New York’s Constitution

A Plan for Government
The current state constitution of New York was adopted in 1894 and changed in 1938. Like the United States Constitution, it organizes state government into three branches and it protects people’s liberties. It guarantees citizens the right to vote. It also gives people freedom to follow any religion or no religion and the right to say or write what they choose. New York’s constitution guarantees people accused of breaking the law the right to a fair trial.

A Living Document
New York’s constitution is called a living document because it grows and changes over time as amendments are added to it. Sometimes, an amendment is suggested by the state legislature. The Senate and the Assembly must then approve it. Amendments may also be proposed by conventions. New York voters must approve amendments proposed by conventions. Services such as public schools are provided by New York’s constitution and government.

Changes to New York’s Constitution

1846 The terms of senators changed from four years to two.

1894 The present state constitution is adopted.

1938 Women take part in New York’s constitutional convention for the first time.

Before You Read
Find and underline a form of each vocabulary word or term.

living document noun, a document, the meaning of which changes over time

public school noun, a school provided by the government

After You Read
What right does the constitution give people accused of breaking the law? Highlight the sentence that tells the answer.

Who must approve amendments to the constitution that are proposed by a convention? Circle the sentence that tells the answer.

SKILL Reading Charts
Which happened first: the changing of a senator’s term from four years to two, or the adoption of the present constitution? Circle the answer.