A Nation Debates

Read and compare arguments about the Constitution.

5.C.5.4 "Describe the public debates over the Constitution's ratification, comparing the viewpoints of the Federalists, led by James Madison and Alexander Hamilton, and Anti-Federalists, led by George Mason..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the Federalists' view of national power, circle the Anti-Federalists' view of national power, and write 1 and 2 beside their different views of a national Bill of Rights so you can compare their arguments.

Should the States Approve the Constitution?

1. In 1788, a printer set fresh pages on a table outside a meeting hall. People could read arguments about a new plan for the United States government: the Constitution. Each state held a meeting called a ratifying convention to decide whether to approve it. In newspapers and public meetings, two groups debated a hard question: How much power should the national government have, and how could people's rights stay safe?

2. Federalists, including James Madison and Alexander Hamilton, supported ratification. Under the old government, Congress struggled to collect money and handle problems shared by states. Federalists argued that the Constitution would give the national government enough power to govern while dividing its powers among branches. They said the new government could use only powers given to it by the Constitution, so a national Bill of Rights was not necessary before ratification.

3. Anti-Federalists, including George Mason, feared that the new national government would become too powerful. Mason had refused to sign the Constitution in part because it had no Bill of Rights. Anti-Federalists wanted written protections for freedoms, such as speech, before states approved the plan. Federalists won the ratification debate, but the demand for protections continued. In 1791, the first ten amendments were added as the Bill of Rights.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the Federalists and Anti-Federalists differ about the power of the national government?

2. Why did the two groups disagree about whether a national Bill of Rights was needed before ratification?

3. If a state planned to approve the Constitution without adding a Bill of Rights first, how would each group likely respond?

4. How did the final outcome include something each group wanted?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you are writing a short note for a town newspaper in 1788. In four sentences, name one worry about the new national government, explain how each group would answer that worry and view a Bill of Rights, then say which group you would support and why.

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the Federalists' view of national power, circle the Anti-Federalists' view of national power, and write 1 and 2 beside their different views of a national Bill of Rights so you can compare their arguments. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the Federalists and Anti-Federalists differ about the power of the national government?	**Federalists believed the Constitution gave the national government enough power to govern while limiting and dividing that power. Anti-Federalists feared it would become too powerful.**
2	Why did the two groups disagree about whether a national Bill of Rights was needed before ratification?	**Federalists said the government could use only powers given by the Constitution, so a Bill of Rights was not needed before ratification. Anti-Federalists wanted written protections for freedoms before states approved it.**
3	If a state planned to approve the Constitution without adding a Bill of Rights first, how would each group likely respond?	**Federalists would support approval because they did not think a Bill of Rights was necessary first. Anti-Federalists would object because they wanted written protections before approval.**
4	How did the final outcome include something each group wanted?	**The Constitution was ratified, as Federalists wanted. The first ten amendments later added a Bill of Rights, which Anti-Federalists had called for.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I worry that a strong national government could take away freedom of speech. Federalists such as Madison and Hamilton believed the Constitution limited the government's powers, so a Bill of Rights was not needed before approval. Anti-Federalists such as Mason feared too much national power and wanted written protections before approval. I would support the Anti-Federalists because written protections could help guard speech.

Accept answers that accurately compare the groups' views on national power and the need for a Bill of Rights before ratification. For Part 3, accept either group as the student's choice if the reason fits that group's argument.