Building a Constitution

Trace the decisions that shaped a new government

8.H.6 "Identify and provide the significance of major events in the creation of the U.S. Constitution, such as the enactment of state constitutions, the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation, the Constitutional Conventions..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline five events or developments that moved the nation toward the Constitution, and number them in the order they appear. Circle words that show why each one mattered.

From State Experiments to a National Plan

1 In 1776, as independence spread, states began writing constitutions to replace royal rule. Many created elected legislatures and written limits on government power. Pennsylvania gave its legislature great authority, while Massachusetts later separated power among three branches. These state experiments mattered because Americans could compare ways to build a republic before designing a national government. Under the Articles of Confederation, adopted in 1781, Congress could request money from states but could not tax people directly. When states refused to pay, Congress struggled to repay war debts and support an army.

2 Trade disputes between states revealed another problem: Congress could not regulate commerce between states. In 1787, delegates met in Philadelphia to revise the Articles, but they drafted a new Constitution instead. Small states feared that a Congress based only on population would let large states rule. The Great Compromise created a House of Representatives based on population and a Senate with equal representation for each state. This agreement mattered because delegates with competing interests could keep working together rather than abandon the plan for a stronger national government.

3 The proposed Constitution still needed approval from special conventions in the states. Federalists argued that a stronger national government could solve problems the Articles had left unsolved. Anti-Federalists worried that the new government might threaten individual liberties because the Constitution did not list specific protections. Their debate shaped the vote: promises to add a bill of rights helped win support in key states, including Massachusetts. Nine states had ratified by 1788, but discussion continued. In 1791, ten amendments known as the Bill of Rights were added to protect freedoms such as speech and religion.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why did writing state constitutions matter to the creation of a national Constitution?

2. How did two weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation point to a need for change?

3. Why did delegates in Philadelphia need the Great Compromise, and what did it accomplish?

4. How did the Federalist and Anti-Federalist debate affect ratification and later change the Constitution?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you are a newspaper editor in 1788. Write four sentences recommending a vote for or against ratification, explaining how two earlier developments in the passage led to your choice and addressing one argument from the opposing side.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 8 · 8.H.6

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline five events or developments that moved the nation toward the Constitution, and number them in the order they appear. Circle words that show why each one mattered. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why did writing state constitutions matter to the creation of a national Constitution?	**State constitutions let Americans compare different ways to organize a republic before designing a national government.**
2	How did two weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation point to a need for change?	**Congress could not tax people directly, which made it hard to pay debts and support an army. It also could not regulate trade between states, so it could not settle their trade disputes.**
3	Why did delegates in Philadelphia need the Great Compromise, and what did it accomplish?	**Small states feared being ruled by large states in a Congress based only on population. The compromise gave states representation by population in the House and equal representation in the Senate, allowing delegates to keep working together.**
4	How did the Federalist and Anti-Federalist debate affect ratification and later change the Constitution?	**Anti-Federalists raised concerns about individual liberties. Promises to add a bill of rights helped win support for ratification, and the Bill of Rights was added in 1791.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I urge our state to ratify the Constitution. Under the Articles, Congress could not tax directly, leaving it short of money for debts and an army. The Great Compromise gives both large and small states a place in Congress, making agreement possible. Opponents rightly fear for individual liberties, so we should demand a bill of rights after ratification.

Accept either position on ratification if the response accurately explains the significance of two earlier developments and addresses an opposing argument. The four sentences should make a clear recommendation.