A Union Rebuilt

From the Articles of Confederation to the Constitution

8.C.3 "Examine the formation of the United States of America's system of government following the Revolutionary War and the creation of the Constitution of the United States of America..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two successes of the Articles of Confederation, circle three weaknesses, and number two changes in the Constitution that addressed those weaknesses. Use your marks to trace why the nation changed its government.

Why Change the Government?

1. After independence, the states needed a way to act together without returning to rule by a powerful central government. Under the Articles of Confederation, Congress helped organize the war effort and later passed the Northwest Ordinance, which set rules for governing western territory and admitting new states. Yet Congress could request money but could not tax to pay war debts. States issued different currencies, and Congress lacked a reliable way to fund common defense or a national court to settle disputes between states. Changing the Articles required every state's approval.

2. Debt and scarce money squeezed farmers. In Massachusetts, armed protesters in Shays' Rebellion shut down courts in 1786 and 1787 to stop property seizures. The unrest exposed how hard it was for the national government to respond. Delegates met in Philadelphia in 1787 to revise the Articles, but designed a new Constitution instead. George Washington presided, while James Madison shaped debates. Roger Sherman proposed a compromise between the Virginia Plan's population-based representation and the New Jersey Plan's equal state representation: one House based on population and one Senate with equal representation for states.

3. The Constitution began with "We the People," echoing the Declaration of Independence's claim that government gets its power from the people's consent. It gave Congress power to tax, created federal courts, and divided national power among branches. Ratification required approval by conventions in nine states. Federalists such as Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay argued that a stronger union could govern effectively. Anti-Federalists, including George Mason, feared federal abuse and demanded a bill of rights. Supporters promised amendments protecting individual freedoms, which became the Bill of Rights.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the Northwest Ordinance show a strength of the Articles, while war debt revealed a weakness?

2. Why did Shays' Rebellion add urgency to calls for changing the Articles?

3. How did Sherman's proposal address the disagreement between the Virginia and New Jersey Plans?

4. How did Federalist and Anti-Federalist arguments shape the path to ratification?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you are advising a state ratifying convention. In five or six sentences, argue for or against ratification using one success and two failures of the Articles, one decision made at the Constitutional Convention, and a response to a concern raised during ratification. Explain why your evidence supports your position.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 8 · 8.C.3

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two successes of the Articles of Confederation, circle three weaknesses, and number two changes in the Constitution that addressed those weaknesses. Use your marks to trace why the nation changed its government. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the Northwest Ordinance show a strength of the Articles, while war debt revealed a weakness?	**Congress set rules for governing western territory and admitting states, but it could not tax to pay war debts.**
2	Why did Shays' Rebellion add urgency to calls for changing the Articles?	**Armed protesters shut down courts during an economic crisis, exposing how hard it was for the national government to respond.**
3	How did Sherman's proposal address the disagreement between the Virginia and New Jersey Plans?	**It created a House with representation based on population, as the Virginia Plan favored, and a Senate with equal representation for states, as the New Jersey Plan favored.**
4	How did Federalist and Anti-Federalist arguments shape the path to ratification?	**Federalists argued for a stronger union. Anti-Federalists feared federal abuse and wanted a bill of rights, so supporters promised amendments protecting individual freedoms.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would vote to ratify the Constitution because the Articles could not meet the nation's growing needs. The Northwest Ordinance showed that Congress could set rules for western territory, but Congress could not tax to repay war debts or provide a national court for disputes between states. The delegates' decision to give Congress taxing power and create federal courts would make shared problems easier to address. I understand George Mason's fear that federal officials might abuse their power. I would support ratification with a promise to add a bill of rights to protect individual freedoms.

Accept either position on ratification if the student uses accurate evidence and explains its significance. The Convention decision and the response to a ratification concern should be specific.