Name:

Class Period:

Score: /40

**SIX PRINCIPLES OF THE CONSTITUTION**

DIRECTIONS: First READ THROUGH THIS DOCUMENT and THEN answer the questions that follow in complete sentences on a SEPARATE SHEET OF PAPER!

Although the United States Constitution is a 200 year old document, it doesn't mean that it's not useful in today's century. It still remains an important and very well alive document. The Constitution is the "supreme law of the land" - the United States.

**An Outline of the Constitution**

The Constitution lays out the basic principles on which the United States government operates on. With a little more than 7,000 words, the Constitution can be easily read within half an hour. Unlike other constitutions, the Constitution is organized in a very simple and brief manner.

The Constitution begins with an introduction, called the preamble. The rest of the document is split up into sections called articles. The first three articles talk about the three branches of government: judicial, legislative, and executive. Article IV talks about the relationship between the state and the national government. Article V talks about the process in which new amendments are to be made. Article VI talks about how the constitution is the ultimate law and Article VII talks about the ratification of the Constitution.

**The Basic Principles**

The Constitution is built upon the following six basic principles:

1. Popular Sovereignty

2. Limited Government

3. Separation of Powers

4. Checks and Balances

5. Judicial Review

6. Federalism

**Popular Sovereignty**

In the United States, all political power rests in the people. The people are the only source for governmental power. The principle of popular sovereignty is even declared in the introduction of the Declaration of Independence where the people "ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America." In other words, the government draws its power from the people because the people are sovereign in the fact that a government can only govern under the consent of the people.

**Limited Government**

The principle of limited government is to say that the government is not all powerful. This definition is obvious through the word itself. However, limited government means more to say that the government can only govern what the people allow it to govern. Limited government makes sense because if the people are sovereign, then the government cannot be all powerful.

The concept of limited government can be expressed in another way: The government must obey the law. This is sometimes called constitutionalism. This means that the law is above the government and not the other way around. This is also sometimes called rule of law, which means that everybody in the government is subject to the law. The constitution makes the concept of limited government very clear.

**Separation of Powers**

In a presidential government like the United States, all power is distributed among three branches: legislative, judicial, and executive. This is called the separation of powers. The Constitution talks about the separation of powers among the President, Congress, and the Supreme Court. Articles I, II, and III declare the separation of powers among those three branches. The separation of powers was designed not to take away power from the government, but to spread it out evenly among all parts of it.

**Checks and Balances**

The United States government is broken into three branches: legislative, executive, and judicial. These branches are not completely separated or completely independent. There remains one relationship between the three - the system of checks and balances. This means that each branch is subject to the checks of the other two branches.

For example, Congress has the power to make a law, but the President can veto it, or reject it. And in the case of a veto, Congress may override that veto with a 2/3 vote. Take another example, the President has the power to appoint federal judges, but the Senate must approve that appointment with a majority vote. The system of checks and balances ties all three branches together.

Overall, the system of checks and balances has worked very well. You have the Framers to thank for that. It really has prevented an unjust combination of the majority.

**Judicial Review**

The power of judicial review is the power of the courts to determine whether or not the government has violated the laws of the Constitution. In other words, judicial review is the power to declare something unconstitutional, or against the constitution. The Supreme Court has used the power of judicial review in many cases throughout the nation. However, in most cases the Supreme Court found that the government was in fact being constitutional and not the other way around. There are some exceptions to that.

**Federalism**

Whether you know it or not, the United States government is federal in form. There is a central government and there are smaller governments underneath it. This is called federalism. This concept came from the Framers' experiences and knowledge about government. They wanted to establish a central government, but also recognize the states and their power. The solution was federalism.

**Questions**:

1. What are the six basic principles of the Constitution?

2. What is popular sovereignty?

3. What is meant by limited government?

4. What is the principle of separation of powers and why is it necessary to have a separation of powers?

5. Give examples of how the principle of checks and balances works in our government.

6. What is judicial review? Give examples of when judicial review has been used in our court system (\*HINT: USE YOUR BLUE PACKET!!!!)

7. What is federalism and why is this important?

8. RANK the SIX Principles above in order from what YOU THINK is MOST IMPORTANT to LESS IMPORTANT and tell me WHY you ranked each one where you did.