Power to Win

Weigh the wartime strengths and limits of the Articles of Confederation

8.C.2.1 "Summarize the effectiveness of the Articles of Confederation as the first national system of government for the purpose of conducting the war against Britain."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two powers Congress used to support the war and circle two limits on its power. Write 1 beside a success the system helped achieve and 2 beside a hardship caused by its limits.

A Government at War

1 Imagine trying to feed an army when the national government cannot collect a tax. That was a real problem near the end of the American Revolution. The Articles of Confederation, ratified by all thirteen states in 1781, created the first national system of government. A national Congress could direct the war, ask states for troops and money, borrow funds, and manage relations with other countries. Yet each state kept much of its own power. The system joined the states for a shared fight, but it gave Congress few tools to enforce its requests.

2 At Yorktown in 1781, American and French forces trapped a British army, which surrendered. The United States had made its alliance with France in 1778, before the Articles took effect, but Congress continued to work with France under the new system. French soldiers and ships helped make victory at Yorktown possible. Congress also directed the Continental Army and later sent diplomats to negotiate peace. The 1783 Treaty of Paris recognized American independence. These results show that the national government could coordinate military and diplomatic efforts.

3 Success did not mean the system worked smoothly. Congress had no power to tax people directly or require states to send all the supplies it requested. Some states sent too little money, leaving the army short of food, clothing, and pay. Congress borrowed money, but debts grew, and soldiers sometimes went unpaid. States also had different priorities, so decisions about meeting national needs could move slowly. The Articles helped the states fight together and gain independence, yet their weak funding powers made the war harder to sustain.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did two of Congress's powers help the states fight as one nation?

2. How did Congress's lack of taxing power make it harder to support the army?

3. The alliance with France began before the Articles took effect. How did working with France still show that the new system could help conduct the war?

4. How do the victory at Yorktown and the army's shortages support a mixed judgment of the Articles?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a short message to a state delegate in 1782. Recommend one change to the Articles that would make it easier to support the army, explain which wartime problem it would solve, and name one power Congress should keep because it helped the war effort.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 8 · 8.C.2.1

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two powers Congress used to support the war and circle two limits on its power. Write 1 beside a success the system helped achieve and 2 beside a hardship caused by its limits. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did two of Congress's powers help the states fight as one nation?	**Congress could direct the war and manage relations with other countries, allowing it to coordinate military efforts and work with France.**
2	How did Congress's lack of taxing power make it harder to support the army?	**Congress had to ask states for money. When states sent too little, the army lacked food, clothing, and pay.**
3	The alliance with France began before the Articles took effect. How did working with France still show that the new system could help conduct the war?	**Congress continued to work with France under the Articles, and French soldiers and ships helped American forces win at Yorktown.**
4	How do the victory at Yorktown and the army's shortages support a mixed judgment of the Articles?	**The system helped coordinate a successful war effort, but Congress's weak funding powers left soldiers short of supplies and pay.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Delegate, I recommend giving Congress a limited power to collect a tax for army supplies. Under the Articles, Congress can ask states for money, but it cannot require them to pay. When states send too little, soldiers may lack food, clothing, and pay. A national supply tax would give Congress a more reliable way to support the army while the war continues. Congress should keep its power to manage foreign relations because cooperation with France helped American forces at Yorktown.

Accept other changes that address a wartime limit described in the passage. Responses should also preserve a specific congressional power and explain how it helped the war effort.