



**FLORIDA JOINT CENTER
FOR CITIZENSHIP**

THE ARTICLES OF CONFEDERATION

SS.7.C.1.5 Identify how the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation led to the writing of the Constitution.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Lesson Summary.....	2
Suggested Student Activity Sequence	3
Student Activity Sheets & Reading Materials.....	4
Sources	8
Answer Keys.....	9
Civics Content Vocabulary	11
Essential Teacher Content Background Information	12

Lesson Summary

Essential Questions

What were the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation? How did the weaknesses lead to the writing of the Constitution?

NGSSS Benchmark

SS.7.C.1.5 Identify how the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation led to the writing of the Constitution.

Florida Standards

LAFS.68.RH.1.1

LAFS.68.RH.1.2

LAFS.68.RH.3.7

LAFS.68.WHST.1.1

LAFS.68.WHST.4.10

LAFS.7.SL.1.1

Overview

In this lesson, students will identify the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation and how understand those weaknesses led to the writing of the Constitution.

Learning Goal/Benchmark Clarification

- Students will identify the weaknesses of the government under the Articles of Confederation (i.e., Congress had no power to tax, to regulate trade, or to enforce its laws; the national government lacked a national court system [judicial branch] and central leadership [executive branch]; and changes to the Articles required unanimous consent of the 13 states).

Benchmark Content Limits

- Items should focus on the significance of the context of the document, but should not require students to recall passages from the document.

Civics EOC Reporting Category

Reporting Category 1 – Origins and Purposes of Law and Government

Suggested Time Frame

- Two 45-50 minute class periods

Civics Content Vocabulary

- Articles of Confederation, confederation, Constitutional Convention, debt, Shays's Rebellion

Instructional Strategies

KWL

Collaborative learning

Close reading of complex text

Analysis of primary sources

Materials

Computer to project websites and activity sheets

Highlighters for students to mark text

Student activity sheets:

- Articles of Confederation – KWL
- Articles of Confederation
- Excerpts of the U.S. Constitution

Student reading materials:

- Articles of Confederation

Lesson Activities and Daily Schedule

Please use the chart below to track activity completion.

Day	Task #	Steps in Lesson	Description	Completed? Yes/No
Day One	Task 1	1 & 2	Hook Activity	
	Task 2	3-9	Articles of Confederation KWL Activity	
	Task 3	10-15	Articles of Confederation Reading	
Day Two	Task 4	16-19	U.S. Constitution Activity	
	Task 5	20-23	What did I learn? KWL Activity	
	Task 6	24	Checking for Understanding	

Suggested Student Activity Sequence

1. To begin this lesson, place students into pairs and post the following question on the board: Imagine that the fifty states of the United States became fifty independent countries. How would the United States be different?
2. Provide a few minutes for the students to brainstorm with their partner and then share out.
3. Project the following image of the Articles of Confederation:
<https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=3#> .
4. Ask the students to identify the document and pass out the “Articles of Confederation – KWL” student activity sheet.
5. Instruct the students to work with their partner to complete the first column on the activity sheet by brainstorming what they think they know about the Articles of Confederation.
6. Have students share out.
7. Return student attention back to the activity sheet and instruct students to complete the second column by writing down some things they want to know about the Articles of Confederation. Instruct students to write these statements in the form of questions.
8. Have students share out and create a list of common questions on the board.
9. Share the following background information with students about what led to the Articles of Confederation and instruct students to take notes at the bottom of the “Articles of Confederation – KWL” student activity sheet. Key points to include:
 - In 1775, the Revolutionary War begins between the colonists and the British.
 - In 1776, the Declaration of Independence is signed.
 - The Revolutionary War continued until 1783.
 - After the Revolutionary War, the newly formed United States created the Articles of Confederation to give the new country a sense of unity.
10. Pass out the “Articles of Confederation” reading and student activity sheet.
11. Explain to students that they will read to understand the Articles of Confederation and how its’ weaknesses led to the writing of the U.S. Constitution.
12. Preview the activity sheet as a whole class by reading through the directions and each guiding question.
13. Provide time for students to read and answer the questions with their partner.
14. Have students share out their answers to the following question from their activity sheet: What were the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation? Teacher note: Use the Sample Answers section to guide this discussion.
15. Pose the following questions for discussion: “Why do you think these are weaknesses? How do you think the writers of the Constitution dealt with these weaknesses?” Instruct students to take notes during this discussion.
16. Explain to students that they will look at the relationship between the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation and the U.S. Constitution.
17. Move students into groups of four and pass out the “Excerpts of the U.S. Constitution” student activity sheet.
18. Explain to the students that their task is to read through each excerpt from the U.S. Constitution and identify how the excerpt relates to one of the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation.
19. Provide time for students to complete the activity sheet.
20. Have students share out.
21. Instruct students to take out their “Articles of Confederation – KWL” student activity sheet from the beginning of class.
22. Have students look at the “W” column and determine if any of their questions were answered. Instruct students to explain these answers in the “L – What did I learn?” column. Teacher Note: As an extension of the KWL chart, instruct students to add a second “L” column and ask them to answer the question: What do I want to learn more about?
23. Have students share some of the questions that are still unanswered. Brainstorm, as a whole class, places to look to get the remaining questions answered.
24. Checking for Understanding (Formative Assessment) Instruct students to write a well-crafted response using the following prompt:
Prompt
Write an argument explaining the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation. Cite specific evidence from the reading to support your argument.

