



THE VIRGINIA RATIFICATION CONVENTION

**A re-creation of the Federalist and Anti-Federalist conflict,
debating whether or not Virginia should ratify the Constitution**

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PURPOSE

Why was Virginia's ratification of the Constitution of 1787 so important?

Americans tend to trace our country's political history from 1789, when our Constitution first went into effect. To fully appreciate the political philosophy and system that Americans enjoy today, however, we cannot overlook the era 1781-1788, the "Critical Period" in our history, when democracy was on trial. The shaping of present-day American government took place during those years, and, to say the least, it was a time of grave tension and forceful debate, of heartfelt conviction, and, on occasion, even personality assassination. This re-creation will result in a tense debate of 18th-century issues that are still relevant today. Specifically, your students will experience the following:

Knowledge

1. Eighteenth-century concepts about government responsibility to people and subsequent attitudes and opinions about the same
2. The main issues debated at Richmond, Virginia, in 1788: weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation, the necessity of having three balanced branches in a federal government, whether America is "doomed" without a strong central government, and whether individuals need a strong civil rights guarantee from the federal government as well as from their state.

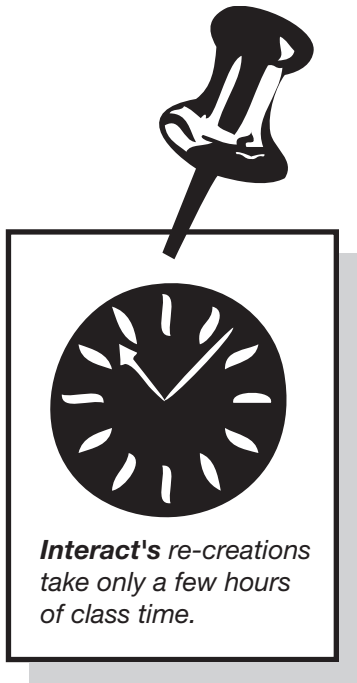
Attitudes

1. Appreciating the truth contained in both the Federalist and Anti-Federalist positions
2. Appreciating the hopes and fears that statesmen and their contemporaries experienced during the 1780s as they presented arguments in behalf of their respective positions
3. Appreciating how compromise is not a weakness, but a strength of a strong democratic political system

Skills

1. Assuming an historical identity, standing up, and speaking convincingly as that identity before a whole class
2. Listening carefully enough to be able to take specific detail notes under generalization headings

OVERVIEW



Four class periods—or days—are needed for this re-creation.

Day 1

After an interest catcher that makes students aware that they do have assumptions about the role of government in their lives, students read about the Virginia Ratification Convention and what happened there. This Background Essay is in the Student Guide. Then they are clustered into three groups: 1) Federalist speakers; 2) Anti-Federalist speakers; 3) Kentuckians, who represent an uncommitted “swing” group. Group members receive separate handouts which they study in order to contribute to the next day’s debate.

Days 2-3

The room is changed into a special debate arrangement. The main issues argued at the Virginia Ratification Convention (arranged as three resolutions) are now debated by the Federalist speakers for the three resolutions and the Anti-Federalists speakers against the three resolutions. After each pro/con pair speak, specific questions of specific speakers are asked by the speaker’s opponents or by the Kentuckians. After debate on the three resolutions and summation from each side, a vote is taken on ratification. A simple majority then decides the issue.

Day 4

Either in study pairs or activity groups students debrief what happened during the previous days’ debate. They pinpoint 18th-century concepts and attitudes about national government, its strengths and weaknesses, and possible results (impacts) of changes in government. They then discuss how our changing government today relates to the events of the 1780s. As a result, students draw conclusions about the scope and function of our nation’s government under the Constitution.

SETUP DIRECTIONS



Certain roles are so important that only you should determine who plays them.



Note: *You will not need to duplicate the bulleted items the first time you use this re-creation, for Interact has given you different colored handouts for those students playing roles. All other necessary items are in the Student Guide.*

- 1. Assigning roles** Decide in advance how you wish to divide your students into the three groups. Since no student has a larger responsibility than making a two-minute speech and a one-minute answer to a question, you may just have students pull numbered slips to determine who is to be in which group—if your group is roughly homogeneous in ability. However, you may wish to insure that all three groups have a fair number of “vocal” persons; that is, individuals either capable of, or desirous of, speaking on their feet. **Note well:** After duplicating a role assignment sheet, fill in its spaces with students’ names so that you will always know the debate’s sequence. (You may also want to give each student a copy.)
- 2. Handouts** See note at left the first time you use this re-creation. For subsequent classes, duplicate the number in parentheses, using the masters in this Teacher Guide.
 - FEDERALIST ARGUMENTS (seven—one page per speaker)
 - FEDERALIST SUMMARY (one—for Madison)
 - ANTI-FEDERALIST ARGUMENTS (seven—one page per speaker)
 - ANTI-FEDERALIST SUMMARY (one—for Henry)
 - FEDERALIST QUESTIONS (three, cut pages in half vertically, one per questioner)
 - ANTI-FEDERALIST QUESTIONS (two, cut pages in half vertically, one per questioner)
 - KENTUCKIAN QUESTIONS (two, cut pages in half vertically, one per questioner)

