

A Fragile Union

Analyze how the Articles worked and why they were changed.

SS.8.A.3.9 "Evaluate the structure, strengths, and weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation and its aspects that led to the Constitutional Convention."

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details that show strengths of the Articles, circle two details that show weaknesses, and write a 1 beside the detail that best explains why delegates met in 1787.

The First National Government

- ① After independence, the thirteen states wanted a national government but feared another powerful ruler. The Articles of Confederation, approved in 1781, created a "firm league of friendship" among the states. Each state, large or small, had one vote in a one-house Congress. Important laws needed approval from nine states, while changing the Articles required every state to agree. Congress had no president to carry out laws and no national court system to settle disputes among states.
- ② The Articles gave Congress several useful powers. It could make treaties, declare war, maintain an army and navy, borrow money, run a postal service, and manage western lands. This structure helped the new nation negotiate the Treaty of Paris in 1783, which ended the Revolutionary War. Congress also passed the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. It described how territories could become states and prohibited slavery in the Northwest Territory. These actions showed that states could cooperate on national issues.
- ③ Yet Congress could not levy taxes or regulate trade between states or with other nations. It had to request money from state governments, which often paid too little. States set conflicting trade rules and printed their own money. Because Congress lacked an executive branch, it could not enforce its decisions. In 1786 and 1787, Shays' Rebellion in Massachusetts showed how hard it was for the national government to respond to unrest. Delegates met at the Constitutional Convention in 1787 to strengthen the national government.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE Use the passage

1 How did the rules for passing major laws and changing the Articles make national action difficult?

2 Describe one action Congress took that shows a strength of the Articles. Explain why the action was important.

3 Why did Congress have trouble getting money under the Articles?

4 How did Shays' Rebellion reveal a weakness in the national government?

3 YOUR TURN Your own words

Write a four-sentence evaluation of the Articles of Confederation. Include one part of its structure, one strength, one weakness, and explain why its limits led delegates to meet at the Constitutional Convention.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline two details that show strengths of the Articles, circle two details that show weaknesses, and write a 1 beside the detail that best explains why delegates met in 1787. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the rules for passing major laws and changing the Articles make national action difficult?	Major laws needed approval from nine states, and changes required every state to agree. These rules made it hard to pass laws or fix problems.
2	Describe one action Congress took that shows a strength of the Articles. Explain why the action was important.	Answers may cite the Treaty of Paris, the Northwest Ordinance, or another listed power. For example, the Northwest Ordinance created a process for territories to become states and prohibited slavery in the Northwest Territory.
3	Why did Congress have trouble getting money under the Articles?	Congress could not levy taxes. It had to request money from state governments, which often paid too little.
4	How did Shays' Rebellion reveal a weakness in the national government?	It showed that the national government had difficulty responding to unrest because Congress lacked power to enforce its decisions.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The Articles made the states equal in Congress, but requiring nine states for major laws made action slow. The government showed strength by creating a process for western territories to become states. However, Congress could not tax states or enforce its decisions, so it lacked money and power. These limits persuaded delegates that they needed a stronger national government at the Constitutional Convention.

Accept equivalent evidence-based explanations from the passage. The open response should evaluate both a strength and a weakness and connect the weakness to the call for a stronger national government.