Constitution Day

September 17
Celebrating the Signing of the US Constitution
Welcome to Living Books Curriculum’s Holiday Helper series

Living Books Curriculum has created a series called Holiday Helpers just for you. These short collections of high-quality literature, artwork and quotations are easy to use during busy holidays; each one is designed to provide your children with uplifting and inspiring ideas and images.

This edition, Constitution Day includes artwork, quotes, poetry and articles that celebrate the signing of our Constitution, one of the finest documents expressing the rights and duties of citizenship in a democracy. If you haven’t already begun to teach your children about our Constitution, this Holiday Helper will get you started. As homeschooling parents we must begin early to familiarize our children with the principles of a democratic society and not leave it to a civics class in high school.

The Internet has a bewildering number of sites devoted to Constitution Day. The two sites I found most trustworthy and living were:

*National Archives*
http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/

*The Constitution Center*
http://www.constitutioncenter.org/

The Helper is intended to give you some tools to easily include this topic in your homeschool without a lot of preparation. At the end there are suggestions for further study. Encourage the practice of copywork. If you are new to picture study, visit this link for suggestions:

[www.livingbookscurriculum.com/TeachingChildrenToLoveGreatArt.pdf](http://www.livingbookscurriculum.com/TeachingChildrenToLoveGreatArt.pdf)

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Sheila Carroll
Living Books Curriculum
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The History of Constitution Day

The United States Constitution

The Bill of Rights

The Declaration of Independence

The First Constitution Day

The Preamble to the United States Constitution

Picture Study: The Signing of the Constitution

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America for Me

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The History of Constitution Day

For Parents to Read

Constitution Day (or Citizenship Day) is an American federal observance that recognizes the ratification of the United States Constitution and those who have become U.S. citizens. It is observed on September 17, the day the U.S. Constitutional Convention signed the Constitution in 1787.

The law establishing the holiday was created in 2004 with the passage of an amendment by Senator Robert Byrd to the Omnibus spending bill of 2004. Before this law was enacted, the holiday was known as “Citizenship Day”. In addition to renaming the holiday “Constitution Day and Citizenship Day,” the act mandates that all publicly funded educational institutions provide educational programming on the history of the American Constitution on that day. In May 2005, the United States Department of Education announced the enactment of this law and that it would apply to any school receiving federal funds of any kind. This holiday is not observed by granting time off work for federal employees.

When Constitution Day falls on a weekend or on another holiday, schools and other institutions observe the holiday on an adjacent weekday. This was the case in 2005, when Constitution Day was generally observed on Friday, September 16 and 2006 when the holiday was observed on Monday, September 18.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution_Day_(United_States)
The United States Constitution

Every American should read the United States Constitution by adulthood. For homeschooling families understanding of the roots of our liberty is absolutely essential. Here is a link to a copy of the constitution. Print it out. Read it, or portions of it, on each Constitution Day, Fourth of July and Veteran’s Day.

http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html

The Bill of Rights


The Declaration of Independence

http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration.html
The First Constitution Day
Excerpted from Young Folks History of the United States, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, 1886.

CHAPTER XXII.
AFTER THE WAR.

O
On the 3d of November, 1783, the Revolutionary army was disbanded. At the end of the long struggle, the American Colonies were left very poor; and their money had so declined in value, that it took a hundred paper dollars to buy a pair of shoes. The discharged soldiers of the army were so destitute and so dissatisfied that it took all General Washington's influence to quiet them. People had to be taxed to pay the expenses of the government; and yet many had not money to pay their taxes; and a rebellion broke out in Massachusetts, called "Shays' Rebellion," composed of men who thought that no taxes or debts ought to be paid at such a time. All this was very alarming, and convinced the Americans that they needed a stronger government than the mere league which they had formed in 1777, and which had carried them through the war. The trouble with the government had been, all along, that the colonies were jealous of each other, and especially the smaller of the larger; and so they had all wished to give the "Confederation," as it had been called, just as little power as they could. They were so afraid that their government would be tyrannical, that they had hardly given Congress any means of action. Congress was not authorized to raise money by taxes, or to fix the rates of duties on foreign goods imported, or to compel obedience to any law. It was found that foreign countries did not like to make treaties with such a loose and feeble government. Washington said, "We are one nation to-day, and thirteen to-morrow: who will treat with us on these terms?"