Extension Suggestions:

1. Have students research their unanswered questions from the KWL chart and report answers to the class.
2. Instruct students to create two Wordles (www.wordle.net) using the text of the Articles of Confederation and the text of the U.S. Constitution. Using a Venn Diagram, compare the main ideas of the two documents.

Articles of Confederation – KWL

What do I think I know?	What do I want to know?	What did I learn?

Space for Class Discussion Note Taking

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The Articles of Confederation

The Articles of Confederation was written in 1776 and finally ratified, or approved, by the original thirteen states in 1781. Maryland was the last state to ratify the document in 1781. The confederation was the first government of the newly formed United States. A confederation is a government system where power is located with the independent states and there is little power in the central government. The desire for a confederation came from the colonists' experience under King George III from England. They wanted to create a system that wouldn't allow for unfair taxing or limiting individual rights.

Under the Articles of Confederation, most power was with the states. The articles stated that each colony was to act as an independent state, and that each state had the right to pass laws within their borders. The articles also established a weak national legislature to oversee interactions between the states.

Under the Articles of Confederation, states maintained their freedom and independence. As a result, states functioned in many ways as independent countries. For example, several states negotiated their own trade agreements with other countries, while other states established their own militaries.

With the states having the majority of government power, the central government had no control over the states' actions and people began to fear that this system of government was not working because the national government was too weak. The Congress did not have the power to tax, so it could not pay for the army and navy needed to defend the nation. It also couldn't regulate the trade agreements states were making with other countries. The Congress could also not enforce any laws they passed because there was no central leadership to make sure that laws were being enforced in each state or a central judicial system to interpret laws or settle disputes between states. Finally, if any changes were to be made to the Articles of Confederation, unanimous approval from all 13 states was required. This made it difficult to make any changes to the articles. As a result, the lack of powers held by the weak national Congress combined with each state's independent actions, raised concerns that the Articles of Confederation were not designed in a way to protect the new nation.

By 1786 the economy of the United States was struggling due to debt, or money owed, from the Revolutionary War and because states were arguing over boundary lines and taxes. This economic situation impacted individual states and also individual citizens, especially farmers and merchants. These circumstances led to Shays's Rebellion, a revolt by 2,000 western Massachusetts farmers who marched on county courthouses to prevent land foreclosures. A foreclosure is when a bank or other entity takes back property when taxes or debts are not paid. The farmers' land was threatened with foreclosure because they were promised that they did not have to pay taxes and other debts on their land during the Revolutionary War. These promises were not kept and this led the farmers to revolt. Congress did not respond because it was too weak and did not have its own army. The Massachusetts militia finally ended the rebellion, but the situation made it clear that the national government did not have the ability to maintain order in this new nation. After Shays's Rebellion, Alexander Hamilton of New York organized a meeting in Philadelphia in 1787. This meeting, called the Constitutional Convention, would eventually throw out the Articles of Confederation and draft the Constitution.

The freedom that the American Revolution sought to preserve proved to create a government under the Articles of Confederation that could not keep law and order. However, the experience with the Articles of Confederation led to the writing of the Constitution in 1787.

Adapted from: Florida Joint Center for Citizenship, Elementary Civics Module for SS.5.C.1.4, #2, <http://www.ushistory.org/gov/2b.asp> and <http://www.kidspast.com/world-history/0368-articles-of-confederation.php>.

Understanding the Articles of Confederation

Directions: While you read, mark text that helps you answer the following guiding questions. After reading, cite the specific text-based evidence that helps you answer each question. Then, write your answers in complete sentences and in your own words.

What is the Articles of Confederation?

Evidence from Text	
Answer in complete sentences	

What is a confederation?

Evidence from Text	
Answer in complete sentences	

What were the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation?

