A Stronger Union?

Read the original Constitution as a set of choices and trade-offs.

6-12.US1.16 "Analyze the original Constitution by comparing the powers of government branches, assessing its response to Revolutionary causes and alignment with Declaration of Independence ideals..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one failure of the Articles of Confederation, circle powers assigned to different branches, and number two places where the Constitution supported or fell short of a Declaration of Independence ideal.

What Changed in Philadelphia?

1. Imagine thirteen states trying to pay a shared war debt after independence. Under the Articles of Confederation, Congress could ask states for money but could not collect national taxes. It also lacked power to regulate trade among states, so states could set conflicting trade rules. There was no separate national executive to carry out laws and no national court system to settle disputes under national law. These weaknesses made joint action difficult. Delegates meeting in Philadelphia in 1787 proposed a new Constitution that gave the national government more tools while dividing its power among three branches.

2. Congress, the legislative branch, gained power to tax, regulate commerce, and pass national laws. Voters chose members of the House of Representatives, but state legislatures chose senators under the original Constitution. The president, leading the executive branch, could carry out laws and veto bills, while Congress could override a veto with enough votes. Federal judges, part of the judicial branch, could decide cases arising under national law. The president nominated them, and the Senate approved appointments. These separate jobs and checks kept any one branch from easily controlling the others, unlike rule by a powerful king.

3. Many colonists had protested taxes imposed without their elected representatives and feared the king's unchecked power. The Declaration of Independence proclaimed that people have equal rights and that government needs their consent. The Constitution answered some fears through representation and divided power, but its original text did not include a bill of rights. It also protected slavery: enslaved people were counted as three-fifths of a person for representation and direct taxes, without having a vote. Congress could not ban the importation of enslaved people before 1808, though it could prohibit it afterward. Those limits challenged the Declaration's promise of equality.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. If two states set conflicting trade rules, which branch could create a national solution, and which branch would carry it out? How was this different under the Articles?

2. How did the original methods of choosing House members and senators respond to concerns about representation? Where was that response limited?

3. Which two branches shared a role in choosing federal judges? Explain how this arrangement limited one branch's power.

4. Compare one way the Constitution supported a Declaration ideal with one way it fell short. Use evidence from the passage.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a short message from a delegate in 1787 to a worried neighbor recommending whether to support the proposed Constitution. Explain your choice using one weakness of the Articles, a comparison of two branches' powers, and one tension with a Declaration ideal.

ANSWER KEY

A Stronger Union?

GRADES 6-12 · 6-12.US1.16

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one failure of the Articles of Confederation, circle powers assigned to different branches, and number two places where the Constitution supported or fell short of a Declaration of Independence ideal. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	If two states set conflicting trade rules, which branch could create a national solution, and which branch would carry it out? How was this different under the Articles?	**Congress could pass a national commerce law, and the president could carry it out. Under the Articles, Congress could not regulate trade among states, and there was no separate national executive.**
2	How did the original methods of choosing House members and senators respond to concerns about representation? Where was that response limited?	**Voters chose House members, giving them a voice in Congress. State legislatures, not voters directly, chose senators, and enslaved people had no vote.**
3	Which two branches shared a role in choosing federal judges? Explain how this arrangement limited one branch's power.	**The president nominated judges, and the Senate approved them. The president could not make the appointments alone.**
4	Compare one way the Constitution supported a Declaration ideal with one way it fell short. Use evidence from the passage.	**The elected House supported government by the people's consent. Counting enslaved people for representation while denying them a vote fell short of the Declaration's ideal of equality.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Dear neighbor, I would support the proposed Constitution, but I would demand changes after ratification. Under the Articles, Congress could not collect taxes to pay national debts. The new Congress could raise taxes, while the president would carry out the laws it passed, so these jobs would not rest with one leader. Still, the Declaration says people have equal rights, and the Constitution counts enslaved people for representation while denying them a vote. We must not pretend that stronger government alone fulfills that promise.

Accept either recommendation in Part 3 if the message accurately connects an Articles weakness, two branches' powers, and a conflict with a Declaration ideal.