final-report>. Completed evaluations should be submitted no later than April 30, 2022.

## Kentucky Humanities

Kentucky Humanities is an independent, nonprofit affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities in Washington, D.C. Kentucky Humanities is supported by the National Endowment and by private contributions. We are not a state agency, but are proud partners with Kentucky’s cultural, heritage, arts, and tourism agencies. Kentucky Humanities is dedicated to Telling Kentucky’s Story through programs and services that create a legacy of pride in the wealth of Kentucky culture, building civic engagement, and supporting local humanities programs and events. We strive to enable all Kentuckians to take part in learning, sharing, and teaching each other about Kentucky’s rich heritage. We are committed to providing leadership and developing resources that support the needs of Kentuckians to examine our values, understand our common heritage, and build stronger Kentucky communities based on the knowledge, insight, and respect inherent to the humanities.

For more information about Kentucky Humanities and our many programs and resources, visit <https://www.kyhumanities.org/>.

In 2022, Kentucky Humanities will be celebrating 50 years of supporting humanities programming in the Commonwealth. To learn more about the year-long celebration and how you can participate, <https://www.kyhumanities.org/>.

*Views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the NEH or the Kentucky Humanities board and staff.*

# Grace for President

Written by Kelly DiPucchio & Illustrated by LeUyen Pham  
Published by Little, Brown & Company, 2008



When Grace learns that the United States has never had a female president, she decides she wants to be the nation's first. She jumpstarts her political career by running in her school's mock election, but the race turns out to be more competitive than she expected because her opponent, Thomas, is a popular student who says he is the "best man for the job." To mirror the way the U.S. President is elected—via state Electoral College votes that vary based on population—students draw states to cast votes for. Thomas has figured out that boys drew more electoral votes than girls did, so if it remains a "girls versus boys" contest, it looks like Grace will lose. However, one student bases his vote on another factor—who he thinks is the "best person for the job." If used during a Presidential election period, this book offers a fun way to help students better understand the Electoral College system and its distinction from the popular vote and can be used anytime to stimulate an exploration of the topics of elected positions, elections, and campaigns.

## Discussion Questions:

1. What did Grace and Thomas do in their campaigns to be elected?
2. Why do some students' electoral votes add more to the total than others'? Do you think the outcome could be different if the election was based on the "popular vote," that is, one vote per student?
3. Looking at the illustration in the book, how many electoral votes does Kentucky have? How does this compare to other states?
4. Why do you think Sam decided Grace was the best person for the job—and do you think it was hard for him to go against what everyone expected him to do?
5. What do you know about the Electoral College and what questions do you have about it?
6. Do you think you would like to run for President or another public office— why or why not?

## Vocabulary:

**campaign**—the competition by rival political candidates and organizations for public office

**democracy**—government by the people

**electoral vote**—the vote cast in the electoral college of the U.S. by the representatives of each state in a presidential election

**popular vote**—the vote for a candidate made by the qualified voters

## Activity:

As a class make a list of elected positions that students know of—these might be local, state, national, or even elected officials of clubs and organizations. Do any students know any of their local elected officials personally? Discuss and/or have students research how often these officials are elected and what these officials' roles and responsibilities are. Have each student choose an elected official at any level and write them a letter, either expressing an opinion about an issue important to the student or asking a question about the official's job. Share what is learned in the responses they receive.

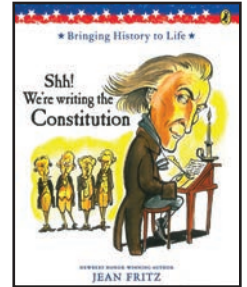
## Related Resources:

- A lesson plan using a "Know-What-Wonder" activity about the Electoral College is found at the Colorful Pages website, at <https://colorfulpages.org/2019/02/26/colorful-pages-lesson-plan-grace-for-president/>.
- Numerous activity ideas and worksheets based on the book are found at [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a29e9eef09ca48b52cafc06/t/5dc24349fb887642e863a27d/1573012298386/TG\\_Grace+For+President.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a29e9eef09ca48b52cafc06/t/5dc24349fb887642e863a27d/1573012298386/TG_Grace+For+President.pdf)
- The Children's Theatre of Charlotte website at <https://etcharlotte.org/ArticleMedia/Files/StudyGuides/Grace%20for%20President%20Study%20Guide.pdf> has a study guide developed around a play adaptation of the book, but activities could be used with the book as well.
- Read-aloud versions of the book are available on YouTube.

