

A Constitution for Kids

Sometimes reading the U.S. Constitution can be confusing. Most people can't tell their ***habeas corpus***¹ from their ***ex post facto***.²

In 2003, Cathy Travis took the confusion out of the Constitution. Travis, who works as a congressional aide in Washington, D.C., wrote a book, *Constitution Translated for Kids*, that makes reading the Constitution as simple as saying "We the People."

The 85-page book has the original text of the Constitution on one page and Travis's **translation**³ on the facing page.

For example, article 1, section 9, clause 3, of the Constitution reads: "No Bill of Attainder or *ex post facto* law shall be passed."

Travis's translation: "Criminal laws passed by Congress can be applied only from the time they are passed."

Travis said she got the idea to write the book when Ross Perot ran for president in 1992 against George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton. She became angry every time Perot made statements about the Constitution that she considered inaccurate.

Travis said she took great care to make sure that her translation of the document was fair and accurate. Many aspects of the Constitution are open to debate.

"The Constitution belongs to everyone. If you make it sound like the beliefs of one party or the other, you are doing a great disservice to everybody," Travis told the *Austin-American Statesman*.

¹ **habeas corpus**: a legal order to find out if a person has been wrongly sent to prison

² **ex post facto**: after the fact; retroactive

³ **translation**: expressing text in a different language (in this case more easily understandable English)

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Article 1, section 9, clause 3, of the Constitution reads: "No Bill of Attainder or *ex post facto* law shall be passed." How does Cathy Travis "translate" this article?

- A Criminal laws passed by Congress can be applied only from the time they are passed.
- B Laws passed by Congress can be made retroactive affecting past events.
- C Criminal laws passed by Congress cannot be applied from the time they are passed.
- D Criminals laws passed by Congress cannot go into effect until all states have ratified them.

2. Read these two sentences from the passage:

"Travis said she got the idea to write the book when Ross Perot ran for president in 1992 against George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton. She became angry every time Perot made statements about the Constitution that she considered inaccurate."

Which of the following describes the relationship between these two sentences?

- A The sentences describe two steps in a process.
- B The sentences show two sides of an argument.
- C The second sentence is the solution to the first.
- D The first sentence gives the effect of the second.

3. What was the author trying to convey to the reader by stating "Most people can't tell their *habeas corpus* from their *ex post facto*."?

- A why more people need to go back to school
- B that the Constitution can be confusing
- C how English and Latin are so similar
- D that people should read more carefully

4. Read this sentence from the passage: "She became angry every time Perot made statements about the Constitution that she considered inaccurate."

Based on the text, the word **inaccurate** means

- A exact
- B not correct
- C truthful
- D disapprove

5. Which statement best describes the central idea of this passage?

- A The U.S. Constitution is a very important document to read.
- B Many sections of the Constitution are open to debate from either party.
- C Cathy Travis wrote a book to make the Constitution easier to understand.
- D Being a congressional aide is a job that requires hard work and dedication.

6. What did Cathy Travis take great care to do when writing her book?

7. Why is the U.S. Constitution important? How do you know? Give a specific example from the article that supports your answer.

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

_____ hearing Ross Perot's statements about the U.S. Constitution, Cathy Travis became angry at what she considered inaccurate information.

- A Before
- B After
- C Although
- D Because

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

Because the U.S. Constitution can be confusing, Cathy Travis wrote a book in 2003 to translate the document into simpler language.

Who? Cathy Travis

(did) What? _____

When? _____

Why? _____

How? _____

10. **Vocabulary Word:** disservice: an unhelpful act.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: _____

Teacher Guide and Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 970

Featured Text Structure: Descriptive – the writer explains, defines or illustrates a concept or topic

Passage Summary: “A Constitution for Kids” describes how Cathy Travis, a congressional aide in Washington D.C., wrote a book that translates the original text of the U.S. Constitution to more easily understandable language that children can understand.

1. Article 1, section 9, clause 3, of the Constitution reads: “No Bill of Attainder or *ex post facto* law shall be passed.” How does Cathy Travis “translate” this article?

- A **Criminal laws passed by Congress can be applied only from the time they are passed.**
- B Laws passed by Congress can be made retroactive affecting past events.
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- B **that the Constitution can be confusing**
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- C** Cathy Travis wrote a book to make the Constitution easier to understand.
- D** Being a congressional aide is a job that requires hard work and dedication.

6. What did Cathy Travis take great care to do when writing her book?

Suggested answer: Cathy Travis took great care to make sure that her translation of the document was fair and accurate. [paragraph 7]

7. Why is the U.S. Constitution important? How do you know? Give a specific example from the article that supports your answer.

Suggested answer: The Constitution is a document that contains the laws of the United States. For example, one of Travis's translations is this: "Criminal laws passed by Congress can be applied only from the time they are passed." It is important to understand the laws of the country one lives in. In addition, it is important to know if candidates and elected officials understand the laws. Cathy states she was frustrated because one of the political candidates made statements about the constitution that were inaccurate. [paragraph 5]

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

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- C** Although
- D** Because

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Because the U.S. Constitution can be confusing, Cathy Travis wrote a book in 2003 to translate the document into simpler language.

Who? Cathy Travis

(did) What? **wrote a book**

When? **in 2003**

Why? **because the U.S. Constitution can be confusing**

How? **she translated the document into simpler language**

10. Vocabulary Word: disservice: an unhelpful act.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: answers may vary.