A Nation Debates

Read competing arguments about ratifying the Constitution.

8.C.3.3 "Examine the process to ratify the Constitution of the United States of America. Identify major reasons advocating for the adoption of the Constitution of the United States of America as expressed by leading Federalists James Madison..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each Federalist reason for ratification, circle each Anti-Federalist concern, and number arguments from opposite sides that address the same risk.

The Ratification Debate

1. In 1787, delegates in Philadelphia proposed a Constitution to replace the Articles of Confederation. The proposal would take effect among states that ratified it once conventions in nine of the thirteen states approved it. Newspapers became a stage for public debate. Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay wrote essays as Publius to urge approval. Hamilton opened Federalist No. 1 by asking whether people could choose a government through reason and debate rather than leave it to chance and force. Jay argued that a united nation could better face threats from abroad.

2. Supporters and critics agreed that power could be dangerous, but disagreed on how to control it. In Federalist No. 10, Madison argued that a large republic would contain many competing groups, making it harder for one group to trample others. In No. 51, he argued that separate branches could check one another because officials would defend their own powers. In No. 84, Hamilton argued that a national bill of rights was unnecessary because the proposed government had only powers granted to it. He warned that listing rights might suggest the government had powers to limit them.

3. Anti-Federalist writers doubted these safeguards. Cato warned that a republic spread across a vast territory would put leaders too far from the people to know their needs. Brutus warned that broad federal powers and national courts could weaken state governments and threaten liberty. George Mason refused to sign the Constitution, in part because it lacked a national bill of rights. Critics feared a strong central government could abuse power without clear protections. Ratification won enough states in 1788, but the debate continued; the first ten amendments, the Bill of Rights, were ratified in 1791.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does Hamilton's argument in Federalist No. 1 differ from Cato's concern about leaders and the people?

2. What different safeguards against abuse of power does Madison describe in Federalist Nos. 10 and 51?

3. Why did Hamilton in Federalist No. 84 and George Mason disagree about a national bill of rights?

4. Compare Jay's reason for a united nation with Brutus's warning about national power.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you are a delegate at a state ratifying convention in 1788. In four or five sentences, recommend a vote, compare arguments from two numbered Federalist essays with one argument from Cato or Brutus, and explain how the bill of rights issue affects your vote.

ANSWER KEY

A Nation Debates

GRADE 8 · 8.C.3.3

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each Federalist reason for ratification, circle each Anti-Federalist concern, and number arguments from opposite sides that address the same risk. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does Hamilton's argument in Federalist No. 1 differ from Cato's concern about leaders and the people?	**Hamilton argued that people could choose a government through reason and debate. Cato feared that leaders of a large republic would be too distant to understand the people's needs.**
2	What different safeguards against abuse of power does Madison describe in Federalist Nos. 10 and 51?	**No. 10 points to competing groups in a large republic. No. 51 points to separate branches checking one another.**
3	Why did Hamilton in Federalist No. 84 and George Mason disagree about a national bill of rights?	**Hamilton thought it was unnecessary because the government had only granted powers, and he feared a list of rights might suggest powers to limit them. Mason wanted clear protections against government abuse.**
4	Compare Jay's reason for a united nation with Brutus's warning about national power.	**Jay argued that unity would help the nation face foreign threats. Brutus warned that federal powers and national courts could weaken states and threaten liberty.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would vote to ratify because Madison's Federalist No. 10 says a large republic makes it harder for one group to dominate. His No. 51 adds that separate branches can check one another. Brutus warns that national power and courts could weaken the states, which makes me cautious. Since the Constitution lacks a national bill of rights, I would ask leaders to add one after ratification. That change would address a serious objection while allowing the new government to take effect.

Accept either vote if the response accurately compares two numbered Federalist essays with Cato or Brutus and explains how the lack of a national bill of rights affects the decision.