It was perceived that this would never do; and so a convention of delegates was called, to meet in the State House at Philadelphia, in order to decide upon a new constitution, and make, if possible, a stronger government, without doing harm to the liberties of the people. There was a long discussion, lasting many weeks, in this convention; but at last, on Sept. 17, 1787, the present Constitution was adopted. It had still to be accepted by the different States, and there was a good deal of opposition to it; while it was very strongly urged by Alexander Hamilton and others, in a celebrated series of papers, called "The Federalist." However, ten of the thirteen States agreed to it almost immediately; so that it went into effect in 1788. Of the three which remained, New York accepted the Constitution in time to take part in the first presidential election, that same year. North Carolina accepted it during the year following; and Rhode Island, last of all, in the year after that (1790). Thus the old "Confederation" ended, and the new "Union" began. The Confederation had changed the Colonies into independent States; and the Union now united these States into a single nation. The nation has governed itself, ever since, under the Constitution then adopted,
although some amendments have been made to it from time to time.

There were great celebrations over all the country when the new Constitution went into effect, and the new nation began to exist. In Philadelphia, for instance, there was a procession of five thousand people representing all trades and pursuits. Such a procession of trades was then quite a new thing; and it was thought to show the difference between republican and monarchical government; because in Europe, at that time, all triumphal processions were almost wholly military in their character. In the procession there were figures in emblematical costumes, representing the Declaration of Independence, the French Alliance, the Treaty of Peace, and so on. The Constitution was represented by a lofty car, in the shape of an eagle, drawn by six horses. The judges of the Supreme Court sat in this car, bearing the Constitution, framed, and fixed upon a staff, which was crowned with the cap of liberty, and was inscribed in gold letters “The People.” Then a carriage, drawn by ten white horses, supported the model of a building representing the Federal Government; its roof being upheld by thirteen columns. Three of these were left unfinished, to represent the States that had not yet ratified the Constitution; and ten were finished, to represent the States that had already joined. There were also ten ships along the river, with flags and girt inscriptions, in honor of these ten States. The clergy of the city walked in the procession; and the Jewish rabbi went between two Christian ministers, to show that the new Republic was founded on religious toleration.

George Washington was chosen the first President of the Republic, and John Adams as Vice-President. New York was to be the seat of government; and as Washington travelled thither from his home in Virginia, he had enthusiastic greetings everywhere. At Trenton, for instance, where he had formerly fought several battles, he found a triumphal arch thrown across a bridge which he was to pass. It was the very bridge over which he had once retreated before the army of Cornwallis. The arch was supported on thirteen pillars, was wreathed with flowers, and bore the inscription, “The Defender of the Mothers will be the Preserver of the Daughters.” Beneath this arch stood a party of young girls, with baskets of flowers in their hands; and they sang this song as Washington drew near:—
of the United States!" to which the assembled crowd replied with shouts of enthusiasm. Then a flag was raised on the cupola of the hall, and there was a general discharge of artillery, and pealing of bells. Thus was the new Republic fully organized at last, with a chief magistrate who had the respect and love of the whole people. This was April 30, 1789.

Sutting the action to the word, they strewed before him the flowers from their baskets.

As he approached New York, a delegation was sent out to meet him. A barge was provided with a crew of thirteen, wearing white uniforms, this number being chosen to represent the thirteen colonies; and many other boats joined in procession, with flags flying. The governor of the State and many others were in waiting at the wharf, and escorted Washington, amid general enthusiasm, to his quarters. Carriages were provided, but he preferred to walk; and the procession passed through the streets, while handkerchiefs were waved and flowers were strewed in the way. Some days after the ceremony of inauguration took place on the balcony of what was then the Senate-chamber. It was a hall called "Federal Hall," which stood at the meeting of four streets; and these streets were so crowded, that an eye-witness said, "It seemed as if one might literally walk on the heads of the people." When Washington came forth upon the balcony, the chancellor of New York read the inaugural oath to him, and he repeated it. After the oath was administered, there was a cry of "Long live George Washington, President.
The Preamble to the United States Constitution

The Preamble to the United States Constitution is a brief introductory statement of the Constitution's fundamental purposes and guiding principles. In general terms it states, and courts have referred to it as reliable evidence of, the Founding Fathers' intentions regarding the Constitution's meaning and what they hoped it would achieve.

We encourage you and your children to memorize this simple, yet profound, statement.

"We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."
Picture Study: *The Signing of the Constitution*

About the Painting

Howard Chandler Christy's painting of the signing of the United States Constitution was commissioned in 1939 as part of the congressional observance of the Constitution’s sesquicentennial. Completed in 1940, the 20-by-30-foot framed oil-on-canvas scene is among the best known images in the United States Capitol.

