Power Under Debate

How early conflicts shaped the Constitution

SS24.US1.2 "Evaluate how events and issues from the signing of the Treaty of Paris (1783) to the ratification of the Constitution of the United States affected the development of the political system of the United States..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation. Circle three decisions made at the Constitutional Convention, then number one argument for and one argument against ratification.

Building a Government That Could Last

1. After the 1783 Treaty of Paris recognized American independence, the states faced debts, trade disputes, and the challenge of governing together. Under the Articles of Confederation, Congress conducted diplomacy and organized western lands, but it could not tax people directly or regulate trade between states. States retained most power. In 1786 and 1787, indebted Massachusetts farmers joined Shays' Rebellion against courts that seized property. The unrest exposed the national government's limited ability to respond and increased support for a stronger central government.

2. In 1787, delegates disputed who should hold power. The Great Compromise created a House based on population and a Senate with equal state representation. The Constitution divided federal power among three branches, empowered Congress to regulate interstate and foreign trade, and required two-thirds Senate approval of treaties. Delegates created an Electoral College to choose the president. For representation and taxation, they counted three-fifths of enslaved people, while barring Congress from prohibiting the overseas slave trade before 1808. These bargains strengthened federal authority while protecting some state interests.

3. Ratification triggered another contest over power. Federalists argued that the new checks and balances would prevent tyranny while giving the nation enough power to govern. Anti-Federalists warned that a distant federal government might threaten state authority and personal freedoms; the Constitution listed no specific protections for speech or religion. To win support, Federalists promised amendments protecting liberties. Nine states ratified the Constitution by 1788, and the Bill of Rights followed in 1791. Those amendments limited federal power without dismantling the new government.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did one strength and one weakness of the Articles affect the new nation?

2. Why did Shays' Rebellion increase support for a stronger central government?

3. How did the Convention settle disputes over state representation and the choice of president?

4. How did the Bill of Rights address an Anti-Federalist concern without removing the powers Federalists wanted?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a brief letter to an undecided state convention delegate in 1788. Recommend ratification or rejection, using two different Convention decisions from the passage and answering one concern someone on the other side might raise.

ANSWER KEY

Power Under Debate

GRADE 10 · SS24.US1.2

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation. Circle three decisions made at the Constitutional Convention, then number one argument for and one argument against ratification. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did one strength and one weakness of the Articles affect the new nation?	**Congress could conduct diplomacy, helping the states act together abroad. It could not regulate interstate trade, leaving trade disputes between states unresolved.**
2	Why did Shays' Rebellion increase support for a stronger central government?	**The unrest exposed the national government's limited ability to respond to a crisis.**
3	How did the Convention settle disputes over state representation and the choice of president?	**It based House representation on population, gave each state equal representation in the Senate, and created the Electoral College to choose the president.**
4	How did the Bill of Rights address an Anti-Federalist concern without removing the powers Federalists wanted?	**It protected liberties such as speech and religion and limited federal power, while leaving the new national government's powers in place.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Dear Delegate, I urge you to ratify the Constitution. Giving Congress power over interstate trade could reduce disputes between states. Requiring Senate approval of treaties also prevents the president from acting alone in foreign affairs. You may worry, as Anti-Federalists do, that federal power could threaten personal freedoms. That concern matters, but the Federalists have promised amendments to protect those freedoms. Ratification would give the nation a more effective government while leaving room to add protections.

Accept other accurate strengths, weaknesses, and passage-based explanations. For the letter, look for a clear position, two distinct Convention decisions, and a response to an opposing concern.