Power and Liberty

The debate over ratifying the Constitution

SS24.US1.2c "Compare the arguments of Federalists and Anti-Federalists regarding ratification of the United States Constitution, and explain how the Bill of Rights represented a compromise between fundamental liberties and the powers of government."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one Federalist argument and one Anti-Federalist argument, then circle the words that show how the Bill of Rights addressed both sides' concerns.

A Constitution and a Promise

1 In 1788, delegates at the Massachusetts ratifying convention faced a choice: approve the proposed Constitution or keep the weaker Articles of Confederation. Under the Articles, Congress could request money from states but could not collect federal taxes directly. Federalists argued that a stronger national government could raise revenue, settle disputes among states, and defend the country. They pointed to the Constitution's separate branches and checks on power as safeguards against abuse. To them, delaying ratification for a list of rights risked losing a workable plan of government just when the nation needed one.

2 Anti-Federalists looked at the same plan and saw a different danger. The proposed federal government could tax individuals, maintain an army, and make laws that took priority over conflicting state laws. Critics feared that officials far from voters might use these powers to silence dissent or weaken local control. They wanted written protections for freedoms such as speech, religion, and fair treatment in court before giving the new government authority. Federalists replied that the national government had only powers granted by the Constitution and that listing some rights might suggest that unlisted rights had no protection.

3 Massachusetts ratified the Constitution but recommended amendments, a path other states also followed. The Constitution took effect, and Congress proposed amendments in 1789. Ten were ratified in 1791 as the Bill of Rights. These amendments restricted the federal government, protecting freedoms such as speech and religion and requiring due process before it could take life, liberty, or property. At the same time, they did not cancel federal powers to collect taxes, provide for defense, or make laws within constitutional limits. The compromise answered demands for explicit liberties while keeping the stronger government Federalists believed necessary.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why did Federalists favor giving the national government more power, while Anti-Federalists worried about that power?

2. How did Federalists answer the call for a written list of rights, and why did Anti-Federalists still want one?

3. How did Massachusetts's decision create a path between the two sides' positions?

4. How did the Bill of Rights limit federal power without removing the powers Federalists thought the government needed?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you are a Massachusetts delegate speaking to neighbors who fear both foreign threats and censorship. Write a five-sentence statement recommending ratification with proposed amendments, comparing the two sides' arguments and explaining how the plan can protect speech while keeping the power to provide for defense.

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one Federalist argument and one Anti-Federalist argument, then circle the words that show how the Bill of Rights addressed both sides' concerns. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why did Federalists favor giving the national government more power, while Anti-Federalists worried about that power?	**Federalists wanted a government that could raise revenue and defend the country. Anti-Federalists feared that distant officials could misuse those powers to silence dissent or weaken local control.**
2	How did Federalists answer the call for a written list of rights, and why did Anti-Federalists still want one?	**Federalists said the government had only granted powers and warned that a list might leave unlisted rights unprotected. Anti-Federalists wanted explicit protections against abuses such as censorship.**
3	How did Massachusetts's decision create a path between the two sides' positions?	**Massachusetts ratified the Constitution, allowing the stronger government Federalists wanted, while recommending amendments to protect rights as Anti-Federalists urged.**
4	How did the Bill of Rights limit federal power without removing the powers Federalists thought the government needed?	**It protected liberties such as speech and religion and required due process, but left the federal government able to collect taxes, provide for defense, and make laws within constitutional limits.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Neighbors, our country needs a government that can raise money and provide for its defense, as Federalists argue. Yet Anti-Federalists are right to fear that powerful officials could silence people who criticize them. I support ratifying the Constitution while recommending an amendment that protects freedom of speech from the federal government. Such a rule would limit censorship, not the government's power to collect taxes or provide for defense. We can give the nation tools to face threats without giving up our voices.

Accept other accurate comparisons and examples of protected rights. In the final statement, look for a clear distinction between limiting government abuse and removing government authority.