# Shh! We're Writing the Constitution

Written by Jean Fritz, Pictures by Tomie dePaola,  
Cover Illustration by David Small, Published by Puffin Books, 1987

This is a lively and detailed account of the 1787 gathering of delegates to write the Constitution of the United States. The book also includes a copy of the Constitution and a list of those who signed it. It's a good way for older elementary students to gain insight into the issues and disagreements delegates faced and to begin a unit examining the Constitution. With younger students, you may want to read the book with them, have them read and discuss it in sections, or combine reading with a read-aloud version.



## Discussion Questions:

1. What do you already know about the U.S. Constitution and what is something you would like to know about it?
2. Why did some people want the states to form a nation after the Revolutionary War, and why were others against it?
3. What three branches of government did the delegates decide on? Do we still have these branches today?
4. What were some of the things that delegates disagreed about and how did they work out their disagreements?  
Have you ever been in a situation where you made a “compromise”?
5. What do you think life would be like if the states had not come together to form a plan for a unified nation?
6. Did it make the book more interesting to you to learn about the personalities of some of the people and about other events that occurred while they were meeting?

## Vocabulary:

**amendment**-an alteration of or addition to a motion, bill, constitution, etc.

**Articles of Confederation**-the first constitution of the 13 American states, adopted in 1781 and replaced in 1789 by the Constitution of the United States

**Constitution**-the system of fundamental principles according to which a nation, state, corporation, or the like, is governed; the document embodying these principles

**executive branch**-the branch of government charged with the execution and enforcement of laws and policies and the administration of public affairs

**federalism**-the federal principle of government

**judicial branch**-the branch of government charged with the interpretation of laws and the administration of justice

**legislative branch**-the branch of government having the power to make laws

**preamble**-the introductory statement of the U.S. Constitution, setting forth the general principles of American government

## Activity:

As a class, look through the book and make a list of delegates mentioned. Which of these people have students heard of and which are new names to them? Divide students into small groups and assign each group a delegate. Have each group create a poster about their delegate, including these elements from the book and/or additional research: what state they represented, something specific they said or did, and something interesting or funny students learned about them.

## Related Resources:

- The Government Printing Office website Ben’s Guide to the U.S. Government at <https://bensguide.gpo.gov> has a variety of activities organized by age group (4-8, 9-13, and 14+).
- The script for a play adaptation of *Shh! We're Writing the Constitution* is found at the University of Virginia Center for Politics Youth Leadership Initiative website at [http://www.amoreperfectconstitution.com/teacher\\_resources/the\\_plan.pdf](http://www.amoreperfectconstitution.com/teacher_resources/the_plan.pdf).
- The Scholastic website has a lesson plan on Creating a Classroom Constitution at <https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/lesson-plans/teaching-content/creating-classroom-constitution/>.
- Read-aloud versions of the book are found on YouTube.

# The Big Orange Splot

Written by Daniel Manus Pinkwater  
Published by Scholastic Inc., 1977



Mr. Plumbean lives on a street where all the houses look the same, and everyone likes it that way. But after a seagull splashes orange paint on Mr. Plumbean's house, he decides to paint his house to reflect his colorful dreams. Although the neighbors are upset at first, one by one they talk to Mr. Plumbean, who convinces them to transform their own houses to reflect their dreams. This book can be used to explore the theme of conformity and nonconformity and to celebrate diversity and individual expression.

## Discussion Questions:

1. What is a “splot”? How do you know? Have you ever heard this word before?
2. What adjectives would you use to describe Mr. Plumbean's street before and after the homeowners change their houses?  
Which look do you like better and why?
3. Even though they look different do the houses still have anything in common?
4. Are there situations or settings in which it might be more beneficial for things to look or be the same?  
(For example, what if the members of sports teams each wore different clothing instead of the same uniform?)
5. What do you think Mr. Plumbean said to his neighbors to convince them to change their houses—and was talking about the disagreement a good way to resolve it?
6. What are some everyday ways that people express their individuality?

## Vocabulary:

**neighbor**- a person who lives near another

**splot**-messy spot

**stranger**-a person with whom one has had no personal acquaintance

## Activity:

Discuss the idea of a neighborhood and if/how a classroom is like a neighborhood. On orange poster board, write an adapted version of the last sentence of the book: “Our classroom is us, and we are it. Our classroom is where we like to be, and it looks like our dreams.” Create a classroom collage by having each student add a statement, photo, small drawing, or small object that reflects them and their dreams. (You can limit this to a few categories, e.g., their hobby, their favorite kind of animal, what they would like to do for a living when they are grown, or you can leave it completely open.) After the collage is created, discuss similarities and differences in the students' contributions.

