



CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION (3-5)

OBJECTIVE: Students will be able to...

- Explain why the Constitutional Convention was held.
- Explain who the delegates were at the Constitutional Convention.
- Describe one major disagreement the delegates had and how they reached a compromise.
- Understand that the delegates created the United States Constitution.

STANDARDS:

- **3.SP1.3** Generate questions about individuals and groups who have impacted history.
- **3.SP3.6** Construct arguments and explanations using reasoning, examples, and details from sources.
- **3.H3.1** Evaluate how individual rights, freedoms, and responsibilities can vary based on community, state, and nation.
- **4.SP2.1** Explain why individuals and groups during the same historical period differed in their perspectives on issues and events.
- **4.SP3.5** Construct and present arguments and explanations using reasoning, examples, and details with relevant information and data from multiple sources.
- **4.C2.1** Use primary and secondary sources to generate questions about the concepts and ideas such as liberty, justice, equality, and individual rights.
- **5.SP2.1** Explain why individuals and groups during the same historical period differed in their perspectives
 - Key individuals and groups can include but are not limited to loyalists and patriots, federalists and anti-federalists, Hamilton and Jefferson,
- **5.SP4.3** Summarize the central claim in a secondary source.
- **5.H2.1** Use primary and secondary sources to summarize the causes and effects of conflicts, resolutions, and social movements throughout the historical timeframe.
 - Key conflicts can include, but are not limited to, cultural conflicts, political conflicts, economic conflicts, military conflicts, and conflicts related to resource use and availability
- **5.H4.1** Use primary and secondary sources to describe how diverse groups (racial, ethnic, class, gender, regional, immigrant/migrant) shaped the United States' multicultural society within the historical timeframe.

CIVICS EXAM QUESTIONS:

- What happened at the Constitutional Convention? **A:** The Constitution was written.

TIMELINE: This lesson fits best after learning about the American Revolution and the first government under the Articles of Confederation. Within the SPB process, this would fit best during the deliberation phase.

APPROXIMATE LESSON LENGTH: 60-90 minutes

SUPPORTING MATERIALS:

- [*The Difficult Trade Game*](#)
- [*The Constitutional Convention of 1787: A Revolution in Government Simplified Reading*](#)
- [*Constitutional Convention Images: Constitutional Convention setting \(Independence Hall\) and key figures \(Washington, Franklin, Madison\).*](#)
- [*The Constitutional Convention Graphic Organizer*](#)
- Video: [*Constitutional Convention - Teaching the Framers and Their Creation of the Union*](#)
- [*Constitutional Convention Summary*](#)

VOCABULARY:

- **Articles of Confederation:** The first set of rules for the United States government that didn't work very well.
- **Delegate:** A person sent to represent a state or group.
- **Convention:** A meeting where people come together to discuss important things.
- **Compromise:** When people with different ideas agree on something by each giving up a little of what they wanted.
- **Constitution:** The set of rules the delegates wrote in Philadelphia that became the plan for the United States government.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Engage

- Activity: The "Difficult Trade" Game:
 - Divide students into small groups (3-4 total groups), each representing a "State."
 - Give each State group a unique set of building blocks or colored items (e.g., State 1 gets all red blocks, State 2 all blue, State 3 all green, State 4 all yellow). You could use manipulatives you already have or just different colored pieces of paper.
 - Explain the goal: Each State needs to collect at least one item of every color. They can only get colors they don't have by trading with other States.

- Introduce the “Articles Rules” using *The Difficult Trade Game* resource: Tell them that under their current rules, trading is difficult and costly. To trade for a block of a different color from another State, your State must give away two of your own blocks in exchange for receiving just one block of the needed color from the other State. (This simulates the problems caused by states acting in their own interests, imposing taxes, or making interstate trade inefficient under the Articles.)
- Allow States time (a few minutes) to attempt trades and achieve their goal of collecting all colors. Observe their difficulties, frustrations, and potential lack of progress.
- Debrief and Connect:
 - Gather the class together. Ask students: Was it easy for your State to trade with other States and get all the colors you needed? Why or why not? How did these “Articles Rules” make it difficult for the “States” to trade and work together? Did it cause problems between the States?
 - Explain that the first set of government rules for the United States, called the Articles of Confederation, was similar to their game rules in that it made it very hard for the states to work together on important things like trade and collecting money.
 - Introduction: Explain that because the Articles of Confederation created such a weak central government and couldn’t solve the serious problems between the states, leaders like James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and George Washington became very concerned that the young country might fall apart. They realized they needed a better plan for the government and decided to hold a special meeting.

2. Explore

- Activity: Constitutional Convention Fact Find!
 - Transition: Remind students of the “Difficult Trade” game they played and how hard it was for the “States” to work together under those rules. Explain that this is similar to the real problems the United States faced after the Revolutionary War under the first government rules, the Articles of Confederation. Because things were so difficult, important leaders knew they needed to try and fix the government.
 - Setting the Scene - Fact Finding: Tell students they are now “History Detectives” and their mission is to find out key facts about the important meeting where leaders tried to fix the government.
 - Provide each student or small group with a copy of the *The Constitutional Convention of 1787: A Revolution in Government Simplified Reading*. These materials should contain the following information, using simple language:
 - Why they met: The old rules (Articles of Confederation) weren’t working, making it hard for states to get along and for the country to solve

problems. Leaders feared the country might fall apart. They decided to have a meeting to make the government stronger.

