

Lesson 8: Representative Government and the U.S. Constitution

Teacher Version

Essential Question

*What did Benjamin Franklin mean when he said,
“A republic, madam—if you can keep it”?*

Lesson Bridge

Review Lesson 7:

- Federalists vs. Anti-Federalists

Bridge Question:

- What kind of government had Americans created?

Hook Question

What does it take for a government to continue working well over time?

What could make a government fail?

Key Vocabulary

Introduce and clarify the following terms:

- Representative Government
- Republic
- Direct Democracy
- Factions

Reading and Text Coding

R = Representative Government

D = Direct Democracy

I = Important Information

- Teacher Modeling—I Do
- Guided Practice—We Do
- Independent Practice—You Do

Directed Note-Taking Graphic Organizer

Category	Evidence (paragraph #)	What this shows about Franklin's warning
Paying attention		
Voting wisely		
Holding leaders accountable		
Protecting rights		

Video Segment (10 minutes)

Video: [Benjamin Franklin](#)

- **Teacher Prompt:** “The video we’ll watch in a moment provides some insight into just who Benjamin Franklin was as a man. He also emphasizes that the signing of the Declaration of Independence was just the first step for our nation. The crafting of the Constitution was the next one. Listen for what Franklin believes citizens must do to keep a republic working.”

Note: The video does not directly explain representative government or the republic quote. Use the discussion after the video to bridge from Franklin’s emotional message to the civic meaning students explored in the reading text.

Video Segment (10 minutes)...cont'd

- ***Students complete Handout #4 while watching.***
- ***Teacher prompts (after video):***
 - “What does Franklin mean when he says a republic is ‘hard won and fragile’?”
 - “What responsibility does Franklin say belongs to future citizens?”
 - “What does Franklin’s message make you want to find out more about?”

Interpretive Discussion

- ***Teacher Prompt:*** “What does Franklin mean when he says a republic must be ‘kept’?”
- ***Students discuss:***
 - What does “keep” mean?
 - Who does the keeping?
 - What happens if people stop participating?
 - Do you think Franklin is mainly warning about citizens—or about government itself?

Interpretive Discussion...cont'd

- ***Teacher Prompt (after students talk):*** “Franklin is emphasizing that a republic depends on citizens staying informed, responsible, and engaged.”

Debate: Ideas for Keeping a Republic (10-12 minutes)

“A republic, madam—if you can keep it.”

— Benjamin Franklin, outside Independence Hall, September 17, 1787

“I have often, in the course of the session, looked at that sun behind the President, without being able to tell whether it was rising or setting. But now, at length, I have the happiness to know that it is a rising, and not a setting, sun.”

— Benjamin Franklin, upon signing the Constitution, September 17, 1787

Ideas for Keeping a Republic:

Paying attention—staying informed to prevent factions from taking over

Voting wisely—choosing trusted leaders to act as representatives

Holding leaders accountable—using the power of the people to vote them out

Protecting rights—ensuring no group takes away the rights of others

Debate: Ideas for Keeping a Republic (10-12 minutes)...cont'd

The Debate Question

*Which idea best explains what he meant when he said,
“A republic—if you can keep it”?*

Debate Directions

Choose one idea and explain how it best supports Franklin’s warning. Be ready to support your choice with at least one piece of evidence from the text or video.

Final Writing Prompt

Revolutionary Writers Essay: Benjamin Franklin

At the end of the Constitutional Convention, Benjamin Franklin was asked what kind of government the Founders had created. He replied, “A republic, madam—if you can keep it.”

What did Benjamin Franklin mean when he said, “A republic, madam—if you can keep it”?

Explain your answer using details from the text and the video.

Students should write a paragraph that:

- states what Franklin meant (the Founders created a representative government)
- explains what a representative government is
- explains why citizen participation is necessary to keep it working

Final Writing Prompt...cont'd

Important: This essay is the primary assessment for Lesson 8 and also serves as one of nine potential student essays for the FIREWORKS250 Revolutionary Writers Essay Competition for students with teachers participating in cohort 2. Participating teachers should save all student essays. Students will select their best essay at the end of the year to submit for the competition.

Closure (5 minutes)

- **Teacher prompt:** “Today we learned that Franklin believed a republic only survives if citizens actively participate. You debated which idea best explains his warning—and then you wrote about it.”
- **Turn-and-Talk:** “Which idea do you think matters most today? Has your thinking changed after writing your essay?”
- **Exit Ticket:** “What is one idea for keeping a republic, and why does it matter?”