Evidence from Text	
Answer in complete sentences	

What does the term debt mean? What does debt have to do with Shays's Rebellion?

Evidence from Text	
Answer in complete sentences	

How did Shays's Rebellion lead to the Constitutional Convention?

Evidence from Text	
Answer in complete sentences	

What happened at the Constitutional Convention?

Evidence from Text	
Answer in complete sentences	

Excerpts of the U.S. Constitution

Directions: Below are six excerpts from the U.S. Constitution. In your small groups, summarize the excerpts in your own words. Then, compare the excerpt to the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation and determine which weakness is related to the excerpt. Finally, determine how the writers dealt with the related weakness.

Article 1, Section 8: The Congress shall have Power To lay and collect Taxes, Duties, Imposts, and Excises, to pay the Debts and provide for the common Defence and general Welfare of the Unites States; but all Duties, Imposts and Excises shall be uniform throughout the United States.

Article 1, Section 8: The Congress shall have Power... To regulate Commerce foreign Nations, and among the several States

Article II, Section 3:...he shall take Care that the Laws be faithfully executed...

Article III, Section 1: The judicial Power of the United States, shall be vested in one supreme Court, and in such inferior Courts as the Congress may from time to time ordain and establish.

Article II, Section 1: The executive Power shall be vested in a President of the United States of America.

Article V: The Congress, whenever two thirds of both Houses shall deem it necessary, shall propose Amendments to this Constitution...

Sources

Image of the Articles of Confederation:

<https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=3#>

Articles of Confederation Reading: Adapted from: Florida Joint Center for Citizenship, Elementary Civics Module for SS.5.C.1.4, #2, <http://www.ushistory.org/gov/2b.asp> and

<http://www.kidspast.com/world-history/0368-articles-of-confederation.php>

Excerpts from the U.S. Constitution: www.constitutioncenter.org

Understanding the Articles of Confederation – Sample Answers

Directions: While you read, mark text that helps you answer the following guiding questions. After reading, cite the specific text-based evidence that helps you answer each question. Then, write your answers in complete sentences and in your own words.

What is the Articles of Confederation?

Evidence from Text	was the first government of the newly formed United States
Answer in complete sentences	The Articles of Confederation was the first government of the United States.

What is a confederation?

Evidence from Text	A confederation is a government system where power is located with the independent states and there is little power in the central government.
Answer in complete sentences	A confederation is a government where the states have more power than the central government.

What were the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation?

Evidence from Text	The Congress did not have the power to tax, so it could not pay for the army and navy needed to defend the nation. It also couldn't regulate the trade agreements states were making with other countries. The Congress could also not enforce any laws they passed because there was no central leadership to make sure that laws were being enforced in each state or a central judicial system to interpret laws or settle disputes between states. Finally, if any changes were to be made to the Articles of Confederation, unanimous approval from all 13 states was required.
Answer in complete sentences	Under the Articles of Confederation, the Congress could not tax, could not regulate trade, or enforce laws. There was no central leadership to enforce laws and there was no central judicial branch. It required unanimous approval of all 13 states in order to change any part of the articles.

What does the term debt mean? What does debt have to do with Shays's Rebellion?

Evidence from Text	money owed; A foreclosure is when a bank or other entity takes back property when taxes or debts are not paid. The farmers' land was threatened with foreclosure because they were promised that they did not have to pay taxes and other debts on their
Answer in complete sentences	Debt is money owed for something. Farmers in MA were told they did not have to pay back debt from the war, but this promise not kept and their land was going to be taken away. The farmers rebelled and this was known as Shays's Rebellion.

How did Shays's Rebellion lead to the Constitutional Convention?

Evidence from Text	the situation made it clear that the national government did not have the ability to maintain order in this new nation; After Shays's Rebellion, Alexander Hamilton of New York organized a meeting in Philadelphia in 1787
Answer in complete sentences	Shays's Rebellion made it clear that the central government did not have the ability to keep order in the new nation. This causes Alexander Hamilton to organize a meeting.

What happened at the Constitutional Convention?

Evidence from Text	This meeting, called the Constitutional Convention, would eventually throw out the Articles of Confederation and draft the Constitution.
Answer in complete sentences	At the Constitutional Convention, the Articles of Confederation were thrown out and the Constitution was written.

Excerpts from the U.S. Constitution – **Sample Answers**

Weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation:

1. Congress had no power to tax
2. Congress had no power to regulate trade
3. Congress had no power to enforce its laws
4. The national government lacked a national court system (judicial branch)
5. There was no central leadership (executive branch)
6. Changes to the Articles required unanimous consent of the 13 states.

