



# The Newspaper That Tried to Explain the Rules

*WisdomForge Booklet — Ages 5–10*



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## About This Book

The United States has a big rule book called the Constitution. That book was written in Philadelphia in the summer of 1787. This booklet is not that book.

This booklet is about what happened next. Three men in New York wrote letters in the newspapers. They used one fake Roman name: Publius. They wanted New York to say yes to rules that already existed. A printer later bound the letters and called the pile *The Federalist*. Grown-ups sometimes call them the Federalist Papers. The letters are a sales pitch. The Constitution is the product. If the pitch and the product disagree, the product wins.

WisdomForge already walked a chain: Magna Carta, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution. These essays are the next link — the brief that tried to sell the machine. They are not a sixth constitution.

You will hear real words from the title page and from a few famous sentences. You will not hear the court essay or the counting essay. Those belong with a grown-up and with the older booklets. This one keeps the little-band omit list.

Each chapter has a story, words to remember, a big idea, something to try, and a question to ask a grown-up. The questions are not tests. They are doors to walk through together.

A grown-up who wants Hamilton's judiciary letter, Madison's mixed-character counting letter, or the fight over whether courts may void a statute should use the middle or high booklet. This one keeps the little-band omit list: no Federalist 78, no Federalist 54. The newspaper, the groups, the split jobs, the empty cup, the list of promises, and New York's late yes are enough work for this age.

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# Chapter 1: A Fake Name in the Newspaper



*Illustration for Chapter 1*

Imagine your town is about to vote on a new set of playground rules. The rules are already written. Now someone starts putting letters in the local paper, trying to talk neighbors into saying yes.

That is what happened in New York in 1787. The Constitution had already been drafted in Philadelphia. New York still had to ratify — to say yes or no. Some New Yorkers did not want to say yes. Governor George Clinton's side was against it. If New York refused, the new union might crack on the Hudson River.

Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay started writing. They did not sign their real names. They signed **Publius**, a costume borrowed from a Roman republican. The costume did two jobs. It made the letters sound like a citizen talking to citizens. It hid the party.

Hamilton wrote most of the letters. Madison wrote some that classrooms still remember. Jay wrote five, then illness took him out. They shared a goal in 1787: get New York to ratify. They did not share a later politics. By 1791 Hamilton and Madison were building opposite parties.

The Convention sat behind closed doors. The draft was signed on 17 September 1787. The political problem then changed. It was no longer “what should the frame be?” It was “will enough states say yes?” Article VII said nine state conventions, not every state legislature. That was already a break with the Articles. Honesty names the break without turning the summer into a cartoon villain story.

The first Publius letter appeared on 27 October 1787 in the *Independent Journal*. The series ran into May 1788. Some later famous letters first reached readers as a bound book, not as a morning paper. Newspaper war and book are not the same object. The popular name “Federalist Papers” came later still. Founding-era readers knew *The Federalist*.

A printer named McLean bound the letters in 1788. The honest title on the book was *The Federalist: A Collection of Essays, Written in Favour of the New Constitution*. Favour. Not scripture. About five hundred copies. Many copies were still unsold when the fight ended. That is not *Common Sense*. That is not a book everyone in America owned.

The letters did not write the Constitution. Philadelphia wrote the Constitution. The letters tried to sell it. A sales pitch can be brilliant and still not be the product. Jay had not even been in the Philadelphia room. Madison and Hamilton had. Even the two who had been in the room could not bind the other delegates.

When a grown-up says “the Founders wrote the Federalist Papers, so that's what the Constitution means,” you can put two facts on the table. First: different rooms, different years. Second: three men, one mask. Name the man when you can.

### ***Words to Remember***

*“A Collection of Essays, Written in Favour of the New Constitution.” — Title of the 1788 McLean bound edition of \*The Federalist\**

That means: these pages are arguing *for* the rules. They are not the rules themselves.

### ***Big Idea***

The Federalist essays are a New York newspaper campaign written to ratify a Constitution that already existed. Three men shared a mask. The mask is not the machine.

### ***Try This***

1. Fold a paper in half. On the left write: Constitution — Philadelphia, 1787, the rules. On the right write: Federalist letters — New York newspapers, 1787–88, the pitch. 2. List three names: Hamilton, Madison, Jay. Draw one Roman mask over all three. 3. Tell a stuffed animal: if the letter and the rule book disagree, the rule book wins.

### ***Ask a Grown-Up***

If someone tried to sell you a set of rules in the newspaper, would you trust the sales pitch or read the rules?

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## Chapter 2: When Groups Want Different Things



*Illustration for Chapter 2*

Every school has groups. The kickball kids want the field. The quiet readers want the benches. The lunch line has opinions about pizza. Groups are not a surprise. People care about different things.