- Where they met: They met in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The meeting was in a building called the Pennsylvania State House, which is now known as Independence Hall. (Show *Constitutional Convention Images* here.)
- When they met: They met in the summer of 1787. The meeting started in May and lasted until September. It took them almost four months!
- Who was there: Important people called delegates came from most of the states. There were 55 men who attended at different times. Some famous delegates included George Washington (who was in charge of the meeting), Benjamin Franklin (the oldest delegate), and James Madison (who had many ideas for the new government). They decided to keep their meetings a secret so they could talk and argue freely and change their minds without worrying about what everyone outside thought.
 - The *Constitutional Convention Graphic Organizer*: Give students a simple worksheet or graphic organizer with headings like “Where they met,” “When they met,” “Why they met,” “Who was there (names),” and “What was accomplished?”
 - Students read their fact cards/reading material and write or draw the answers on their worksheet.
- Debrief: Bring the class back together. Have students share the facts they found. Use this to review the setting (Philadelphia, summer 1787, State House), the purpose (to fix the problems with the Articles of Confederation and create a stronger government), and introduce some of the key players. Collect the worksheets as artifacts of their research.

3. Explain

- The Big Problems: Explain that the delegates had many disagreements. One big problem was how the states should be represented in the new government’s rule-making group (Congress). Should bigger states with more people have more votes, or should every state, big or small, have the same number of votes?
- Finding a Compromise: Explain that they talked and argued for many weeks. They had to find a compromise, a way to make both big and small states happy. The compromise they reached was to create two groups in Congress: one where representation is based on population (the House of Representatives) and one where every state has the same number of representatives (the Senate).
- Other Difficult Issues: Mention that they had other very difficult disagreements, including about slavery. The sources note this was a thorny question that threatened to derail the Union. They made difficult compromises about how enslaved people would be counted for representation and taxation.

- What They Created: After almost four months of meeting and debating, the delegates wrote a new plan for the government called the Constitution. This new plan created a stronger central government with different parts, like a leader (the President) and the rule-making group (Congress).
- Watch *iCivics, Constitutional Convention - Teaching the Framers and Their Creation of the Union*

4. Elaborate

- Signing and Sending: Start by explaining that after working for almost four months, the delegates finished writing their new plan, the Constitution. On September 17, 1787, many of them signed it. But the plan wasn't the law yet! They sent it to all the states. The states had to agree, or "ratify," the new plan for it to become the rules for the country.
- The Great Debate: Explain that sending the Constitution to the states started a big debate all over the country. Not everyone agreed with the new plan. Some people were worried that the new government created by the Constitution would be too powerful. They thought it might take away the freedoms people had just fought for in the Revolutionary War.
 - Discussion Prompt (can be small or whole group): Ask the students, "Have you ever made rules for a game or a group, and someone thought the rules weren't fair or gave too much power to one person? What did you do?" Connect this to the idea of people having different ideas about how the government should work and worrying about fairness and power.
- What Was Missing?: Explain that one of the biggest worries was that the Constitution didn't have a list of important rights for the people. People wanted a guarantee that the government couldn't stop them from saying what they thought or doing certain things that were important. They wanted a "Bill of Rights" added.
 - Interactive Activity/Discussion: Tell the students, "Imagine you are helping decide what rights everyone in the United States should have. If you could write down three important rules to protect what people can say or do, what would they be?" Write their ideas on the board. You can mention that one important right people wanted was the freedom of speech, which means the right to share your ideas.
- Finding Another Compromise: Explain that the people who liked the new Constitution and wanted the states to approve it knew they needed to convince the people who were worried. To get the states to agree, the supporters of the Constitution made a promise. They said that if the states approved the Constitution, they would add a list of rights, the Bill of Rights, later. This was a very important compromise – both sides gave up a little of what they wanted to agree on something important.

- Discussion Prompt (can be small or whole group): Ask the students, “Have you ever had to compromise on something, where you had to give up or change a bit of what you wanted so that you and others could come to an agreement? Do you think the strategy of compromise is effective; why or why not?” Connect this to the idea of people with different wants, needs, and ideas living together in society and how the government tries to appeal and respond to these differences.
- The Bill of Rights is Added: Explain that after the states approved the Constitution, they kept their promise. They added the list of rights, which is called the Bill of Rights. It includes important rights like freedom of speech. This list helped make sure the new government protected the people’s freedoms.
 - Interactive Activity/Discussion: Look at the list the students created earlier and see if any of their ideas are similar to the rights found in the Bill of Rights. Discuss any additional rights that were not listed.

5. Evaluate

- Review Questions: Ask students questions: Why did the delegates meet in Philadelphia? What were the first rules called? What is the new set of rules called? What was one big problem they had to solve? What is a compromise? What important list was added to the Constitution later?
- *Constitutional Convention Summary*: Have students complete a simple worksheet summarizing the main points or draw a picture illustrating one aspect of the Convention, like delegates debating or signing the Constitution.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

Read simplified biographies of some of the key figures from the Convention.

Discuss how making rules and compromising are still important today in school or in the country.

Compare and contrast the Articles of Confederation (like weak rules) with the Constitution (like stronger rules) using a simple analogy.

RESOURCES:

- Beeman, Richard R. [*The Constitutional Convention of 1787: A Revolution in Government*](#), National Constitution Center.
- National Archives, [*The Constitution: How Did it Happen?*](#)
- Office of the Historian, [*Constitutional Convention and Ratification, 1787–1789*](#), U.S. Department of State.