Excerpts from the U.S. Constitution

Article 1, Section 8: The Congress shall have Power To lay and collect Taxes, Duties, Imposts, and Excises, to pay the Debts and provide for the common Defence and general Welfare of the Unites States; but all Duties, Imposts and Excises shall be uniform throughout the United States. **(1)**

Article 1, Section 8: The Congress shall have Power... To regulate Commerce foreign Nations, and among the several States **(2)**

Article II, Section 3:...he shall take Care that the Laws be faithfully executed...**(3)**

Article III, Section 1: The judicial Power of the United States, shall be vested in one supreme Court, and in such inferior Courts as the Congress may from time to time ordain and establish. **(4)**

Article II, Section 1: The executive Power shall be vested in a President of the United States of America. **(5)**

Article V: The Congress, whenever two thirds of both Houses shall deem it necessary, shall propose Amendments to this Constitution.. **(6)**

Civics Content Vocabulary

Word/Term	Part of Speech	Definition
Articles of Confederation	proper noun	the first constitution of the United States
confederation	noun	a system of government where power is located with the independent states and there is little power in the central government; a confederation is also known as a confederal system
Constitutional Convention	proper noun	a meeting in Philadelphia in 1787 where delegates decided to throw out the Articles of Confederation and draft the Constitution
debt	noun	something owed; such as money
Shays's Rebellion	proper noun	an event when 2,000 Massachusetts farmers rebelled against land foreclosures and debt from the Revolutionary War

Essential Teacher Content Background Information

This section addresses the following issues:

1. The core components of the Articles of Confederation
2. Responding to Shays's Rebellion

1. The core components of the Articles of Confederation

The first government of the United States following the Declaration of Independence was the Articles of Confederation (1781-1789). A confederation is a state-centered, decentralized government where the primary powers of government are held at the state level. The Declaration of Independence spoke of the many abuses of King George III, who, as a monarch, ruled over the executive, legislative and judiciary powers of the government. In the Declaration, Thomas Jefferson stated that both King George III and the form of government in place at the time both failed to protect the colonists' "life, liberty and pursuit of happiness." The unitary government, one that centralized the legislative, executive and judicial powers, was unacceptable to the colonists when they sought to create a government after declaring their independence from the British crown.

The colonists decided to create a government that was quite different from a unitary system where the powers of government were concentrated in a single person. This decentralized system reflected the colonists' fear of a powerful central government. Under the Articles of Confederation, states retained their freedom and independence. Each of the 13 states had a vote in the weak national Congress (appointed by the state governments), while a vote of all 9 states was required in order to pass any laws and a unanimous vote of all 13 states was required for the Articles to be amended. The national Congress was also denied the power to tax, so it could not pay for the army and navy needed to defend the nation. The national Congress also lacked the power to regulate trade. As for the other powers of government, there was no national court system nor was there a national executive.

The result of this decentralized approach was that each state functioned in many ways as an independent country. Several states negotiated their own trade agreements with those countries that the king had previously convinced not to have a relationship with the colonies, while other states established their own militaries. The lack of a national court system meant that criminals committing crimes in one state would often seek refuge in other states where they would not be prosecuted. Without a national military, states that were attacked or suffered internal rebellion could not turn to the national government for support or resources for their defense. The result of these state actions was that the states, despite being part of the same country, did not function as a nation. For instance, fears emerged that the 13 states functioning as independent countries would make the nation vulnerable to attack by Spain, France, by Native Americans.

Together the lack of powers held by the weak national Congress coupled with each state's independent and often conflicting actions, raised concerns that the Articles of Confederation were not designed in a way to protect the new nation. In February 1787, Alexander Hamilton called for a constitutional convention, a "Meeting of Commissioners to Remedy Defects of the Federal Government" to take place the following May. In May 1787, 12 of the 13 states met in Philadelphia, PA for this purpose. The outcome of that meeting was the U.S. Constitution which was completed on September 17, 1787 and sent to the states for their review and ratification.

2. Responding to Shays's Rebellion

Shays's Rebellion was a citizen rebellion that began in 1786. Two thousand western Massachusetts farmers marched on county courthouses to prevent land foreclosures. The farmers' land was threatened with foreclosure because they were assured that they did not have to pay taxes and other debts on their land during the Revolutionary War. These promises were not kept, which prompted the farmers to revolt. Congress would not respond because it was too weak and did not have its own army.

Shays's Rebellion prompted representatives from five states to meet in Annapolis, Maryland in February 1787 to call for a constitutional convention of all 13 states the following May in Philadelphia. Congress stated that the purpose of this May convention was "the sole and express purpose of revising the Articles of Confederation."