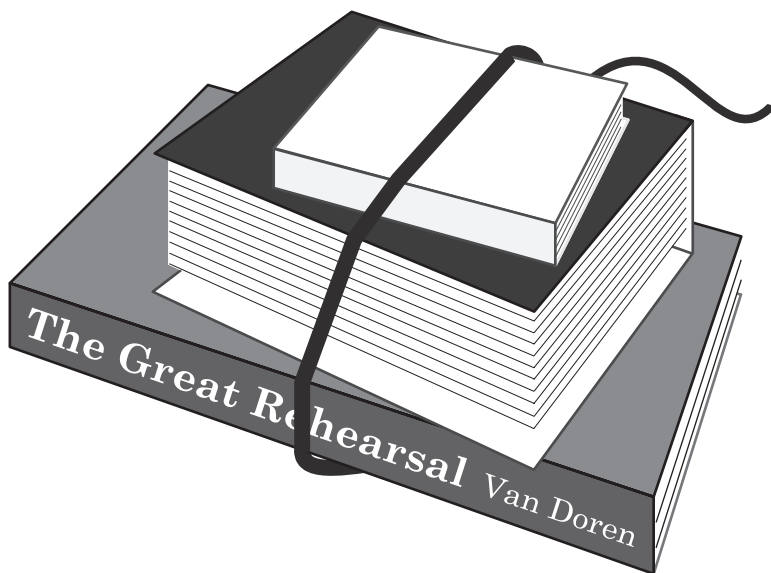
Optional:

 - * ROLE ASSIGNMENTS: VIRGINIA RATIFICATION DEBATE (one copy for your use)

If your class is larger than 27 students, you will likely wish to directly involve unassigned students by assigning them as “back-ups” for any roles you wish. In such a case, duplicate the appropriate materials for them.
- 3. Follow-up reading** Since some of your students will be stimulated by the heated quality of the debate, consider asking your librarian to set up a Constitutional History Reserve Shelf in the school library for your students. On this shelf place books such as listed in the Bibliography on the next page. You can then encourage your students to read in these books before or after the debate.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- Bowen, Catherine, *Miracle at Philadelphia*, Little, Brown, and Company, Boston, 1966.
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- Madison, James, et al, *The Federalist Papers*.
- Van Doren, Carl, *The Great Rehearsal*, The Viking Press, New York, 1948.
- Welch, Joseph N., *The Constitution*, Houghton-Mifflin Company, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1956.



DAILY TEACHING DIRECTIONS - 1



Also assign your students to read the chapter(s) in their textbook covering the writing and ratifying of the Constitution of 1787.

Before Day 1

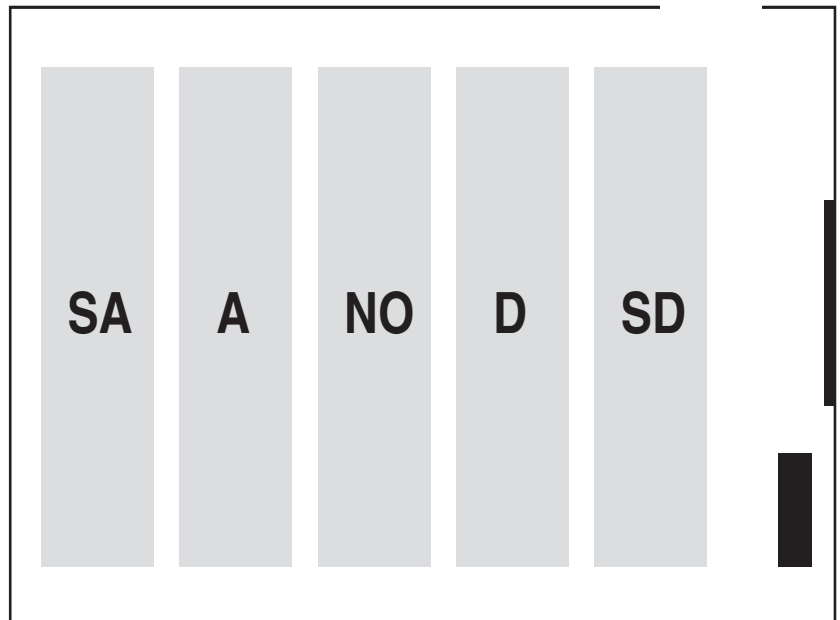
(Could be one or more days in advance of Day 1)

1. Consider showing any film or filmstrip that will appropriately introduce the constitutional situation during the 1780s.
2. Point out how the audio-visual you have shown relates to the upcoming re-creation of the Virginia Ratification Convention.
3. Assign or encourage students to read in your textbook or in books you and your librarian have gathered on a reserve shelf labeled Constitutional History.

Day 1

(Some of the following teaching directions are rather brief since the instructional sequence is written out in considerable detail under Procedure in the Student Guide.)

