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U.S. History Readers: Conflicts and Resolutions

The Constitution and the Federalist Era

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The Constitution and the Federalist Era

Table of Contents

Chapter 1	The Articles of Confederation and the Critical Period	1
Chapter 2	Fifty-Five Men Meet to Write a Constitution	13
Chapter 3	The Issue of Representation: By State or Population	41
Chapter 4	Local Control vs. National Authority	57
Chapter 5	How Power Was Divided between National and State Governments	71
Chapter 6	Three Branches of Government and How Laws are Made.....	85
Chapter 7	The Bill of Rights	97
Chapter 8	Slavery, Amending the Constitution, and Ratifying It.....	113
Chapter 9	Hamilton and Jefferson: The Men, their Philosophies and Hamilton's Program	129
Chapter 10	The Whiskey Rebellion.....	147
Chapter 11	By The French Revolution, Sedition Act, and the Kentucky Resolution	159

The Constitution and the Federalist Era

As the title implies, this unit has two major but interconnected sections. The first focuses on the writing of the U.S. Constitution. The unit starts with a chapter on the Articles of Confederation and a brief explanation of the problems that could not be solved under the ineffective government the Articles set up. The section continues with brief political biographies of 23 of the Founding Fathers who were most active during the Constitutional Convention. Students are supplied with information necessary to reenact the Convention's debates on the issues of giving large states proportional representation and on dividing power between national and state governments. The remainder of the first section explains how the Founders resolved the issues of including a bill of rights, establishing a system of checks and balances, and deciding what to do about slavery and the slave trade. The section concludes with excerpts from a debate over ratifying the U.S. Constitution that poses the issue of liberty vs. order and powers of states vs. powers of the national government.

The second section of this unit starts with a comparison of Thomas Jefferson's and Alexander Hamilton's views, using excerpts from their own writings on topics such as industrializing America, helping the wealthy vs. assisting the average American, and the need for a bill of rights. Needless to say, these issues exposed a fundamental philosophical fault line between the founders of the forerunners of the present Democratic and Republican parties, and are still important today. The chapter presents Hamilton's program in a pro-and-con format and asks students how much the program reflects Hamilton's philosophy and what was best for the fledgling country. Subsequent chapters deal with the Whiskey Rebellion, the Sedition Act, and the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions.

This is not a traditional text. Part I of each chapter raises an issue central to the historical period to which it pertains. Students are asked factual questions, often through the use of graphic organizers, to make sure they understand the basic facts integral to the episode the chapter covers and the concepts needed to understand the period. Each chapter contains a thought question that requires students to formulate answers based on the facts and concepts in the readings as well as their own ideas. Many lessons/chapters, like those on the writing of the Constitution, lend themselves to debates and/or simulations.

The second part of each chapter contains information that is more challenging than the narrative in Part I and requires higher-level thinking skills. It usually goes into more depth than the basic material but often provides a bridge to connect the chapter to a subsequent episode. Each chapter can serve as an in-depth lesson to supplement the basal text or can be used entirely to replace it with materials to encourage independent thought and informed discussions. Finally, each lesson includes vocabulary words and key terms in a flash card format; these can be used either for review or reference.

Chapter 1. The Articles of Confederation and the Critical Period Teacher Page

Overview:

This chapter on the Articles of Confederation covers both the Articles and the problems during the aptly named “Critical Period” when the government under this constitution could not resolve the problems the states faced. Quotations from the Articles themselves provide students with the information they need to draw their own conclusions about their weaknesses. The “For Further Consideration” section reviews the problems the nation faced during the Critical Period under three headings: Foreign Policy, Quarrels in the East, and Finances. Another section covers the Land Ordinance and Northwest Territory acts. Students are asked what changes in the Articles of Confederation would have made the government more effective.

Objectives:

Students will:

- Identify areas of weaknesses in the Articles of Confederation
- understand the need for a functioning executive branch of government and an independent judiciary
- learn of four important problems that the nation could not resolve under the Articles of Confederation

Strategies:

Before class: Assign the chapter either up to or including the “For Further Consideration” section and inform students they will be expected to write their answers to all the Student Activities questions covering the assigned section(s).

In class: Review students’ answers to questions concerning a need for a constitution and the most important characteristic of the Articles. Proceed by reviewing their answers to the graphic organizer, which requires them to summarize important clauses of the Articles of Confederation and share their opinions of each of these clauses. If you assigned the “For Further Consideration” section, review each major heading and then ask whether the problems mentioned warrant changes in the Articles of Confederation. If you did not assign it, ask students to read it for homework and use same method as suggested.

