

Lesson Plan

Articles of Confederation vs. US Constitution

Book: *Creating the Constitution*

Series: Foundations of Our Nation

Level: Navigator

Objective

To help students compare and contrast two different historical documents, summarizing the process by which they were created as well as the results of that process.

Supplies

- *Creating the Constitution*
- The Heritage Guide to the Constitution: <http://www.heritage.org/constitution>
- Articles of Confederation vs. US Constitution Guided Reading Assignment (attached)
- Pencils and paper

Before the Activity

Read *Creating the Constitution*, or assign it to students to read on their own.

Print enough copies of the Articles of Confederation vs. US Constitution GRA so each student can have one. Cut the GRAs apart so each list of questions is on a separate sheet of paper.

Activity

Have students compare and contrast the Articles of Confederation with the US Constitution by answering the questions on the Guided Reading Assignment. Students should write their answers on a separate sheet of paper.

Evaluation

Use the attached answer key to score the students' answers, for a total of 15 points.

Standards

This lesson may be used to address the Common Core State Standards' reading informational texts standards, grade 5 (RI 5.2; RI 5.3).

Articles of Confederation vs. US Constitution GRA

1. Write a paragraph summarizing how the Articles of Confederation was created and ratified.
2. What were two major problems with the Articles of Confederation?
3. Write a paragraph summarizing how the US Constitution was created and ratified.
4. How was the US Constitution different than the Articles of Confederation?
5. How did these differences help the US Constitution prevent the problems that the Articles of Confederation had?

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Articles of Confederation vs. US Constitution GRA ANSWER KEY

1. Write a paragraph summarizing how the Articles of Confederation were created and ratified. **(4 points)**

Answers will vary, but should include some of the following:

- The document that became the Articles of Confederation was written by 13 members of the Continental Congress. This group was led by John Dickinson.
- The document was ready in November 1777. It was debated by Congress for months, then sent to each of 13 states for approval.
- In December 1777, Virginia became the first state to ratify the Articles of Confederation.
- The new government, known as the Congress of the Confederation, took effect in March 1781.

2. What were two major problems with the Articles of Confederation? **(2 points)**

- The Articles kept most of the power with the states, so the new government was weak and struggled to pay back the debt from the war. For example, the Articles didn't say the states had to pay taxes, so many did not.
- There was no national army, and many people worried that depending on state militias would make it difficult to get an army together quickly if the new country was attacked.

3. Write a paragraph summarizing how the US Constitution was created and ratified. **(4 points)**

Answers will vary, but should include some of the following:

- To solve these problems, a meeting was called for in September 1786. The meeting, known as the Constitutional Convention and led by George Washington, began May 1787. This convention lasted almost four months.
- The document was hotly debated, especially how representation in Congress would be determined. The end result was a seven-part document proposing a government with three branches (executive, legislative, and judicial). This three-branch form was known as the Virginia Plan and headed by James Madison.
- A final draft was ready September 1787 and sent to states to ratify. Nine of 13 states needed to ratify it.
- Delaware was the first state to ratify it in 1787. It was ratified by the ninth state in June 1788 and took effect on March 4, 1789.

4. How was the US Constitution different than the Articles of Confederation? **(2 points)**

Answers will vary, but should include some of the following:

- The US Constitution created three branches of the government: legislative, judicial, executive. This created a system of checks and balances to balance the power.
- The US Constitution made the federal government stronger. The government could now collect taxes and control the army.

5. How did these differences help prevent the problems with the Articles of Confederation? (3 points)

Answers will vary, but should include some of the following:

- A stronger federal government would not encounter the same problems of not being able to get states to cooperate.
- The newly created executive branch could help enforce the laws.
- The amendment process made it possible to modify the Constitution instead of having to completely create a new government.