The painting depicts Independence Hall in Philadelphia on September 17, 1787. George Washington is the most prominent figure; he stands on the platform next to Richard Spaight of North Carolina, who is signing the document. Eighty-one-year-old Benjamin Franklin is seated in the center, with Alexander Hamilton leaning toward him, while James Madison appears farther to the right. In comparison to many of the historical paintings in the Capitol, the colors are bright and airy, and the brushwork is almost impressionistic in places. Christy used light and shadow to unify the individual portraits.

To achieve the greatest possible accuracy, Christy searched for portraits by the best artists of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, such as Charles Wilson Peale and Gilbert Stuart. He located portraits of thirty-seven out of the thirty-nine delegates and the Secretary, William Jackson. Christy took some liberties in composing his scene: John Dickinson, whose signature was added by proxy, is included, and three men who were present but did not sign are not shown. He obscured the faces of the two signers (Thomas FitzSimons and Jacob Broom) of whom no portraits were found. He also researched authentic costumes, including a pair of George Washington’s breeches borrowed from the Smithsonian Institution, and he depicted the furniture and artifacts used by the delegates. The books beside Franklin’s chair were part of Thomas Jefferson’s library; Christy borrowed them from the Rare Book Room of the Library of Congress and included them in the scene to acknowledge Jefferson’s importance to the Constitution. He made the sketch for the painting in Independence Hall in September, at the same time of day as the signing, to show accurately the angle of sunlight in the room with its glass chandelier. The artist said that the flags he depicted are the Stars and Stripes, one from a Maryland dragoon regiment, and regimental colors from Massachusetts and New Hampshire.

Representative Sol Bloom, the Director General of the United States Constitution Sesquicentennial Commission, first proposed that the painting be commissioned in 1937 as part of the 150th anniversary of the Constitution. Howard Chandler Christy, one of the most popular illustrators and portrait painters of the time, had created an historically accurate scene of the signing for the Commission to reproduce. His first small painting included a maiden representing “We the People” and numerous other symbolic figures, but these were eliminated in the final version. In the three years during which Representative Bloom worked with Christy to locate early portraits of the signers and to fill in historical details, he became aware that there was no scene of the signing of the Constitution in the U.S. Capitol, and few other paintings in existence included all the signers.
A Joint Resolution was first introduced in the House in 1937 to pay Christy $35,000 to paint Sign of the Constitution. Heated debate arose, however: some members of Congress were in favor of memorializing one of the greatest events in American history, but others held deep reservations about spending the funds for art during a period of severe economic depression, and the bill did not pass. The Joint Resolution failed again in 1938.

Finally, in 1939, a modified resolution, P.R. 11, 76th Congress, was accepted to set up a commission consisting of the Vice President, the Speaker of the House, and the Architect of the Capitol to employ an artist to paint a 20-by-30-foot scene of the signing at a price of $30,000. The contract with Christy was signed on July 24, 1939. On October 29, 1940, the Congress approved $1500 for the purchase of a frame, which was accepted by the Joint Committee on the Library on December 26, 1940.

The huge 18-by-26-foot canvas was painted in the sail loft of the Washington Navy Yard, where Christy at times used enlisted men as models for the figures. After five years of research and seven months of painting, the canvas was dedicated in May 1940 in the Rotunda of the Capitol, where it was on view for 16 months. The 20-by-30-foot frame, made in nine sections including the central eagle and crest, was hand carved and given a gold-leaf finish by Azeglio Pancani of New York. After much debate about where it could be hung, another painting was moved and the Christy in its frame was installed in the east grand stairway of the House, where it remains today.

In 1967 the painting was vandalized by being slashed along the bottom; the canvas had to be removed from the stretcher to be transported for repair in 1968. The fills made then were apparent, however, and over time dust, grime, and yellowed varnish obscured the original brilliant colors. In 2006 the painting was cleaned and conserved in place by conservators working from a large four-level scaffold from mid-October through December. The cleaning of areas that had looked dull brown revealed lively expressions; detailed costumes; and impressionist colors, such as lavender and pink, applied with scintillating brushwork. The vandalized area was given special attention and is now barely visible. Finally, a new coating of clear protective varnish was applied.

The frame, which had been covered with bronze powder paint in 1968, was taken apart in sections and conserved off site. It was cleaned and repaired, regilded with 22-karat gold leaf similar to the color of the original metal leaf, and toned to complement the painting. The gold leaf will never tarnish and should remain beautiful for generations to come.

