Seats at Stake

How a debate over representation shaped Congress

8.C.3.2.C "Explain how the key debate regarding state representation in Congress, presented by opposing Virginia and New Jersey Plans, was resolved by the Great Compromise, creating a bicameral legislature."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the representation rule in each plan and circle the rule for each chamber in the compromise. Write 1 beside the smaller states' objection and 2 beside the larger states' objection to trace how the compromise addressed both.

Who Gets a Voice in Congress?

1. In the summer of 1787, delegates met in Philadelphia to redesign the national government. They agreed that Congress needed power to make laws for the whole country, but they disagreed about who should have the strongest voice there. Imagine a vote on a shipping law: would a state with many people deserve more lawmakers than a state with few people? Virginia had a much larger population than Delaware. If both states sent the same number of lawmakers, Virginians argued, a person in Delaware would have more influence than a person in Virginia.

2. The Virginia Plan proposed a Congress with two chambers, or parts. Under that plan, a state's population would help determine its number of representatives in each chamber. Larger states would gain more seats and more power. The New Jersey Plan kept one chamber and gave every state an equal vote, no matter its size. Delegates from smaller states feared that population-based representation would let larger states dominate decisions. Delegates from larger states protested that equal state votes would give smaller populations too much power. Neither side wanted to surrender its voice.

3. After weeks of debate, delegates adopted the Great Compromise, also called the Connecticut Compromise. It created a bicameral, or two-chamber, Congress. In the House of Representatives, states receive seats based on population, addressing larger states' demand that people count in representation. In the Senate, every state gets two senators, giving smaller states an equal place at the table. Both chambers must pass the same bill before it can become law. The compromise built both ideas into Congress, requiring lawmakers from differently sized states to share power.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Under the Virginia Plan and the New Jersey Plan, how would Virginia's voice in Congress compare with Delaware's?

2. Why would delegates from a smaller state such as Delaware object to the Virginia Plan?

3. Why would delegates from a larger state such as Virginia object to the New Jersey Plan?

4. How did the Great Compromise address both sides' objections through its two chambers?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine four states forming a new union. One large state wants more seats, while three small states want equal votes. Write a four- or five-sentence proposal for a two-chamber lawmaking body. Explain how each chamber assigns seats and why both sides might accept your plan.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 8 · 8.C.3.2.C

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the representation rule in each plan and circle the rule for each chamber in the compromise. Write 1 beside the smaller states' objection and 2 beside the larger states' objection to trace how the compromise addressed both. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Under the Virginia Plan and the New Jersey Plan, how would Virginia's voice in Congress compare with Delaware's?	**The Virginia Plan would give more seats to Virginia because it had more people. The New Jersey Plan would give the two states equal votes.**
2	Why would delegates from a smaller state such as Delaware object to the Virginia Plan?	**Its population-based seats would give larger states more power, which could let them dominate decisions.**
3	Why would delegates from a larger state such as Virginia object to the New Jersey Plan?	**Its equal state votes would give states with far fewer people the same voice as Virginia.**
4	How did the Great Compromise address both sides' objections through its two chambers?	**The House gives states seats based on population, addressing larger states' concerns. The Senate gives every state two senators, addressing smaller states' concerns.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Our union would have two chambers that must both approve a law. In one chamber, states would receive seats based on population, giving the large state more seats. In the other chamber, each state would have the same number of seats, giving the small states equal standing. Both sides might accept this plan because each gets a voice in one chamber without controlling the whole lawmaking body alone.

Accept explanations that connect population-based seats to larger states and equal state representation to smaller states. For the open task, students may choose any equal number of seats per state in the second chamber.