

Tennessee Secretary of State

Blue Book Lesson Plans

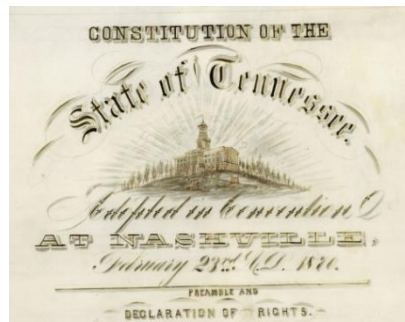
Tennessee State Constitution

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Grade level: High School, U.S. Government and Civics

Date Created: May 2015

For additional lesson plans, click [here](#).



1870 Constitution, Tennessee State Library and Archives

There are a limited number of hard copies of Blue Books available. To see about ordering a set for your classroom, please contact the Secretary of State's office at (615) 741-2819 or one of your local legislators. The online version of the Blue Book is also available [here](#).

Introduction:

The first Tennessee State Constitution was written in 1796. Since then it has been rewritten several times. In this lesson students will explore how the Tennessee Constitution distributes power and authority within government. They will begin with the 1796 Constitution and then see what changes have been made in the succeeding years.

Guiding Questions:

- What principles are the foundations of the Tennessee Constitution?
- What has changed since the original Constitution written in 1796?
- What was the historical context for writing the Constitution and the changes that followed?

Learning Objectives: In the course of the lesson, the students will...

- List what powers are identified in the Constitution.
- Determine how powers and authority are distributed within state government.
- Examine each Constitution since 1796.
- Compare the Constitutions of 1796, 1834, and 1870.
- Determine what has changed and what has stayed the same.

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Curriculum Standards:

GC.54-Identify and describe the provisions of the Tennessee Constitution that define and distribute powers and authority of the state government. (P, TN)

Materials Needed:

- 1) Copies of the graphic organizer
- 2) Copies of (or computer access to) the following primary sources (scroll down and click on “Transcription Link” to get a full transcript):
 - [Tennessee Constitution, 1796](#)
 - [Tennessee Constitution, 1834](#)
 - [Tennessee Constitution, 1870](#)
- 3) Copies of the *Tennessee Blue Book* or internet access to the online version (PDFs provided)
 - [pgs. 627-649, Constitution of the State of Tennessee](#)
 - [pgs. 487-543, A History of Tennessee](#)

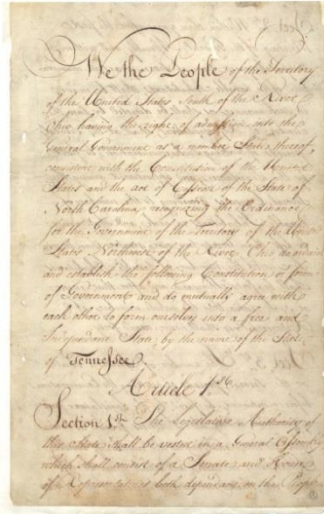
Background:

- 1) *Tennessee Blue Book*, Constitution of the State of Tennessee, pg. 627, (the introduction to the Constitution has some background information)
- 2) Tennessee State Library and Archives: Each of the State Constitutions has a historical note that gives some background to each document.
 - [Tennessee Constitution, 1796](#)
 - [Tennessee Constitution, 1834](#)
 - [Tennessee Constitution, 1870](#)

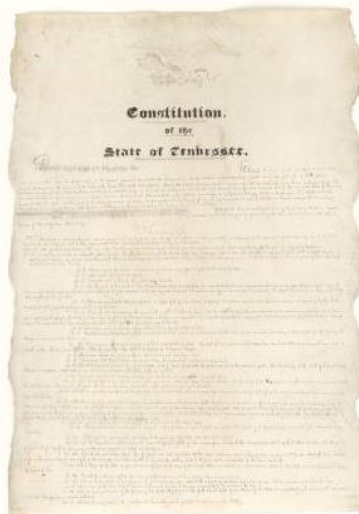
Preparation Instructions:

- 1) Divide the class into three member groups.
- 2) Each group should get one copy (or have access to) the Tennessee Constitution from 1796, 1834, and 1870. Determine if you are going to print copies for the students or if you are going to have them access the sources digitally.
- 3) Print copies of the graphic organizer.
- 4) Determine how students will access the *Tennessee Blue Book*.

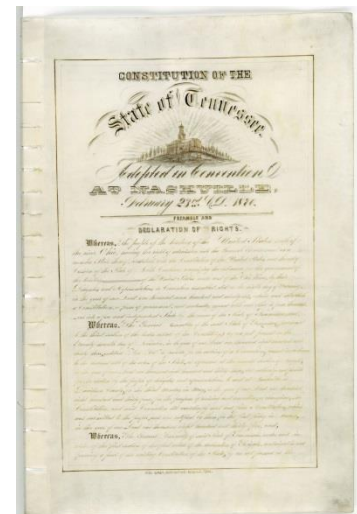
- 5) This lesson assumes that your students have experience in analyzing primary sources. If you feel they will need more guidance in the analysis process, the Tennessee State Library and Archives has an [analysis guide for written documents](#).
- 6) Create a rubric for scoring the essay/opinion piece. See www.ReadWriteThink.org for examples.
- 7) Familiarize yourself with the sources prior to the lesson.



1796 Constitution,
Tennessee State Library and Archives



Tennessee Constitution, 1834,
Tennessee State Library and Archives



1870 Constitution,
Tennessee State Library and Archives

Lesson Activities:

Activity 1

- 1) Ask students what they know about the Tennessee State Constitution.
- 2) Put the students into their three member groups.
- 3) Have each student take one of the three constitutions (one of each per group).
- 4) Using the graphic organizer, have the students read their constitution and fill in the information on the chart.

Activity 2

- 1) Using the information on the graphic organizer have students analyze their findings.
- 2) As the students search, have them compare the constitutions looking for where the information remains the same and where/when changes were made.

- 3) Once each group has determined where/when changes happened, they should search for historical background about what was going on that led to the changes. Below are some options of where to look for historical context:
 - *Tennessee Blue Book*, [A History of Tennessee, pgs. 487-543](#)
 - State Constitutions, TSLA historical notes
 - [Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture](#)
- 4) Have each group share their findings with the class and make a record on the board.
- 5) Were there items that most groups found? Any items that only one or two groups found? Anything that the students missed?

Activity 3

- 1) Instruct students to write an essay on the distribution of power and authority within state government based on the Constitution.
- 2) Students should discuss how the distribution was done in 1796 and how the distribution of power and authority changed in the 1834 and 1870 Constitutions.
- 3) As part of the essay they should include an opinion piece discussing if they think the changes have been for the better or worse and how they might have been improved.
- 4) Students should share ideas within their group to help focus the paper.

Extension Activity:

- 1) Have students search for the reasons the Tennessee Constitution was written in that way. What were the major influences when the state was founded?
- 2) Have students determine the historical context for each constitutional change since 1796, including each of the amendments.

Option for extension: Invite state legislators or local elected officials to come speak to the classroom about their role in government.