Reprinted from The Architect of the Capitol
“Since the laying of the Capitol cornerstone by George Washington in 1793, the Architect of the Capitol (AOC) has served the United States as builder and steward of many of the nation's most iconic and indelible landmark buildings.”
http://www.aoc.gov/cc/art/sign_constitution.cfm
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About the artist: Howard Chandler Christy

Howard Chandler Christy travelled a long road from Ohio and watching steamboats on the Muskingum River to painting Presidents, society's grand dames, Hollywood stars and Army Generals. Christy arrived in New York in 1890 to attend the Art Students League where he studied with William Merritt Chase. At that time, great technological advances were being made in publishing and Christy sensed that a new field was opening - providing illustrations for burgeoning new periodicals. Reproduction technologies had evolved to the point where engravings were no longer the only tedious and expensive means to reproduce a painting. New technological innovations inspired this needy young artist to turn to illustration as a profession.

His first project was illustrating a manuscript for *In Camphor*, a book by Frank Crowninshield. After completion, other book commissions rolled in. A single book established Christy as a professional illustrator.

Patriotically moved by the explosion of the Battleship 'Maine', Christy signed-on to cover the Spanish-American War. Accompanying the Rough Riders under fire, he illustrated articles published by *Scribner's, Harpers, Century*, and *Leslie's Weekly* to the utter delight of readers back home. In the process of covering the war, Christy befriended Col. Theodore Roosevelt and gained an even broader interest in patriotic subjects. By the time he returned home in 1898, he was a celebrity. His fame and reputation were truly secured with 'The Soldier's Dream' published in *Scribner's*, where he portrayed a beautiful girl who became known as 'The Christy Girl.' Like 'The Gibson Girl,' she was a prototype for the ideal American woman, “High bred, aristocratic and dainty though not always silken-skirted; a woman with tremendous self respect.” From this point forward, Christy painted beautiful women for *McClure's* and other popular magazines. Calendars and book illustrations, some that he authored such as 'The Christy Girl' and 'The American Girl' expanded his audience exponentially. They combined to make his notion of a beautiful girl, everyone's criteria thereafter. In 1908, he returned to the riverbanks of the Muskingum River and enlarged 'The Barracks' (his childhood home), by adding a studio. In spite of being so far from the mainstream, publishers beat their way to his door. By 1910, his commission rates had reached an astounding $1,000 per week.

In 1915, Christy returned to New York and continued on his career path with magazine commissions. As war once again appeared imminent, Christy rallied his talents to assist in the war effort by painting posters for government war bonds, the Red Cross, Navy, Marines, and civilian volunteer efforts. His most famous poster was a young woman dressed in a Navy uniform with the caption, “*If I were a man, I would join the Navy*”, a classic today.
The 1920’s were the times for illustrators to reap rewards. New directions, styles and music combined with a business boom to create a huge market for portrait artists. Everyone craved immortality on canvas. It was at this point that Christy turned from illustration and painted many notables including Benito Mussolini, Crown Prince Umberto of Italy, Captain Eddie Rickenbacker, U.S. Presidents Franklin Roosevelt, Coolidge, Hoover, Polk, Van Buren and Garfield; humorist Will Rogers, aviator Amelia Earhart, General Douglas MacArthur, and Mr. and Mrs. William Randolph Hearst. Exhibitions, commissions, trips to Europe and celebrity elbow-rubbing engaged him completely during the 1920’s. In 1925, after his earlier successes with ‘The American Girl’ and ‘The Christy Girl,’ he was commissioned to undertake a sculpture, which he titled, ‘Miss America’ after having been the only judge in the Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City at its inception. It was awarded Oscar-style, to the winner.

In the 1930-31 period, he became extremely depressed as did so many others after the ’Great Crash of 1929’. Nevertheless, a new kind of commission developed for him to paint celebrities and allegorical works depicting historical events, and even posters to memorialize significant historical events. He was painting illustrations again, but of a wholly different sort. The 1940’s witnessed Christy undertaking milestone pieces such as The Signing of the Constitution (his most famous mural, it hangs in the Rotunda of the United States Capitol Building), Signing the United Nations Charter and his portrayal of Thomas Edison in Dawn of a New Light. Howard Chandler Christy died peacefully at the age of 80 in 1952, in his beloved studio apartment at the Hotel des Artistes.

Used with permission.
Signing of the Constitution on 17 September 1787

Howard Chandler Christy
Oil on canvas, 18" x 26" (1939)
SCENE AT THE SIGNING OF THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES
Poems for Constitution Day

America for Me
Henry Van Dyke

'Tis fine to see the Old World, and travel up and down
Among the famous places and cities of renown,
To admire the crumbly castles and the statues of their kings,
- But now I think I've had enough of antiquated things.

