A Nation Tested

Strengths, weaknesses, and the road to Philadelphia

8.C.3.1 "Examine conditions in the new nation that led to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787. Identify strengths of the United States of America's government operating under the Articles of Confederation..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two strengths of the government under the Articles, circle five weaknesses, and number three steps from farmers' hardship to the meeting in Philadelphia.

Why Change the Articles?

1. Imagine a country trying to govern itself while fighting for independence. Under the Articles of Confederation, Congress helped the states organize troops, supplies, and diplomacy needed to win the Revolutionary War. After the war, arguments over western lands threatened cooperation. The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 gave lands northwest of the Ohio River rules for territorial government and a path to statehood. This plan helped settle disputes about how western lands would be governed, showing that the national government could act together.

2. Yet Congress could not collect national taxes, even though the nation owed money from the war. It had to ask states for funds, and states could refuse. There was no common national currency; different state paper money and foreign coins complicated trade. Congress also lacked a reliable way to raise and pay troops for common defense. With no national court system, disputes between states had no dependable federal judge. Changing the Articles required every state to agree, so even widely supported repairs could be blocked by one state.

3. In Massachusetts, many farmers faced debt and high state taxes after the war. Some lost land when they could not pay. In 1786 and 1787, protesters led by Daniel Shays closed courts to stop debt cases, and some tried to seize an arsenal in Springfield. Massachusetts used its militia to stop them. Shays' Rebellion showed how economic hardship could lead to civil unrest and made leaders fear the government was too weak to respond to crises. In May 1787, delegates met in Philadelphia to revise the Articles; instead, they wrote a new Constitution.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Congress help the states during the war, and how did the Northwest Ordinance help them afterward?

2. Why was paying the war debt difficult, and what made trade between states harder?

3. What two problems could the lack of a national court system and reliable means of common defense cause?

4. How did Shays' Rebellion increase calls to revise the Articles, and why was changing the Articles difficult?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence note to a delegate meeting in Philadelphia. Choose one strength of the government under the Articles to preserve and one weakness to fix, then propose a change and explain how it might address a problem in the passage.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 8 · 8.C.3.1

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two strengths of the government under the Articles, circle five weaknesses, and number three steps from farmers' hardship to the meeting in Philadelphia. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Congress help the states during the war, and how did the Northwest Ordinance help them afterward?	**Congress helped organize troops, supplies, and diplomacy. The Northwest Ordinance set rules for governing western territory and a path to statehood, helping settle disputes over its government.**
2	Why was paying the war debt difficult, and what made trade between states harder?	**Congress could not collect national taxes and had to ask states for funds. Without a common national currency, different kinds of money complicated trade.**
3	What two problems could the lack of a national court system and reliable means of common defense cause?	**States lacked a dependable federal judge for disputes between them. Congress could not reliably raise and pay troops for common defense.**
4	How did Shays' Rebellion increase calls to revise the Articles, and why was changing the Articles difficult?	**The rebellion showed that economic hardship could lead to unrest and raised fears about the government's ability to respond. Revising the Articles required every state's approval.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Keep the Northwest Ordinance's path to statehood because it helped states cooperate over western land. Congress could not collect national taxes to pay the war debt. Give Congress the power to collect those taxes so it can pay national bills. That change could ease pressure on states facing debt, though it would not solve every cause of Shays' Rebellion.

Accept other accurate strengths and proposed fixes if the note explains a plausible connection to a problem in the passage. The proposed change need not solve every cause of the problem.