

THE ARTICLES OF CONFEDERATION

SS.7.CG.1.7 Explain how the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation led to the writing of the U.S. Constitution.

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2023 BENCHMARK UPDATES

- Updated from SS.7.C.1.5
 - Changed from “~~Identify~~ how the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation led to the writing of the Constitution.” to “Explain how the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation led to the writing of the U.S. Constitution.”
- Depth of Knowledge Changes within Benchmark
 - Changed from “Identify” to “Explain”
- Benchmark Clarification Changes
 - Changed from “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).” to “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]; no national armed forces; and changes to the Articles required unanimous consent of the 13 states).”
- Vocabulary Changes
 - No changes

Essential Teacher Content Background Information

[Teacher Content Notes Not Appropriate For Student Use]

This section addresses the following topics:

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."

Lesson Summary

ESSENTIAL QUESTION		
What were the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation? How did the weaknesses lead to the writing of the U.S. Constitution?		
BENCHMARK		
SS.7.CG.1.7 Explain how the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation led to the writing of the U.S. Constitution.		
CIVICS EOC REPORTING CATEGORY		
N/A		
OVERVIEW		
In this lesson, students will explain the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation and understand how those weaknesses led to the writing of the Constitution.		
BENCHMARK CLARIFICATIONS		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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]; no national armed forces; and changes to the Articles required unanimous consent of the 13 states). 		
BENCHMARK CONTENT LIMITS		
N/A		
CIVICS CONTENT VOCABULARY		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Articles of Confederation, confederation, Constitutional Convention, debt, Shays's Rebellion 		
INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES		
Collaborative learning	Close reading of complex text	Analysis of primary sources
MATERIALS		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highlighters Articles of Confederation image (external link) The Articles of Confederation Summary reading Understanding the Articles of Confederation activity sheet Excerpts from the U.S. Constitution activity sheet 		
B.E.S.T. STANDARDS		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ELA.7.R.3.2- Paraphrase content from grade-level texts. 		

- ELA.7.V.1.1- Integrate academic vocabulary appropriate to grade level in speaking and writing.
- ELA.K12.EE.1.1- Cite evidence to explain and justify reasoning.

Suggested Student Activity Sequence & Pace

DAY	ACTIVITY SEQUENCE
DAY 1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To begin this lesson, place students into pairs and ask students the following question: 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 this “Articles of Confederation” image from the National Archives. Discuss with the students that the United States’ first constitution was known as the Articles of Confederation. However, the weaknesses in the Articles of Confederation are what led to the writing of the present-day U.S. Constitution. The Articles of Confederation were designed to give more power to the states than a central government to allow for individual rights and protection against high taxes. 4. Pass out a “The Articles of Confederation Summary” reading and an “Understanding the Articles of Confederation” activity sheet to each student. 5. Preview the activity sheet as a whole class by reading through the directions and each guiding question. 6. 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. 7. Instruct the students that for the activity they will need to mark the text using specific symbols as they read to complete the activity. Teacher Note: This activity was designed for both print and digital sharing but if you are sharing digitally, it is suggested that you change the activity to highlight in specific colors using digital features instead of the prescribed activities. 8. Provide time for students to read and answer the questions with their partner. 9. 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 answer key provided below to guide this discussion. 10. 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.
DAY 2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explain to students that today they will continue to look at the relationship between the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation and the U.S. Constitution. 2. Move students into groups of four and pass out the “Excerpts from the U.S. Constitution” activity sheet. 3. Explain to the students that their task is to read through each excerpt from the U.S. Constitution and summarize with their group. Then, identify how the excerpt relates to one of the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation. 4. Provide time for students to complete the activity. 5. Have students share out. 6. 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 U.S. Constitution to show how at least three of these weaknesses were addressed.
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Civics Content Vocabulary

Word/Term	Definition
Articles of Confederation	the first constitution of the United States
confederation	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	a meeting in Philadelphia in 1787 where delegates decided to throw out the Articles of Confederation and draft the Constitution
debt	something owed; such as money
Shays's Rebellion	an event when 2,000 Massachusetts farmers rebelled against land foreclosures and debt from the Revolutionary War

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Civics 360 Resources](#)

Florida Department of Education's Civic Literacy Reading List

- *Words We Live By: Your Annotated Guide to the Constitution* by Linda R. Monk

ANSWER KEYS

Sample Answers: The Articles of Confederation Summary reading

Sample Answers: Understanding the Articles of Confederation activity sheet

Sample Answers: Excerpts from the U.S. Constitution activity sheet

Written Response: Sample Scoring Rubric

SOURCES

Image of the Articles of Confederation from the National Archives:

<https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/articles-of-confederation>

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> , Accessed 2013.

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