

The Constitution and the Convention

TITLE: The US Constitution, up close and personal

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Grades 9-10

2-4 Days (45 minute classes to begin after the lessons on Shay's Rebellion and the failure of the Articles of Confederation – days can be limited if readings are assigned as homework, verify your students can handle advanced material or use class time to assist in understanding of material)

MASSACHUSETTS FRAMEWORKS

- USI.7 – Explain the roles of various founders at the Constitutional Convention. Describe the major debates that occurred at the Convention and the “Great Compromise” that was reached.
- USI.8 – Describe the debate over the ratification of the Constitution between Federalists and Anti-Federalists and explain the key ideas contained in the Federalist Papers on federalism, factions, checks and balances, and the importance of an independent judiciary
- USI.9 – Explain the reasons for the passage of the Bill of Rights
- USI.10 – On a map of North America, identify the first 13 states to ratify the Constitution

ESSENTIAL OBJECTIVES

- Students will analyze the failures of the Articles of Confederation as the contrast this to the US Constitution
- Students will learn how vital compromise and deal making were essential to finishing the Constitution
- Through letters from the founders themselves students will determine that ratification (and the United States of America) was not a given

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What were the obstacles faced by our Founding Fathers?

PROCEDURE

Day 1 – The focus of the first day is to provide specific background information on the colonies, but also to highlight the different economical background of a Northern versus a Southern colony. Although this predates the Articles of Confederation it is meant to reinforce the idea the Articles were a loose coalition of distinct states.

Preparation: Students should have read pgs 11-14 of The Jefferson by R.B. Bernstein before coming to class

- a. Class discussion on Virginia planters –
 - i. Begin by having students write two desirable traits of a “gentlemen”,

1. Compare traits to the “gentlemen” from colonial Virginia.
 - ii. What problems did they encounter, and how did they overcome them?
 - iii. How might these lives have differed from someone in Philadelphia, New York, or Boston?
- b. Provide class with Colonial reading article (two pages contrasting the life and economy of the Northern and Southern colonies)
 - i. discuss differences as small groups, and then as a class to highlight the differences to all students
 - ii. continue lesson by assigning Colonial Data handout and questions if desired

Day 2 – Students will begin to look at specific members of the Articles of Confederation, and get personal with their elected representatives to Constitutional Convention.

- a. Assign each student an original colony, and have them group together by colony (groups of 2 or 3 students) Introduce students to texts from A Brilliant Solution by Carol Berkin (pgs 211-261) which contains a nicely organized profile of each representative by colony, and The Founders on the Founders by John Kaminski. In these groups have students read and discuss their colony’s representatives.
 - iii. Which economic class do they belong to?
 - iv. What do they have in common with one another? (same colony)
 - v. What do they hope to accomplish at the Convention? (goals)
 - vi. Describe one representative as if you were describing him to a friend.
 - vii. What do the previous questions tell you about your colony?
- b. Distribute Founding Father Trading Card assignment (attached) and ask students to choose a representative from their own colony in which they would like to research a little more (tell students that they cannot pick the same person).
 - viii. By the end of class, make sure students have a person assigned to them and understand the assignment

Day 3 – Using letters from the founders to others, the students will investigate the debates that raged over ratification, scrutinize the Constitution, think about the human side of the Founders, and consider the possibility of failing to ratify the Constitution. GREAT OPPORTUNITY FOR DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION.

- a. Begin the day by reading selections from Michael Kammen’s book *The Origins of the American Constitution* (pg 53-122). Specifically the teacher should read from pg 65, the letter from James Madison to Thomas Jefferson on October 24, 1787. It is lengthy, but includes much information including a telling comment on why

slavery was not addressed (SC and GA were inflexible on the point of slaves). Pick and choose specific sections from this reading, but Madison does seem to say it all (at least he attempts to).

- b. Around the room on large mostly blank pieces of paper place the names of the founding fathers (one piece for each author of a letter you are about to distribute). There are many different letters included in this book, including the Federalist Papers (which I would only give to the most advanced students looking for a challenge). *Give 4-5 letters to each student. As students read through these letters they should record criticisms and/or support of the different aspects of the Constitution. After 15 minutes or so have them find a partner (or small group) and share the ideas they pulled from their readings and write them on the appropriate founding fathers sheet (which you hung up around the room). One or two letters will not tell an entire story by themselves, but each student reading five letters may tell more of the story that will begin to take shape.
- c. As the final minutes are approaching (or the following day) ask the students as a class to categorize the founding fathers into those for Ratification and those against. (You can use this as a lead into the Federalist vs the Anti-Federalist)

*I would definitely include the following letters but there are plenty to choose from. They are numbered in the book (repeats are definitely OK as long as different students get them).
Use #14, 16, 18, 21, 25, 30, 34, 35, 36

Length and complexity can be adjusted for different level students
There are similar letters included and a similar days activity may be used for the Bill of Rights as well as the Federalist/Anti-Federalist Papers.