Chapter 1. The Articles of Confederation and the Critical Period I-Chart

	What were the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation?	How did the "Critical Period" earn its name?	What were the major problems during this period?
What I already know			
What I learned from Chapter 1, Part I			
What I learned from Chapter 2, Part II			
What I still would like to learn about this subject			

Vocabulary for Chapter 1—The Articles of Confederation and the Critical Period

session

alternative

appropriating

preside

common treasury

postponed

constitution

confederation

Vocabulary for Chapter 1—The Articles of Confederation and the Critical Period

<p>A meeting or a series of meetings of an official body</p>	<p>Having something different that can serve as a substitute</p>	<p>A place in which a government or a similar entity places its money and from which it pays what it owes</p>
<p>Describes the act of putting money aside for a specific purpose</p>	<p>To run a meeting of or be in charge of a group of people</p>	<p>A group of independent states that meet together for some common purposes</p>
<p>To have put something off until a later time</p>	<p>In politics, it refers to a document which states how a government is organized and what powers it has and does not have</p>	

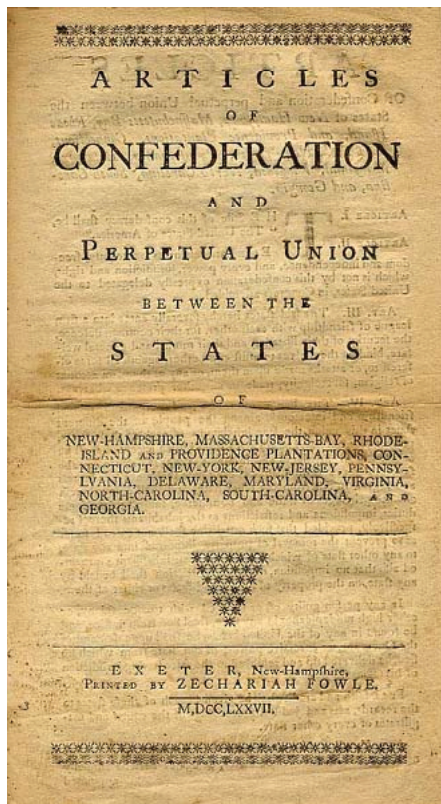
Chapter 1

The Articles of Confederation and the “Critical Period”

Introduction

When the American colonists declared their independence from England, they had a government to speak for them but they did not have a constitution to outline what the government could and could not do. Therefore, their government, the Continental Congress, appointed a committee to write a constitution for the colonies.

In this chapter, you will learn enough about this new constitution—the Articles of Confederation—to discover its weaknesses and make suggestions to improve it. You may also be asked to decide whether the problems the country could not solve under this constitution were the result of the flaws you detected.



The Articles of Confederation

On July 12, 1776, the Committee appointed to draw up the nation’s first constitution submitted a plan to Congress that they called the Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union. Congress made many changes and finally approved of the Articles in November 1777. The new plan was sent to the states for their agreement. However, before this new constitution could finally be agreed to, all 13 states had to accept it. There were many things that some states did not like about the Articles. For instance, Maryland refused to agree to the plan unless all states gave up their claims to land west of the Appalachian Mountains. This postponed final acceptance until 1781, and by this time, the war with England was almost over. It was not until after the Revolution that many Americans knew the real weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation.

This chapter allows you to look at the most important parts of the Articles of Confederation. Later, you will read about some of the problems the country faced while these Articles served as the first constitution for the United States. After examining the Articles and studying the problems facing the country, you may be asked to suggest changes in this old constitution that would make it easier to solve these problems.

The following are quotes from the Articles of Confederation. By reading them, you will have the chance to decide for yourself what was wrong with the first constitution for the not-so-united states of America.

THE ARTICLES OF CONFEDERATION:

Article II. Each state retains its sovereignty (powers), freedom, and independence, and every Power, and right, which is not by this confederation expressly [specifically and clearly] delegated (given) to the United States, in Congress.

Article III. States hereby enter into a firm league of friendship with each other, for their common defense, the security (protection of) their liberties, and their mutual and general welfare, binding [promising] to assist [help] each other against all force or attacks made on them.

Article V. Each state shall have one vote.

Article VI. No state, shall...make any agreement, alliance or treaty with any other country without consent of Congress, nor shall any state engage in war without the agreement of the united states in congress assembled.

Article VIII. [1]. All charges of war and all other expenses for the common defense or general welfare...shall be paid out of a common treasury, which shall be supplied by the states, in proportion (according to) the value of the land in each state.

[2]. The taxes for paying that proportion shall be set and collected by the states...

Article IX. [1]. The united states in congress assembled shall have the sole [only] power of determining [deciding] on peace and war [and] entering into treaties and alliances.

[2]. The Congress shall be the last resort [make the final judgment] in all disputes and differences that may arise between two or more states.

Article IX [1]. The united states in congress assembled shall have authority to appoint...a “Committee of the States” to consist of one delegate from each state, and to appoint such other committees and civil offices as may be necessary for managing the general affairs of the united states under their direction—to appoint one of their number to preside [as president] This Committee [or these committees] may carry out the power of the united states. [this provision establishes the executive branch of the U.S. government]

[2]. For important matters of government such as declaring war, making treaties, coining or borrowing money, appropriating money, or raising an army or navy, or admitting new states, 9 of the 13 states must agree.

Article XIII. [1]. Every state shall abide by [follow] the decisions of the united states in congress assembled...and the Union shall be perpetual [forever];

[2]. nor shall any alteration [changes or amendments] to the Articles of Confederation] be made unless such alteration be...confirmed [agreed upon] by the legislatures of every state.

Student Activities

A. Student Exercises

1. What is a constitution and why should every country's government have one?
2. Write a brief statement (no more than 25 words) characterizing what kind of a government the Articles of Confederation created.