Changing the Charter

Trace the steps required to amend the U.S. Constitution.

SS24.USG.3b "Summarize the formal process of amending the Constitution of the United States."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the two stages of an amendment, circle each required fraction, and number the two proposal routes and the two ratification routes. Use your marks to trace how a proposed change becomes part of the Constitution.

From Proposal to Amendment

1. Imagine a proposed amendment that would change how federal elections are conducted. A popular idea alone cannot rewrite the Constitution. Article V sets a formal path with two separate stages: proposal and ratification. The first stage puts a specific amendment before the states; the second determines whether it becomes part of the Constitution. Supporters might collect signatures or win public attention, but neither action substitutes for either stage. The high voting thresholds require agreement across institutions and states rather than a simple national majority. The process concerns changes to the Constitution itself, not the passage of an ordinary federal law.

2. Most proposed amendments begin in Congress. To propose one, two-thirds of the members voting in the House and two-thirds of the members voting in the Senate must approve the same text, provided each chamber has a quorum. Article V also provides another route: if two-thirds of state legislatures apply, Congress must call a convention for proposing amendments. Such a convention could propose an amendment, but it could not make that amendment part of the Constitution by itself. Neither a presidential signature nor a presidential veto is part of Article V's amendment process. Both proposal routes lead to the same next stage, ratification.

3. After an amendment is proposed, Congress chooses the method of ratification: approval by state legislatures or by special conventions in the states. Whichever method Congress selects, three-fourths of the states must ratify the same proposed text. Today, that means 38 of the 50 states. Neither a statewide referendum nor a national popular vote can replace ratification by states under Article V. Once enough states ratify, the amendment becomes part of the Constitution without further approval by Congress or the president. The Twenty-First Amendment used state conventions for ratification; the other ratified amendments used state legislatures.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Summarize the two stages of the amendment process. Why is public support alone insufficient?

2. Trace the congressional route from a proposed text through the end of the proposal stage. What votes are required?

3. Trace the alternative proposal route. Explain why completing that route does not yet change the Constitution.

4. Summarize both ratification routes. Who selects the route, and what approval is required under either one?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Your town's civic club wants an amendment guaranteeing access to clean drinking water. Members think a petition and a presidential signature will add it to the Constitution. Write a 75 to 100 word advisory note that corrects them and traces both proposal routes, both ratification routes, the required fractions, and who chooses the ratification route.

ANSWER KEY

Changing the Charter

GRADE 12 · SS24.USG.3b

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the two stages of an amendment, circle each required fraction, and number the two proposal routes and the two ratification routes. Use your marks to trace how a proposed change becomes part of the Constitution. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Summarize the two stages of the amendment process. Why is public support alone insufficient?	**An amendment must first be proposed and then ratified. Signatures or public attention cannot replace either stage.**
2	Trace the congressional route from a proposed text through the end of the proposal stage. What votes are required?	**Two-thirds of the members voting in each chamber must approve the same text, with a quorum present in each chamber. The proposal then goes to the states for ratification.**
3	Trace the alternative proposal route. Explain why completing that route does not yet change the Constitution.	**Applications from two-thirds of state legislatures require Congress to call a proposing convention. A convention can propose an amendment, but the states must still ratify it.**
4	Summarize both ratification routes. Who selects the route, and what approval is required under either one?	**Congress selects ratification by state legislatures or state conventions. Under either route, three-fourths of the states, currently 38, must ratify the proposed text.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Your petition could build support for a clean water amendment, but it cannot propose or ratify one under Article V. Congress could propose the amendment with a two-thirds vote in each chamber. Alternatively, applications from two-thirds of state legislatures would require Congress to call a proposing convention. Congress then chooses ratification by state legislatures or state conventions. Either way, three-fourths of the states, currently 38, must ratify the proposal before it joins the Constitution. The president does not sign or veto an amendment. Focus your campaign on persuading lawmakers and states to complete these steps.

Accept equivalent summaries that distinguish proposal from ratification and correctly assign each threshold and choice of route. For Part 3, check the 75 to 100 word limit and all requested corrections.