1. **What is the purpose of the Preamble of the U.S. Constitution?**

The Preamble of the U.S. Constitution provides information as to why the U.S. Constitution was being written; it does not form or specify any power of government. The U.S. Constitution was written in order to take the goals of government and create a workable structure reflecting the goals of government outlined in the Preamble.

1. **Dissecting the Preamble of the U.S. Constitution**

The matrix that follows takes each phrase in the Preamble of the U.S. Constitution and clarifies its deeper meaning. The clarifications explain how the Preamble establishes the goals and purposes of government.

| **Phrase** | **Deeper Meaning** | **Modern Application or Example** |
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| we the people | The people grant the powers to the government in this clause. The creators of the U.S. government were, by definition, an elite group that understood that they were creating a nation where the majority of the population were not elites, but common people. This majority’s approval was necessary; one way to gain their approval was to confirm that the people were forming the government, and it was not being handed down by a god or a king. | In elections, the people decide who will govern. One of the results of the Progressive Movement (1890s-1920s) was the direct election of U.S. Senators who had been elected by state legislatures up to the ratification of the 17th Amendment. |
| form a more perfect union | The U.S. Constitution was intended to improve on the Articles of Confederation, the government in place at the time. The Articles of Confederation had worked well to a point, and was the best that the colonists could come up with when the Articles were created. The Framers understood that the Constitution would not be “perfect”, but “more perfect”. | Amendment process in the Constitution allows for change in order to respond to issues that emerge such as concerns about presidential abuse of power reflected in term limits. |
| establish justice | The purpose of establishing justice is to maintain public order. Maintaining public order requires that the government follows the rule of law and treats the law as supreme. After the experiences of the people as colonists and new Americans, they wanted a level playing field where courts were established with uniformity and would treat the people with fair and equal treatment. | The Bill of Rights extends protections to persons accused of crimes. Even though the nature of these crimes is unpopular and may be especially heinous, the Bill of Rights guarantees to all citizens a level playing field when they are brought to trial. |
| insure domestic tranquility | The purpose of insuring domestic tranquility was to protect citizens from internal conflict. Internal conflict creates instability. Avoiding instability, such as Shays’s Rebellion (1786-1787) was needed in order for a new nation to take hold. | The president and governors may call in the National Guard to address concerns that may or have resulted in violence in a state or area. For example, the National Guard was called in to maintain order in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and to New York and New Jersey after Superstorm Sandy in 2012. |
| provide for the common defense | The purpose of this phrase is to present the goal of protecting citizens from external attacks, which was a problem under the Articles of Confederation. No one state was really capable of fending off an attack from land or sea on its own so the states needed each other to survive attacks, especially from Britain or Spain, or by Native Americans. | The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 were deemed by the federal government to be a terrorist attack on the nation even though New York City and Washington, DC were the prime targets of the attacks. As a federal concern, the federal government took action on behalf of victims. |
| promote the general welfare | Government focuses on the “public interest” which allows every state and citizen to benefit from what the government could provide. The point of having tranquility, justice, and defense was to promote the general welfare which reinforces the concept of “we the people”. | Public policies focusing on environmental protection promote the public interest. |
| secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity | The “public interest” is intended to work to the people’s benefit and not to their detriment for now and forever. In essence, the U.S. would resemble a paradise for liberty. | There are occasions when First Amendment protections are offensive to some; however, in protecting free speech rights for some, free speech rights for all are protected. However, free speech exercises may not violate the public interest because they would compromise the people’s benefit. |
| do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America | This phrase finishes the “we the people” approach by giving the document a name, naming the nation and summarizing the Preamble. There is a higher order involved here which is “the people”. The Constitution replaces the Articles of Confederation (“establish”) and creates one national government. | Since the U.S. Constitution was ratified, every state that has entered the union has also adopted a constitution. |

1. ***Civics Content Vocabulary***

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| **Word/Term** | **Part of Speech** | **Definition** |
| **defense** | noun | method of protecting oneself |
| **domestic** | adjective | referring to something at home, not foreign |
| **insure** | verb | ensure, to make sure |
| **justice** | noun | a system of establishing what is legal and illegal by fair rules |
| **ordain** | verb | to establish something by law |
| **posterity** | noun | future generations |
| **Preamble** | proper noun | the introduction to the U.S. Constitution |
| **tranquility** | noun | peace |
| **union** | noun | something formed by combining parts, such as states into one country |
| **welfare** | noun | well-being |

**The Preamble of the U.S. Constitution**

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, 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.