So it's home again, and home again, America for me!
My heart is turning home again, and there I long to be,
In the land of youth and freedom beyond the ocean bars
Where the air is full of sunlight and the flag is full of stars.

Oh, London is a man's town, there's power in the air;
And Paris is a woman’s town, with flowers in the hair;
And it's sweet to dream in Venice, and it's great to study Rome;
But when it comes to living ... there is no place like home.

I like the German fir-woods, in green battalions drilled;
I like the gardens of Versailles with flashing fountains filled;
But, oh, to take your hand, my dear, and ramble for a day
In the friendly western woodland where Nature has her way!

I know that Europe's wonderful, yet something seems to lack:
The Past is too much with her, and the people looking back.
But the glory of the Present is to make our Future free,
We love our land for what she is and what she is to be.

Oh, it's home again, and home again, America for me!
I want a ship that's westward bound to plough the rolling sea
To the blessed Land of Room Enough beyond the ocean bars
Where the air is full of sunlight and the flag is full of stars.
We've raised a flagpole on the farm
And flung Old Glory to the sky,
And it's another touch of charm
That seems to cheer the passerby,
But more than that, no matter where
We're laboring in wood and field,
We turn and see it in the air,
Our promise of a greater yield.
It whispers to us all day long,
From dawn to dusk: "Be true, be strong;
Who falters now with plow or hoe
Gives comfort to his country's foe."

It seems to me I've never tried
To do so much about the place,
Nor been so slow to come inside,
But since I've got the flag to face,
Each night when I come home to rest
I feel that I must look up there
And say: "Old Flag, I've done my best,
Today I've tried to do my share."
And sometimes, just to catch the breeze,
I stop my work, and o'er the trees
Old Glory fairly shouts my way:
"You're shirking far too much today!"

The help have caught the spirit, too;
The hired man takes off his cap
Before the old red, white and blue,
Then to the horses says: "giddap!"
And starting bravely to the field
He tells the milkmaid by the door:
"We're going to make these acres yield
More than they've ever done before."
She smiles to hear his gallant brag,
Then drops a curtsy to the flag.
And in her eyes there seems to shine
A patriotism that is fine.

We've raised a flagpole on the farm
And flung Old Glory to the sky;
We're far removed from war's alarm,
But courage here is running high.
We're doing things we never dreamed
We'd ever find the time to do;
Deeds that impossible once seemed
Each morning now we hurry through.
The flag now waves above our toil
And sheds its glory on the soil,
And boy and man looks up to it
As if to say: "I'll do my bit!"
Quotes for Copywork and Discussion

Let it be borne on the flag under which we rally in every exigency, that we have one country, one constitution, one destiny.
~Daniel Webster

To live under the American Constitution is the greatest political privilege that was ever accorded to the human race.
~Calvin Coolidge

Honest conviction is my courage; the Constitution is my guide.
~Andrew Johnson

Don't interfere with anything in the Constitution. That must be maintained, for it is the only safeguard of our liberties.
~Abraham Lincoln

We the people are the rightful masters of both Congress and the courts, not to overthrow the Constitution but to overthrow the men who pervert the Constitution.
~Abraham Lincoln

Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.
~John Adams

Firearms are second only to the Constitution in importance; they are the peoples' liberty's teeth.
~George Washington

The Constitution is the guide which I never will abandon.
- George Washington

It is the genius of our Constitution that under its shelter of enduring institutions and rooted principles there is ample room for the rich fertility of American political invention.
~Lyndon B. Johnson

The happy Union of these States is a wonder; their Constitution a miracle; their example the hope of Liberty throughout the world.
~James Madison

The U. S. Constitution doesn't guarantee happiness, only the pursuit of it. You have to catch up with it yourself.
~Benjamin Franklin
The framers of our Constitution meant we were to have freedom of religion, not freedom from religion.
~Billy Graham

The United States Constitution has proved itself the most marvelously elastic compilation of rules of government ever written.
~Franklin D. Roosevelt

The Constitution is not neutral. It was designed to take the government off the backs of people.
- Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas
The Oath of Citizenship

September 17th is also the day when immigrants from across the globe who have come to America to live will take the Oath of Citizenship to officially become citizens of the United States.

Recite the Oath of Citizenship and discuss what it means

Oath of Citizenship

I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen; that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the law; and that I take this obligation freely without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; so help me God.