Required Readings

**Berkin, Carol “A Brilliant Solution: Inventing the American Constitution”
Harcourt, Inc 2002**

**Bernstein, R.B. “The Founding Fathers Reconsidered” pgs 59-63, Oxford
University Press 2009**

Bernstein, R.B. “The Jefferson” pgs 11-14, Oxford University Press 2003

**Kammen, Michael “The Origins of the American Constitution: A
Documentary History” Penguin Group (USA) Inc. 1986**

**Kaminski, John P. “The Founders on the Founders: Word Portraits from the
American Revolutionary Era” University of Virginia Press 2008**

Founding Fathers Trading Cards

WHO: We will be assigning people today.

WHAT: Make a trading card (think baseball card but 8"x11") of one of the Founding Fathers of our nation.

WHEN: LATE 18th Century (1700s) – **PROJECT DUE OCT 25, 2010**

WHY: An opportunity to get a better understanding of the many different people involved in the creation of our Constitution

WHERE: At the convention in Philadelphia

HOW: A little research goes a long way. Using readings from Carol Berkin's *A Brilliant Solution*, possibly John Kaminski's *The Founders on the Founders*, and at least one other source you will develop a fact sheet on a historical figure to use on your trading card. Keep in mind that birth dates and Batting Averages are types of information; they may not necessarily describe the importance of the person. Please feel free to include them but include at least one paragraph regarding their ACTIONS/BELIEFS during the Constitutional Convention, as well as one paragraph which include a story that reflects their personality.

**remember wikipedia is always reliable in terms of accuracy DO NOT USE IT.*

DIRECTIONS

The attached Rubric should supply the requirements. I have seen many trading cards with many unique approaches, so have fun and feel free to be as creative as possible.

- Please have a portrait (photograph, drawing, painting), the name of your person, and also include your name on the **front** as well. Feel free to add more if you want, but the picture and name should be very prominently displayed on the front. A small map of the 13 states should also appear on the front with your persons state somehow highlighted.
- The backside should have the information regarding key facts and dates about your person.
 - At least 6 facts must be included
 - One paragraph will indicate the contributions of your historical figure to the Constitutional Convention.
 - One paragraph will demonstrate the personality (through a story about that individual)
- Do not forget to mention somewhere (anywhere on the card) where you received your information. (Title of book, pg number, etc)
- Remember History Rocks, and so do you. Plan on these hanging from the ceiling of our classroom, so put your best foot forward.

Founding Fathers Trading Cards

CATEGORY	10pts	7pts	4pts	0
Attractiveness & Organization	The card has exceptionally attractive formatting and well-organized information. The formatting follows directions.	The card has attractive formatting and well-organized information. The formatting mostly follows directions.	The card has well-organized information. The formatting follows some directions.	The card's formatting and organization of material are confusing to the reader. The formatting fails to follow directions.
Content - Accuracy	All facts on the card are accurate, and at least 2 different references are included	99-90% of the facts on the card are accurate, or there is only 1 reference listed	89-80% of the facts on the card are accurate, or there are no references listed	Fewer than 80% of the facts on the card are accurate, and no references are listed
Content - Quantity & Relevance	The card includes 6 or more relevant facts about the person, at least one paragraph about their contributions during the convention, and one paragraph about their personal life	The sample card includes 3-5 relevant facts about the person, or a paragraph is left out.	The sample card includes 1 or 2 relevant facts about the person and/or no paragraph	The sample card includes no relevant facts about the person.
Graphics/Pictures	The graphic/portrait and name is on one side, along with the state map. The facts are on the other. The graphic/portrait is neatly attached to the card in a planned manner.	The graphic/portrait and name is on one side and the facts are on the other. The graphic/portrait is not neatly centered and pasted to the card.	The graphic/portrait is on the same side with the facts.	No graphic/portrait is included or the wrong graphic/portrait is included.
Importance	The sample card clearly and concisely explains the importance of the historical figure to the Convention(i.e., why did this person matter enough to be remembered over 200+ years later)	The sample card explains the importance of the historical figure but the explanation is unclear or not in the context of the Constitution Convention	The sample card attempts to explain the importance of the historical figure but the explanation is unsatisfactory (i.e., it misses the point).	The sample card does not offer an explanation of the importance of the figure or only lists a single fact (i.e., "He was a great general.")