## Related Resources:

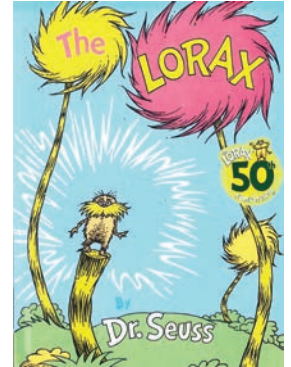
- A lesson plan using the book to teach philosophic discussion is found at the Prindle Institute for Ethics website at <https://www.prindleinstitute.org/books/the-big-orange-splot/>.
- A Human Rights Campaign lesson plan on Valuing Diversity is found at [https://assets2.hrc.org/welcoming-schools/documents/WS\\_Lesson\\_Valuing\\_Diversity\\_Big\\_Orange\\_Splot.pdf](https://assets2.hrc.org/welcoming-schools/documents/WS_Lesson_Valuing_Diversity_Big_Orange_Splot.pdf).
- Several read-aloud versions of the book are available on YouTube.

# The Lorax

Written by Dr. Seuss

Published by New York: Random House, 1971

A little boy visits the “Street of the Lifted Lorax” and learns a story about how greed destroyed the beautiful Truffala-trees, displaced wildlife, and polluted the air and water. There is one last hope for the future, however. With its whimsical characters and word play, this is classic Seuss, but with a strong message of the need for environmental responsibility.



## Discussion Questions:

1. What is the Street of the Lifted Lorax like when the little boy arrives and how is it different from the way it was before the Once-ler arrived
2. Why does the Once-ler chop down all the trees and what happens as a result?
3. What does the Lorax mean when he says, “I speak for the trees?” Have you ever spoken up to help someone or had someone speak up to help you?
4. What could the Once-ler have done to make and sell his products in a different way that would cause less damage to the environment?
5. What does the Once-ler mean when he says, “Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It’s not.” What does he want the boy to do, and what might happen if he does it?
6. What natural areas are you familiar with and how would you feel if they were changed or destroyed?

## Vocabulary:

**environment**—the air, water, minerals, organisms, and all other external factors surrounding and affecting a given organism at any time

**natural resources**—naturally occurring materials such as coal, fertile land, etc. that can be used by man

**pollution**—the introduction of harmful substances or products into the environment

**smog**—smoke or other atmospheric pollutants combined with fog in an unhealthy or irritating mixture

## Activity:

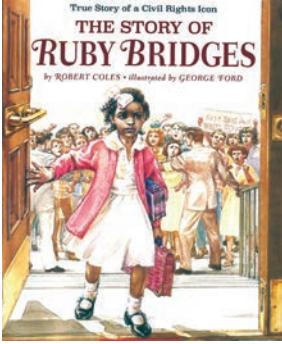
Discuss what natural resources are and how they are used to produce things that people need or want. Have students name some everyday items—such as paper, plastic bottles, gasoline for cars, bread, toys, etc. Do they know what these are made of? How does producing them affect the environment? Divide students into small groups and assign or have each group choose a product to research. Via a poster or other type of presentation, the groups will share what they learn about their items. Then, as a class, discuss ways in which children, adults, and leaders can care for the environment, or have students write how they think people can take care of the environment.

## Related Resources:

- The Educator section of the <https://www.seussville.com/> website has lesson and activity ideas, printables, and other resources.
- A variety of activity ideas can be found at the Project Learning Tree website at <https://www.plt.org/educator-tips/the-lorax-lesson-plans>.
- A variety of resources are found at The Lorax Project website <https://www.theloraxproject.com/activities/>.
- Read-aloud versions of the book can be found on YouTube.

# *The Story of Ruby Bridges*

Written by Robert Coles & Illustrated by George Ford  
Published by Scholastic Inc., 1995 (paperback edition 2010)



In 1960, 6-year-old Ruby Bridges became the first African American child to attend a previously all-white school in New Orleans. This book tells the story of that year at school and how Ruby and her family found the strength to persevere through it, bringing an important point in the American Civil Rights movement of the 1960s to life from a child's perspective. The book could also be used to launch an exploration of leadership qualities.

## Discussion Questions:

1. Why did Ruby Bridges go to a different school for first grade and why was this an historic event?
2. What happened to her during the school year?
3. How did their faith help Ruby and her family during the experience?
4. How are schools today different than the school Ruby went to?
5. If you could meet Ruby Bridges, what would you ask her about her life?
6. Have you ever been in a situation where someone said cruel things to you? How did you react and get through it?

