



# Establishment of the Articles of Confederation:

The First Constitution MS A1

**Grades 6-8**

*United States History*

**Time need** 90 minutes

## Objectives

Students will be able to...

1. Identify aspects of the Articles of Confederation
2. Analyze the extent of the Articles of Confederation
3. Explain the ways in which the Articles of Confederation establish precedents for U.S. government

<b>BINARY PAIDEIA</b>		
<b>Society</b>	<b>Time Period</b>	<b>Society</b>
British Empire King in Parliament	<i>American Revolution</i> <i>Politeia/Regime</i>	American Patriots State Assemblies Continental Congress
Aristocracy/Gentry Glorious Revolution	<i>Politeuma/Ruling Class</i> <i>Paideia/What makes a society what it is</i>	White male landowners Republicanism, Colonial Charters, John Locke's 2 <sup>nd</sup> Treatises
Loyalty	<i>Virtue/ The highest moral excellence</i>	Liberty

## Key Terms

Confederation	a league; a compact for mutual support
Sovereignty	supreme power esp. over a body politic
Ratification	approval of

Jurisdiction                      authority or control

## **Background**

On June 12, 1776, a committee was appointed to begin drafting a document for the United States. This document would define the role and the limits of the inevitable new government of the United States. After several drafts by men such as Benjamin Franklin and John Dickenson, a final draft of the Articles was completed in 1777. After its completion, the Articles were not immediately ratified. Weary of government, states were not immediately willing to ratify the document without deliberations and some concessions.

The issue of who would control lands west of the Appalachian Mountain concerned states, especially those without Western claims. Maryland insisted the West belonged to the United States and that the landless states should be given the opportunity in the West as well. Thus, it was not until Thomas Jefferson urged Virginia to yield its western claims that the Articles of Confederation were finally ratified in 1781.

After debating key issues, like the western land issue, the supremacy of the states, and the type of representation, the Articles gave Congress only very specific powers and strictly limited them. The Articles became the glue, though not a strong one, that held the new nation together. Among the accomplishments of the confederation was the Northwest Ordinance, which set the guidelines for settlement in the West and the admission of new states into the union. This lesson takes a deeper look at Articles: what was included in them, the extent of their power, and the precedents it would set for future government.

## **Procedure**

- I. Previous Night's Homework:
  - a. Using resources from previous lessons, students were to devise their own constitutional republic.
    - i. They will list the five most important components of a free constitutional republic.
- II. Day of Lesson Procedure
  - a. Review Binary *Paideia* with students.
    - i. Make sure they understand the differences between how the British defined themselves and how American Patriots defined themselves. (MS A1a)
  - b. Begin class by asking students to share their lists with the class.
    - i. What types of things would they assume to be included or resisted by the new government?
    - ii. Ask Students:
      1. How would the Founders deal with questions of supremacy, representation, and western lands?
    - iii. Discuss and expand upon students responses.

1. Explain that the class will look at the Articles themselves and analyze them and their scope.
- iv. Distribute study questions MS A1b (MA A1c → answers) to students.
- v. Give students as much time as necessary to investigate the Articles of Confederation at [www.AmericanInstituteforHistory.org](http://www.AmericanInstituteforHistory.org) and answer the questions.
- c. Upon completion of the study questions, ask students to share answers with the class.
  - i. Discuss as a group.
- d. Close class with the final question on the study sheet.
  - i. How did the articles set a precedent U.S. government?
  - ii. Can you see any elements of them in U.S. government today?

### **Homework**

Have students re-read the Articles of Confederation. Ask students to examine the document and evaluate it. Complete the homework worksheet (MA A1b) evaluate why provisions were included, where they are found, and what potential problems might arise?

### **Assessment**

Students will be assessed on participation in class and the completeness of their answers to the questions on the study guide. Homework will be collected and graded by the correctness and thoroughness of student responses.

### **Extension**

Have students research other plans for union that existed prior to the Articles (such as the Albany Plan of 1754). What were the components of these plans? Were elements of these plans evident in the articles? Why were these plans rejected and the Articles used instead?

### **Handout - Study Questions for the Articles of Confederation**

Directions: Using your handout of the Articles of Confederation and any other information gained through classroom notes or discussion, answer the following questions as completely as possible. Be prepared to share your ideas in a class discussion.

1. Compare and contrast the different opinions of Americans with respect to the formation of the new government. What were the effects of these differences as seen in the Articles of Confederation?

2. What is a confederation? Describe the bonds that sustained this confederation.
3. What powers were given to the states in the Articles of Confederation?
4. What powers were given to the Congress of the United States?
5. According to the Articles of Confederation, who would make the law of the nation?
6. According to Article 9, what is the limit placed on the powers of Congress?
7. Which seemed to have more power, the state or national government? Why do you suppose that is?
8. What was the main reason the articles were written?
9. Why do you suppose the articles were not accepted immediately by all?
10. Explain how the articles of confederation established precedents for U.S. government.

### **Handout Answers - Study Questions for the Articles of Confederation**

Directions: Using your handout of the Articles of Confederation and any other information gained through classroom notes or discussion, answer the following questions as completely as possible. Be prepared to share your ideas in a class discussion.

1. Compare the different opinions of Americans with respect to the formation of the new government. What were the effects of these differences as seen in the Articles of Confederation? **Some Americans believed that government should be close to the people with the power residing in the states. Others believed that a stronger national government was necessary to govern the new nation. As a result powers were divided in the Articles with states having supremacy.**
2. What is a confederation? Describe the bonds that sustained this confederation.  
**A loose union or alliance of states joined for a specific purpose with each state keeping its sovereign power**
3. What powers were given to the states in the Articles of Confederation?  
**Any power not given to Congress**

4. What powers were given to the Congress of the United States?  
**Make and wage war, appoint ambassadors, make treaties, maritime courts, settle border disputes, post office, coin money, raise army and navy**
5. According to the Articles of Confederation, who would make the law of the nation?  
**No specific person is given this power**
6. According to Article 9, what is the limit placed on the powers of Congress?  
**Congressional power was limited by the stipulation that nine states had to agree for Congress to make war, treaties, money, etc.**
7. Which seemed to have more power, the state or national government? Why do you suppose that is?  
**States. Powers were limited due to fear of too strong of a central government after the abuses of George III.**
8. What was the main reason the articles were written?  
**It was necessary some central government was necessary. In order for the nation to be recognized internationally and to form some way in which to formally establish a new government.**
9. Why do you suppose the articles were not accepted immediately by all?  
**Western land claims became a stumbling block to ratification.**
10. Explain how the articles of confederation established precedents for U.S. government.  
**Answers will vary (Possible- separation of powers, gave structure, etc)**

## Homework Handout: Analysis of the Articles of Confederation

Feature	Why do you suppose this was included?	Which Article can you find the rule?	What could be a potential problem with the rule?
No chief executive			
No national power to settle disputes between states			
Congress could not collect state debts owed			
Congress did not have the power to tax			
Congress could not create a national court			
Approval of all states were needed to amend the constitution			
Laws needed to be approved by 9/13 states			