A Fragile Union

Find how the Articles of Confederation limited the national government.

8.C.3.1.B "Identify the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation, including the lack of a common national currency, means for common defense, national judiciary to settle disputes among the states..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each weakness of the Articles of Confederation in the passage. Number the weaknesses 1 through 5 so you can check that you found them all.

When States Had to Work Together

1 In the 1780s, a merchant could carry paper money issued by one state into another and find that a shopkeeper would not accept it at the same value. The Articles of Confederation did not establish a common national currency, and states could issue their own money. Different kinds of money made prices harder to compare across state lines. For people trying to buy, sell, or collect payments in several states, doing business could become confusing and costly.

2 The national government could plan a common defense, but it could not force states to send the soldiers or money it requested. If some states refused, the others would have to shoulder more of the burden when danger threatened. There was also no permanent national judiciary to settle legal disputes between states. Congress could arrange a special process for such disputes, but it lacked a standing national court. A disagreement about who controlled a stretch of river could take time to resolve, even when both states wanted an answer.

3 After the Revolutionary War, Congress owed money to soldiers and lenders. Under the Articles, it could ask states for funds but could not impose national taxes to raise the money itself. When states sent too little, paying the war debt became difficult. Fixing this weakness was also hard: every state had to vote yes to amend the Articles. If twelve states favored a change and one rejected it, the change failed. A rule meant to protect state power could prevent the national government from solving shared problems.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Which weakness made it harder for a merchant to do business across state lines?

2. What could the national government not require states to provide for a common defense?

3. Which missing part of the national government could have helped settle legal disputes between states?

4. Identify one weakness that made war debt hard to pay and another that made the Articles hard to change.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Invent a situation in which two weaknesses from the passage cause problems. In four or five sentences, explain both problems and propose a matching change to the Articles for each one.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 8 · 8.C.3.1.B

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each weakness of the Articles of Confederation in the passage. Number the weaknesses 1 through 5 so you can check that you found them all. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Which weakness made it harder for a merchant to do business across state lines?	**The Articles did not establish a common national currency, so merchants dealt with different kinds of money.**
2	What could the national government not require states to provide for a common defense?	**It could not require states to send soldiers or money.**
3	Which missing part of the national government could have helped settle legal disputes between states?	**A permanent national judiciary, or standing national court.**
4	Identify one weakness that made war debt hard to pay and another that made the Articles hard to change.	**Congress could not impose national taxes to pay war debt. Amendments required every state to vote yes.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

In a small town, veterans meet because their promised payments have not arrived. Congress can only ask states for money, so it cannot count on having enough to pay them. I would give Congress the power to collect national taxes. If one state votes against that change, the rule requiring every state's approval will block it. I would allow a large majority of states to approve amendments instead.

Accept accurate descriptions of the five weaknesses, even if students use different wording. For Your Turn, look for an invented situation, two distinct weaknesses, and a change that addresses each one.