James Madison, writing as Publius, had a name for a certain kind of group: a **faction**. A faction is not “people I dislike.” It is a group — big or small — joined by a passion or an interest that can hurt other people’s rights, or hurt the lasting good of the whole.

Madison said you cannot make factions go away without wrecking liberty. Liberty is to faction, he wrote, what air is to fire. You can smother a fire by taking away air. You can smother factions by taking away freedom. He refused that cure.

You also cannot make everyone think the same. Free people will not.

So the work is not “delete groups.” The work is: what stops one group from becoming the whole school and bossing everyone else?

Madison’s answer was a large republic with representatives. In a tiny meeting, one loud majority can be the whole room. In a large country, many groups exist. It is harder for one passion to discover its strength and act as one fist.

A child should not walk away thinking “so we shouldn’t have teams or parties.” Madison said we will have them. The design is so no one team is the country.

Brutus — an opponent writing in another New York paper — said size was the danger, not the cure. In a huge country, he argued, the people cannot watch the government, and the government cannot know the people. This booklet does not pick a winner between Madison and Brutus. It puts both on the table. A monologue is not a lesson.

Think of a group you know: a fandom, a team, a family argument about where to eat. Madison’s question is simple enough for a kitchen: what stops that group from becoming the only voice?

Madison also said the *causes* of faction are sown in human nature: different skills, different property, different opinions about religion and government. A sitting that treats factions as a modern invention has not read him. A sitting that treats them as “just fights” has not read him either. Fights between groups that can outvote you.

He was answering a very old claim: republics must be small. Montesquieu had said it. Brutus repeated it. Madison inverted it: size is the cure, if representation still refines, and if the union can actually govern. Brutus denied both. Hold the two claims. Do not let a model pick a winner for a child.

A recommendation feed on a phone is a grown-up test of Madison’s “extent of territory.” Distance collapses. Passion unites at scale. This booklet does not settle that test. It names it so a grown-up can carry it later.



### ***Words to Remember***

*“Liberty is to faction what air is to fire.” — James Madison, Federalist No. 10 (Avalon)*

That means: you can kill factions by killing freedom. Madison would not.

### ***Big Idea***

Factions are groups that can outvote you. Madison would not destroy liberty to destroy them. He tried to design a large country so no one group is the whole.

### ***Try This***

1. Name three groups in your life that want different things. Draw them as three circles that overlap a little. 2. Circle one group and ask: what would stop it from making all the rules? 3. With a grown-up, say Madison’s question out loud: what stops a group from becoming the whole?

### ***Ask a Grown-Up***

When our family disagrees, what stops one person’s want from becoming the only plan?

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## Chapter 3: Jobs That Watch Each Other



*Illustration for Chapter 3*

Imagine a classroom where one child is teacher, snack-boss, and referee all at once. That child might be kind. The job is still too big.

The Constitution splits work. Congress writes laws. The president carries them out. Courts decide cases. Madison, in a famous letter, said the people who hold those jobs are not angels.

If people were angels, you would not need government. If angels ran the government, you would not need to watch the government. People are not angels. So the offices must watch each other.

Madison's sentence that grown-ups steal for posters is this: ambition must be made to counteract ambition. That does not mean "be mean." It means: connect a person's self-interest to the rights of the *job*, so the Senate has a reason to resist the House, the president has a reason to resist a law that swallows the office, and so on.

He expected Congress to be the strongest in a republic. So he split Congress into two rooms: House and Senate. He also split the country into two governments over the same people: the United States and the states. Two governments, three jobs — a double watch.

This is not a promise that nothing will ever get done. Hamilton, in another letter, wanted energy — a government that can actually finish a job. Checks are to stop one pile of power, not to freeze every sandwich line forever.

A child can practice this without a chart of 2026 news. Pick a family job: who decides bedtime, who packs lunch, who says the rule was broken. If one person does all three, say so. If the jobs are split, say who watches whom.

Do not turn this chapter into "grown-ups are bad." Madison thinks people can be free *because* he does not pretend they are angels.

The security, he said, is giving each department the means and the motive to resist the others. Means without motive is a paper wall. Motive without means is a tantrum. The Constitution tries to hand both to the office, not to a saint who happens to sit there.

Hamilton wanted energy in the same series: one visible person at the executive desk, easy to watch and easy to blame. Cato heard "king." Hamilton said a committee hides blame. This booklet does not resolve that fear. It names it. Ambition-watching-ambition and energy-at-the-desk are both in the letters. After 1791 the two main writers joined different teams and used the old essays against each other. A little-band version is enough: the mask came off. The essays are not one mind.

### ***Words to Remember***

*"If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary." — James Madison, Federalist No. 51 (Avalon)*

That means: we make rules because people are not perfect — including the people in charge.

### *Big Idea*

The Constitution splits jobs so ambition watches ambition. Virtue helps. The machine cannot require saints.