1. If you have shown no film or filmstrip and want to awaken students to what is going to happen, consider using this motivator:
 - a. Ask all students to stand and slide all desks into about one-fourth of the classroom area.
 - b. Draw the following—or something such as the following—on your classroom floor. It is to represent areas on your classroom floor.



- c. Tell students that the **SA** area means: Strongly Agree; **A** = Agree; **NO** = No opinion or not sure; **D** = Disagree; **SD** = Strongly Disagree.

DAILY TEACHING DIRECTIONS - 2

- d. Now explain that you are going to read a statement, after which all students are to move into the areas symbolizing their convictions about the statement. (If you prefer, you can write this statement on the chalkboard before class began.)
 - e. Read this statement: *A person serving as a state government official can make a more intelligent decision concerning the needs of the people of his state than a person serving as a federal official. (For example, a governor of a state will make better decisions about his/her state problems than the president of the United States.)*
 - f. Have students move into their “conviction areas.”
 - g. Read a second statement: *Tax dollars raised by your state government for state purposes are more important than those raised by the federal government for national purposes. (For example, local property taxes supporting schools are more important than federal taxes supporting highway construction.)*
 - h. Have students move again.
 - i. Read a third statement: *In legal disputes in which state laws/regulations are in conflict with those of the federal government, the state’s position should be upheld. (For example, state laws which require separate but equal schools for children of different races should be superior to a federal law requiring racial integration.)*
 - j. Have students move again.
 - k. Have students rearrange the classroom and sit in their regular desks.
 - l. Conduct a brief general discussion of the significance anyone can find in where persons were standing/moving.
2. Hand out the Student Guides and have students read the Purpose.
 3. Generally explain what is going to happen during the next few days.
 4. Have students read the Background Essay and the Ten Key Issues of Debate.
 5. Now have them turn to the Procedure section in the Student Guide and cover numbers 1-6 under Day 1.
 6. Of course, you have the option of giving the students an extra day to prepare. Day 2, in such a case, might consist of the following:
 - a. Students in the same group could try out their speeches on one another in conference rooms around school.
 - b. Students interested in in-depth reading could read articles or book chapters on constitutional history.



Encourage your students to practice giving their speeches and asking their questions—aloud!

DAILY TEACHING DIRECTIONS - 3

" ... self-evident ... "

" ... consent of
the governed ... "

" ... to alter or
to abolish it ... "

Days 2-3 (One or two days)

1. Follow numbers 1-3 under Days 2-3 in the Student Guide.
2. Either yesterday or today before the debate begins, you might like to deliver a brief lecture in which you give some additional information about the Virginia Ratification Convention. Cover some of the following:
 - a. The formation of and nature of the colonial governments...the significance of the concept of "salutary neglect" to the typical colonist of the 1770s...the subsequent "intolerable interference" by the British in American colonial affairs beginning in the 1760s... key events which led to the American Revolution...an interpretation of what the writers of the Declaration of Independence meant by certain phrases in that document.
 - b. Highlight the subtle origins of the Constitutional Convention. Specifically point out that many Americans were shocked when they understood the intent of men such as Alexander Hamilton, who wished to write a complete new Constitution.
 - c. Try to point out that taxation as we think of it today had a different connotation in 1788.
 - d. Try to bring out some of the lesser known facts surrounding the Richmond convention itself: 1) Cobbled streets were covered with dirt to allow the delegates to concentrate on their business. 2) At one time, a shattering thunderclap caused the delegates to scurry to the middle of the room. 3) All delegates present did not strut about in silk clothing, powdered wigs, delivering eloquent speeches before a hushed audience. Such notions are misleading at best. Except for Madison's, Henry's, and several others' ease at public speaking, there was cursing, "ain'ts" and "don'ts," and even a challenge to duel. Also, the convention was held in a closed room in the midst of a humid Virginia summer; thus flies, unpleasant body odors, and other unsanitary factors were present.
3. Use the role assignment sheet during the debate so that you always know during the debate who is to speak next.
4. If your debate catches fire and takes more time than was expected, simply cover Resolution 3 at the beginning of Day 3.

DAILY TEACHING DIRECTIONS - 4

Day 4

1. See numbers 1-2 under the Student Guide's Procedure section.
2. When you organize your study pairs or activity groups for debriefing, be sure you mix all three groups (Federalists, Anti-Federalists, Kentuckians). Don't have any study pair or activity group be only one political/governmental persuasion. (An easy way to do this is to have students number off 1 through 5; then have all 1s sit together, all 2s sit together, etc.)
3. Have each member of a study pair or activity group record his/her reactions to the five debriefing statements (see #1 under Day 4, Procedure, in the Student Guide).
4. Pull together study pairs' or activity groups' thinking by having a general discussion. Two ways to do this are:

Hot Seat or Activity Group

Option 1: Select one representative from each activity group to sit on a "hot seat" along with other activity groups' representatives. Conduct a general discussion of the five statements .

Option 2: If you have been using study pairs, group the study pairs into five activity groups. Then give each activity group one of these debriefing statements: #a, b, c, d, or e. Tell the activity groups that they have 5-10 minutes to prepare a brief report to the class on the group's thinking about the statement. Finally, have each activity group make a brief report to the class.