

Essay Topics



1. Select one of the five goals of the Founders as stated in the Preamble to the Constitution. To what extent has the government achieved this goal? Answer using at least three examples from the period 2000-2015.
2. For over two hundred years, Americans have debated the question of whether the Constitution should be interpreted loosely, as suggested by the Federalist Party of Alexander Hamilton or strictly, as advocated by the Jeffersonian Republicans. Select two issues, one from the period from 1790 to 1900 and one from the period from 1900 to the present, where this question was central to the discussion and resolution of the issue. Describe the issue and its context, the debate over the interpretation of the Constitution, and the solutions proposed or implemented. What is your position on these issues?
3. In times of national crisis, what limits should be placed on the individual's freedom of expression and the federal government's ability to gather information about American citizens and to deny constitutional protections to those accused of terrorism?
4. How is the right to "privacy" protected by the Bill of Rights if the word itself does not appear in that document? Examine modern examples of actions which are or are not protected under the right to privacy.
5. Americans, both private citizens and government officials, continue to debate whether there is a constitutional right to privacy and what the parameters of that right are. Select two issues that illustrate the debate over privacy. Compare and contrast the arguments over these two issues.
6. Select one issue that affects American youth today and which has constitutional dimensions. Examine the context and the details of this debate, analyzing both sides of the debate. What resolution do you feel is best for you personally and for the nation? Choose from the following.
 - The school's right to monitor your email and internet use
 - The schools' right to dictate and implement a dress code
 - Your right to refuse to stand and recite the Pledge of Allegiance
 - Your right to practice your religion as a public school student – through prayer, school clubs, class presentations, etc.
 - Your right to seek advice and obtain contraceptives from a medical professional without your parents' consent
 - A military recruiter's right to have access to you and your school records
7. Select one example of a conflict between two branches of the federal government. Explain the context and the details of this conflict. Analyze how the Constitution addresses this conflict and assess the way our public officials resolved it. Do you agree with their decision?

8. How did the Constitution strike a balance between a strong national government and states' rights? Has that balance shifted too far in favor of the federal government, or have the states maintained their proportionate sovereignty? Explain.
9. Select and examine one issue that illustrates conflict between the authority of the federal government and that of the states or conflict between two branches of government. Examples are the use of medical marijuana, the "right-to-die" law in Oregon, or the debate over the use of government wiretaps.
10. Compare and contrast the Gay Rights movement with the efforts of African Americans to achieve equal rights. What methods has each group used to achieve its goals? Has the system worked as intended by the Framers? Explain.

For reference: The Library of Congress's Constitution Day Teacher Resources, <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/constitutionday.html>; The National Archives Educational Resources, <http://www.archives.gov/legislative/resources/education/>.