### *Try This*

1. Draw three boxes: write laws, carry out laws, decide a fight about the rules. Put a different crayon in each box. 2. Act out a tiny play: one person tries to hold all three crayons. Another person says, “Put two down.” 3. Name one home job that should not belong to the same person as the referee job.

### *Ask a Grown-Up*

In our house, who writes a rule, who carries it out, and who says the rule was broken — and what happens if one person does all three?

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## Chapter 4: The First Rulebook Could Not Collect the Money



*Illustration for Chapter 4*

Before the Constitution, the United States had another rulebook: the Articles of Confederation. It was a “firm league of friendship” among the states. Congress could declare

war and make treaties. It could not tax. It could not make the states pay. It sent requests and hoped.

That design was not a slip of the pen. It was a theory. They had just fought a distant king. They did not want a distant collector. By the mid-1780s the theory looked like empty pockets.

States taxed one another's goods. New York's port fees hit neighbors. Britain still sat in Northwest forts. Spain closed the Mississippi. Congress had neither army nor money to answer. In Massachusetts, angry farmers closed courts over debt. Whether the danger was as big as speakers claimed is a grown-up argument. The exhibit in 1787 was: what can this government actually *do*?

The meeting in Philadelphia was supposed to *revise* the Articles. The Convention proposed a replacement instead, and a new path to say yes: nine states, not every state legislature. Honesty names that. It is not a smear. It is the record.

Publius sold union as safety, credit, and commerce — not as a patriotic song. The first letters are a brief against a league that cannot do the jobs of a government.

A child does not need the court essay. The little-band omit list keeps Hamilton's judiciary letter and Madison's counting letter out of this booklet. What a child needs is the kitchen version: a team that cannot collect snack money cannot buy snacks. A country that cannot collect what it promised cannot keep promises.

Shays' Rebellion in Massachusetts is the domestic exhibit speakers used. Farmers — many of them veterans — closed courts over debt and taxes. The Confederation could not help Massachusetts. Historians still argue whether the danger was oversold. Still ask the child-sized question: if your team cannot help when one room is in trouble, is it a team or a name?

The Annapolis meeting in 1786 was supposed to talk trade. Five states sent twelve men. The next May's meeting in Philadelphia became a meeting about everything. Speed is part of the story. These letters were written against a deadline and against other letters in the *New-York Journal*. Treat them as briefs under fire, not as a sleepy textbook.

Brutus feared a government that could do too much. Publius feared a government that could do too little. Both fears can sit on the table. This chapter does not smash them into one word called "freedom."

### ***Words to Remember***

*"firm league of friendship" — Articles of Confederation (the first American constitution, 1781)*

That means: the states promised to be friends. A promise is not a tax collector.

### *Big Idea*

The Federalist letters begin as a brief against a league that could not tax, trade fairly, or keep promises. Union, for Publius, was a security argument before it was a song.

### *Try This*

1. Put ten pennies in a cup labeled “team.” Write IOU on a slip. See whether the slip buys a snack. 2. Draw two rulebooks. Label one “asks the states.” Label one “makes a rule for people.” 3. Tell a grown-up one job a team must be able to do or the team is only a name.

### *Ask a Grown-Up*

When a group cannot collect what it promised, what breaks first — the snack, the trip, or the trust?

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## Chapter 5: Extra Promises on a List



*Illustration for Chapter 5*

Some New Yorkers said: we will not say yes to this Constitution unless you write down extra promises. Promises like speech, worship, and a fair process if the government comes after you.



Hamilton, writing as Publius, argued that a list of rights was the wrong tool. The Constitution, he said, only gives the new government listed powers. Why reserve what was never given? He also worried that listing rights might make people think unlisted ones were gone. He pointed to limits already in the 1787 text: no religious test for office, jury in criminal cases, and other bars.

He lost that political argument.

Massachusetts, Virginia, New York, and other states said yes with recommended amendments. New York's list was long. Madison, who had thought a list unnecessary in 1788, introduced amendments in the First Congress in 1789. They became the Bill of Rights in 1791.

One of those sentences — the Ninth Amendment — says the list shall not be read as if it were all the rights the people kept. That is Hamilton's worry, turned into a shield.

Hamilton did not “oppose rights.” He opposed a *list* as the main tool. The Anti-Federalists lost the ratification vote and won the first ten amendments. That is the pedagogical fact. Do not turn them into villains or into the only heroes.

A child can hold two papers. Paper A: the 1787 rule book without the list. Paper B: the list added later. Publius did not write Paper B. Treating the Federalist letters as the source of free speech has the family tree wrong.

The genealogy of those promises runs through 1776, the state constitutions, the ratification fight, and 1791. Not through Publius as sole source. Little-band sentence for Hamilton's worry: he thought the list might make people forget the rights not on the list. So they added a sentence that says the list is not all of them.

