

As part of the Constitution Day celebration, the National Constitution Center hosted a live chat with schools all across America. And a lot of students had the same questions about the Constitution and this year's hottest topic, the presidency. In all, we received about 3,000 questions from classrooms, asking everything from what the real estate value was for the White House (around \$250 million, without the furnishings) to who was the cutest president (we didn't have an answer for that).

But many questions were serious, and many the same topics were brought up. Here are the 20 questions kids in middle and high school ask about the Constitution, the Founding Fathers, and the president.

1. *What is the Constitution?*

Answer: The Constitution sets forth our form of government and describes how it is supposed to work. Also, the Constitution, particularly the Bill of Rights, protect the rights and freedoms we enjoy every day.

2. *Why does the president have 35 bathrooms in the White House?*

Answer: There are a lot of people who work in the White House besides the president—so those bathrooms come in handy!

3. *Who wrote the Bill of Rights and when was it added to the Constitution?*

Answer: The Bill of Rights was written by James Madison and was ratified on December 15, 1791.

4. *How long did it take to create the Constitution?*

Answer: The Constitutional Convention lasted four months, from May 25 to September 17, 1787.

5. *When did the Liberty Bell crack?*

Answer: No one is exactly sure when the Liberty Bell cracked, as it was not recorded. The first mention of a crack is in February 1846, when it was published in the Philadelphia Ledger that they wanted to repair the crack in the bell so that they could ring it for George Washington's birthday.

6. *I don't really understand the Electoral College. Can I get any clarification?*

Answer: The Electoral College is technically the group that elects the president. They represent the states based upon the numbers of representatives and senators from each state. Most states base their electoral votes on the winner of that state, but some are divided. One reason for the Electoral College is to keep all of the states involved in the process. Another is that some of the framers were fearful of a strictly democratic election, as they worried about people electing popular leaders rather than able leaders.

7. *How long did it take to build the White House? How old is it?*

Answer: The original White House took 8 years to be built, from 1792 to 1800. President John Adams and his wife, Abigail, were the first to live there. The White House is 212 years old. It has undergone many renovations and expansion projects.

8. *Who ran against Washington in the first election?*

Answer: No one. Washington was elected as the first president by a unanimous vote.

9. *Why haven't we had a Constitutional Convention in recent years?*

Answer: The majority of people support the current Constitution. It is difficult to amend the Constitution—it has only happened 27 times in the last 225 years. To have another convention would take years and would be very disruptive.

10. *Who was the youngest president? The oldest?*

Answer: The youngest president was actually Teddy Roosevelt. He was 42 years old when he became president on the death of William McKinley. John F. Kennedy was elected at the age of 43. Ronald Reagan was the oldest to be elected, at the age of 69.

11. *Why have there been no girl presidents?*

Answer: Women have become more prominent in the race for the presidency. Besides Hillary Clinton who ran for president in 2008 and 2016, there have been six others: 1) Victoria Woodhull (1872) ran for president nearly 50 years before the 19th Amendment allowed women to vote in presidential elections, 2) Gracie Allen (1940) a radio host ran as the "Surprise Party" mostly for publicity and to poke fun at the political system, 3) Shirley Chisholm (1972), who already made history as the first African-American woman elected to Congress in 1968, ran for equal

rights and economic justice in the Democratic Party, 4) Linda Jenness (1972), a secretary from Atlanta ran under the “Socialist Worker Party,” repeatedly challenged Democratic nominee George McGovern to a debate, who refused, 5) Jill Stein (2012), a physician who ran for president under the Green Party after two unsuccessful bids for the office of governor of Massachusetts, and 6) Carly Fiorina (2016), a business women who ran against a large field of Republican candidates, did well in the heated debates. There have been two adult women who have run for vice president: Geraldine Ferraro and Sarah Palin.

12. How many delegates were there during the signing of the Constitution?

Answer: During the signing there were 41 delegates present. 38 signed. One—George Read—also signed for John Dickinson who was home sick that day. 55 different men had been in Philadelphia over the course of the Convention.

13. What was the average age of the delegates at the Constitutional convention?

Answer: The 39 signers of the Constitution varied in age. The average age was 42 years old. The youngest signer of the Constitution was 26-year-old Jonathan Dayton of New Jersey. The oldest signer was Benjamin Franklin at 81 years old.

14. Are taxes specifically mentioned in the Constitution?

Answer: Article I, Section 8, starts off that “Congress shall have the Power to lay and collect Taxes, Duties, Imposts and Excises.” The 16th Amendment gives the power to create an income tax.

15. Why was George Washington on the \$1 bill?

Answer: The federal government has the power to design and print money. According to the Bureau of Engraving and Printing: “A special committee ... determined that portraits of Presidents of the United States have a more permanent familiarity in the minds of the public than any others. This decision was somewhat altered by the Secretary of the Treasury to include Alexander Hamilton, who was the first Secretary of the Treasury; Salmon P. Chase, who was Secretary of the Treasury during the Civil War and is credited with promoting our National Banking System; and Benjamin Franklin, who was one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. All three of these statesmen were well known to the American public. Treasury Department records do not reveal the reason that portraits of these particular statesmen were chosen in preference to those of other persons of equal importance and prominence.”

16. Did George Washington really cut down his dad’s cherry tree?

Answer: No. George Washington never actually cut down his dad’s tree. The story is a myth that illustrates Washington’s honesty.

17. Can someone please tell me what the New Jersey Plan is in a short sentence?

Answer: The Virginia Plan proposed apportioning representation based on population. The New Jersey Plan wanted to apportion representation by state.

18. Which president is the tallest?

Answer: The tallest president we had was Abraham Lincoln. He was 6’4.”

19. Which president lasted the longest in office?

Answer: Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected to four terms and served 12 years in office. He will always been the president who served the most terms—unless we amend the Constitution again to allow a president to serve more than two.

20. Who was the first president to live in the White House?

Answer: The first president to live in the White House was John Adams and his wife Abigail.