## Vocabulary:

**civil rights**-rights to personal liberty established by the 13th and 14th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution and certain Congressional acts, especially as applied to an individual or a minority group  
**integration**-an act or instance of integrating a racial, religious, or ethnic group  
**segregation**-separation of an ethnic, racial, religious, or other minority group from the dominant majority

## Activity:

Show pictures and/or videos of Ruby Bridges so students understand that she is a real person and that these were real events. Have them calculate how many years ago the events in the book occurred. As a class, create an events/feelings timeline about Ruby Bridges. Have students list events in the book sequentially and at each point add how they think Ruby felt at that point based on what she writes or what they see in the illustrations. Based on research or other images and resources you show, students can add events that occurred later in Bridges' life. Based on research, students may also add other events relating to the Civil Rights movement.

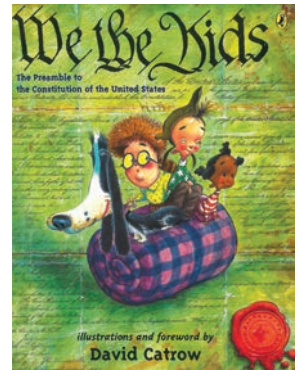
## Related Resources:

- TeacherReads has a read-aloud on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U8D4ldGY41s>.
- An age-appropriate documentary clip is found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uYugH39SxW8>.
- Ruby Bridges' own website <https://www.rubybridges.com/> includes information and a podcast.
- The website of the Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education institute at Stanford University has a lesson plan on heroes and making the world a better place, found at <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/sites/mlk/files/lesson-activities/rubybridgespdf.pdf>.
- The Scholastic website has a lesson plan "A Simple Act of Courage," at <https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/lesson-plans/teaching-content/ruby-bridges-simple-act-courage-common-core-lesson-plan-kindergarten-grade-2/>

# *We the Kids*

Illustrations and Forward by David Catrow  
Published by Puffin Books, 2002

Bright and lively watercolor illustrations introduce students to key concepts of the U.S. Constitution and help demystify the language of the Preamble by placing its phrases in the context of a visual story of three children and their dog going on a backyard camping trip. In a foreword, Catrow recalls wondering as a child “why couldn’t the guys who wrote this just use regular English?” It will be helpful for students to read (or be read) the foreword. There is also a glossary that can help simplify the language of the Preamble. This book could be used to introduce the Constitution to younger students, to celebrate Constitution Day (September 17), or as a fun way to begin a more detailed exploration by older students.



## Discussion Questions:

1. What do you already know about the U.S. Constitution—what is it and why was it created?
2. In the foreword the illustrator says that the Constitution is “a list of rules and promises... a how-to book showing us ways to have happiness, safety, and comfort.” Why would rules and promises be important in order for people to come together as a nation?
3. What is the story told by the illustrations—what are the children and the dog doing?
4. What activities do the illustrations show that relate to people being together? Which is your favorite?
5. What items and activities in the illustrations show happiness, safety, and comfort? Which is your favorite?
6. What rules and promises would help keep you and your classmates happy, safe, and comfortable in school?

## Vocabulary:

**Constitution**—the system of fundamental principles according to which a nation, state, corporation, or the like, is governed; the document embodying these principles

**preamble**—the introductory statement of the U.S. Constitution, setting forth the general principles of American government

**justice**—just treatment of all members of society with regard to a specified public issue, including equitable distribution of resources and participation in decision-making

**tranquility**—quality or state of being tranquil; calmness; peacefulness; quiet; serenity

**posterity**—succeeding or future generations collectively

## Activity:

Have students list terms from the original language that they do not understand. Translate the Preamble phrases into more contemporary language (you can guide students using the glossary in the book or have older students work in groups to research the terms). On the board or on poster paper, list each original phrase in one column and its contemporary version in another column. Read each version aloud. Individually, in groups, or as a class, students will then write a preamble for a class constitution. As an extension, have them create their own drawings to illustrate sections/concepts of the Preamble.

## Related Resources:

- The National Constitution Center website (<https://constitutioncenter.org>) offers a variety of resources, including a “Preamble Scramble” (a reproducible jigsaw puzzle pattern of the Preamble at [https://constitutioncenter.org/media/files/Preamble\\_Puzzle.pdf](https://constitutioncenter.org/media/files/Preamble_Puzzle.pdf)).
- Schoolhouse Rock put the Preamble to music; animated videos of the song are available on YouTube, as are several read-aloud versions of the book.