A Union Tested

Successes, weaknesses, and the road to the Constitutional Convention

6-12.US1.13 "Analyze the successes and failures of the Articles of Confederation and the events that led to the Constitutional Convention of 1787."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two successes of the national government, circle two limits on Congress, and number three steps from unrest to the writing of a new Constitution in the order the passage gives them.

Could the States Govern Together?

(1) After the Revolutionary War, the thirteen states had to govern together without a king. Under the Articles of Confederation, each state kept most of its power, and each had one vote in Congress. This arrangement helped states cooperate while protecting their independence. Congress approved the Treaty of Paris, which ended the war in 1783 and recognized American independence. Congress also passed the Northwest Ordinance in 1787. It set rules for governing western territories and admitting new states. These achievements showed that the national government could make shared decisions, even though its powers were limited.

(2) Yet a decision on paper did not always mean action. Congress could ask states for money, but it could not tax people directly. When states sent less than Congress requested, the national government struggled to pay its debts, including money owed to soldiers. Congress also could not regulate trade between states. States set different trade rules, making it harder to build a common market. Changing the Articles required every state's approval, so fixing these weaknesses was difficult. The same system that guarded state independence left Congress with too few tools to solve problems that crossed state borders.

(3) In 1786, farmers in western Massachusetts, including veterans, protested high taxes and debt collection. Some blocked courts from meeting, preventing judges from taking property from debtors. This conflict, called Shays' Rebellion, alarmed leaders who feared that governments could not keep order. Massachusetts eventually stopped the uprising with a state force, but the national government lacked the money and troops to respond effectively. That year, delegates from five states met in Annapolis to discuss trade problems. They called for a wider meeting in Philadelphia. In 1787, delegates gathered there to revise the Articles, then chose to write a new Constitution.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Choose one achievement under the Articles. Why did it count as a success for the national government?

2. How did Congress's lack of taxing power make it harder to pay national debts?

3. Why did Shays' Rebellion worry leaders about the Articles, even though Massachusetts stopped the uprising?

4. How did the Annapolis meeting lead toward the Constitutional Convention, and how did the delegates' plan change in Philadelphia?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you are a delegate in 1787. Write five or six sentences recommending a plan that keeps one success of the Articles and addresses one of its weaknesses. Name two different weaknesses, connect an event from the passage to your recommendation, and explain how your plan would limit national power.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADES 6-12 · 6-12.US1.13

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two successes of the national government, circle two limits on Congress, and number three steps from unrest to the writing of a new Constitution in the order the passage gives them. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Choose one achievement under the Articles. Why did it count as a success for the national government?	**The Northwest Ordinance was a success because Congress set shared rules for governing western territories and admitting new states.**
2	How did Congress's lack of taxing power make it harder to pay national debts?	**Congress had to ask states for money. When states sent less than requested, the national government struggled to pay its debts.**
3	Why did Shays' Rebellion worry leaders about the Articles, even though Massachusetts stopped the uprising?	**The uprising raised fears about keeping order, while the national government lacked the money and troops to respond effectively.**
4	How did the Annapolis meeting lead toward the Constitutional Convention, and how did the delegates' plan change in Philadelphia?	**Delegates at Annapolis called for a wider meeting in Philadelphia. Delegates went there to revise the Articles but chose to write a new Constitution.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The Northwest Ordinance shows that Congress can set useful rules for territories, so the new government should keep that power. But Congress cannot collect taxes directly, making national debts hard to pay. It also cannot regulate trade between states, which leads to different state rules. Shays' Rebellion showed the danger of a national government without enough resources to respond to a crisis. I recommend giving Congress the power to collect taxes, with tax laws passed by elected representatives. This plan could fund national needs while making Congress answer to voters.

Accept either the Treaty of Paris or the Northwest Ordinance as a success in question 1. For the open task, accept a different workable plan if it uses passage evidence, addresses a weakness, and states a limit on national power.