Madison is both Publius and the man who introduced the list. That is not a cartoon of hypocrisy for a child. It is a person learning from the conventions he had to win. Teach the learning. Do not teach a smear.

### **Words to Remember**

*“The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people.” — Ninth Amendment (National Archives)*

That means: the list is not all of them.

### **Big Idea**

Hamilton thought structure would protect liberty. Opponents demanded parchment promises. America kept both. The list is an Anti-Federalist victory written into a Federalist frame.

### *Try This*

1. Write three promises on sticky notes. Put them on a door. Leave one promise in your pocket. Ask: does the door list mean the pocket promise is gone? 2. With a grown-up, find Amendments 1–10 in a pocket Constitution. Count them on your fingers. 3. Practice this sentence: “They lost the vote and won the list.”

### *Ask a Grown-Up*

Which family rules are written on the fridge, and which rules everybody still knows even though they are not on the fridge?

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## Chapter 6: New York Said Yes Late



*Illustration for Chapter 6*

Publius wrote “To the People of the State of New York.” The people of New York, in 1788, elected a convention that was mostly against the Constitution. The letters did not flip the countryside.

The convention met at Poughkeepsie. Hamilton and Jay were in the room as delegates. Madison was in Virginia. What turned the room was news, not footnotes. New Hampshire said yes. That made nine states. The Constitution would operate without New York. Then Virginia said yes. Isolation, not a conversion by essay, became the problem for the no side.

On 26 July 1788 New York voted 30–27 to ratify. It also asked for more promises in writing and sent a circular letter about amendments. New York was the eleventh state. It said yes late, after the instrument already existed.

Do not teach “the essays won New York.” A grown-up who wants that story should read Pauline Maier. This booklet tells the child-sized truth: New York said yes late, and asked for more promises in writing.

The letters survived because later Americans needed a commentary. Courts quoted them. Teachers assigned them. Use is not the same as winning the first vote. Magna Carta had the same kind of afterlife: a local fight became a store of arguments.

Magna Carta is a charter forced from a king. The Declaration is a public claim of right. The Constitution is a machine. The Federalist is the brief that tried to prove the machine could work. Four objects, four jobs. Do not mash them into one word called “the founding.”

Both sides claimed 1776. Brutus heard a new distant sovereign. Publius said a league of sovereign states could not keep the independence the Declaration announced. Put both claims on the kitchen table. Whig history — they lost, so they were wrong — is how a child gets a mascot instead of a chain.

If you remember only three things from this booklet, remember these: the letters are a pitch, not the rule book; groups will not vanish, so jobs must watch each other; extra promises got written down after the fight. Everything else in these pages is how those three stay honest.

The older booklets take the court essay, the counting essay, and the ugly mixed-character paragraph. This one stops at the newspaper, the groups, the split jobs, the empty cup, the list, and the late yes.

### ***Words to Remember***

*“To the People of the State of New York.” — The address line of the Publius essays*

That means: these letters had a local job. They were trying to win one state’s yes.

### ***Big Idea***

New York ratified 30–27 after other states had already said yes. The essays are a classic that lost their first election and won the syllabus.



### *Try This*

1. Make a paper chain of four links: Magna Carta, Declaration, Constitution, newspaper letters. Point to which link is the pitch. 2. Vote in a tiny family poll 3 to 2. Then add a sticky note of extra promises. That is a child's picture of Poughkeepsie, not a copy of 1788. 3. Tell someone younger: saying yes late is still saying yes — and asking for more writing is allowed.

### *Ask a Grown-Up*

When we join something after it has already started, what extra promises do we still need in writing?

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### **For the Grown-Up Reader**

This elementary booklet follows Harry's little-band map: "the newspaper that tried to explain the rules." It omits Federalist 78 (judgment without sword) and Federalist 54 (slavery / mixed character), per the research handoff. Ugly adult fights — originalism, who wrote which essay, whether the Convention exceeded the Articles — stay out of the child's mouth. Kitchen versions of faction, split jobs, an empty treasury, a list of promises, and a late ratification stay in.

Quotes are from the 1788 McLean title; Madison's air-to-fire line in Federalist 10 (Avalon); the angels line in Federalist 51 (Avalon); the Articles' "firm league of friendship"; the Ninth Amendment (National Archives); and Publius's address line. Paraphrase is marked as paraphrase. The booklet does not claim the essays wrote the Constitution, won New York, or invented the Bill of Rights.

If a child asks about courts with life tenure, three-fifths, or "Publius was one genius," that conversation belongs with you. The middle and high booklets take those texts on.

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### **About WisdomForge**

WisdomForge turns founding documents and great thinkers into booklets for every age. Each figure or document gets four booklets: ages 5–10, 11–14, 15–18, and adults. The same text, told at the right depth. Because the Federalist essays are not a costume of the Constitution. They are a New York brief, and every generation has to tell the pitch from the product again.

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