

# Creation of the U.S. Constitution

**Date:** 11/30/2010

**Class:** 8<sup>th</sup> Grade U.S. History

**Goal:** Today, I aim to help students discover and analyze the important feud between the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists during the framing of the U.S. Constitution in 1787.

**Objective:** Within their groups, students will study where they would have stood on the ratification of the Constitution if they were a Federalist or Anti-Federalist (I have arranged the desks and assigned a role for each group to argue).

**GLCES:** 8 – U3.3.5 Analyze the debates over the ratification of the Constitution from the perspectives of Federalists and Anti-Federalists and describe how the states ratified the Constitution. (C2) (*National Geography Standard 3, p. 148*)

**Rationale:** This formation of a more unified and competent national government (with checks and balances, of course) is the foundation of our government today. Naturally, the creation of such a government was widely disputed, especially because many feared the tyranny they experienced with Great Britain before the Revolutionary War. Understanding the basics about the structure of our government and how it came to be in the first place is essential knowledge for students to become able and active citizens in their community.

## **Procedures:**

- 1) Students will sit in their assigned groups, turn to P.270 in their books (only a couple are needed per group), and listen to directions.
- 2) Each student will write their name on the sheet of paper provided on their table and begin working. One scribe will list their major arguments (in their own words) for or against the ratification of the Constitution based on their assigned role of “Federalist” or “Anti-Federalist.”
- 3) After about 15-20 minutes, I will call on groups from both sides to share and possibly debate the issue.
- 4) If there is time at the end, I will put in a DVD from the History Channel that covers important information from the Chapter we’re currently studying. Students will write up to 10 facts while watching.

**Evaluation:** Students will be evaluated on how well they demonstrate their assigned role as Federalists or Anti-Federalists. Each member of each group must contribute to earn credit for this activity.

**Accommodations/Differentiation/Individualization:** In addition to being given out loud, step-by-step directions will be projected on screen throughout the activity so that students will know what they are supposed to be doing at any time.

**Article 1** (given to each group):

The creation of the Constitution included hours of debate and compromise, and even when it was completed, some delegates were unhappy with it. The task of fixing the crumbling Confederate government was not complete yet; each state had to **ratify**, or approve, the Constitution. Basically, people divided into two groups, the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists. Each of their viewpoints is worth examining, as they both have sound reasoning.

The Anti-Federalists did not want to ratify the Constitution. Basically, they argue that:

- It gave too much power to the national government at the expense of the state governments.
- There was no bill of rights.
- The national government could maintain an army in peacetime.
- Congress, because of the 'necessary and proper clause,' held too much power.
- The executive branch held too much power.

Of these complaints, the lack of a bill of rights was the most effective. The American people had just fought a war to defend their rights, and they did not want a intimidating national government taking those rights away again. The lack of a bill of rights was the focus of the Anti-Federalist campaign against ratification.



The Federalists, on the other hand, had answers to all of the Anti-Federalist complaints. Among them:

- The separation of powers into three independent branches protected the rights of the people. Each branch represents a different aspect of the people, and because all three branches are equal, no one group can assume control over another.
- A listing of rights can be a dangerous thing. If the national government were to protect specific listed rights, what would stop it from violating rights other than the listed ones? Since we can't list all the rights, the Federalists argued that it's better to list none at all.

Overall, the Federalists were more organized in their efforts. By June of 1788, the Constitution was close to ratification. Nine states had ratified it, and only one more (New Hampshire) was needed. To achieve this, the Federalists agreed that once Congress met, it would draft a bill of rights. Finally, New York and Virginia approved, and the Constitution was a reality. Interestingly,

the Bill of Rights was not originally a part of the Constitution, and yet it has proved to be highly important to protecting the rights of the people.

**Article 2** (given to each group):

## ANTIFEDERALISTS VS FEDERALISTS

Anti-Federalist objections to the Constitution

Federalist defenses of the Constitution

Antifederalists -- states' rights advocates, backcountry farmers, poor farmers, the ill-educated and illiterate, debtors, & paper-money advocates. In general, the poorer classes of society.

Federalists -- Well educated and propertied class. Most lived in settled areas along the seaboard.

*Anti-Federalist Positions:*

1. Articles of Confederation were a good plan.
2. Opposed strong central government. Opposed a standing army and a 10 square mile federal stronghold (later District of Columbia).
3. Strong national government threatened state power.
4. Strong national government threatened rights of the common people. Constitution was created by aristocratic elements. Suspected a sinister plot to suppress liberty of the masses.
5. Constitution favored wealthy men and preserved their power. Opposed the dropping of annual elections for representatives.
6. Constitution lacked a bill of rights. State governments already had bills of rights but they might be overridden by the Constitution.
7. Argued against 2/3 ratification plan. Articles of Confederation required unanimous consent.
8. Opposed omitting any reference to God.

*Federalist Positions:*

1. Articles of Confederation were weak and ineffective.

2. National government needed to be strong in order to function. Powers in foreign policy needed to be strengthened while excesses at home needed to be controlled.
3. Strong national government needed to control uncooperative states.
4. Men of experience and talent should govern the nation. "Mobocracy" threatened the security of life and property.
5. National government would protect the rights of the people.
6. Constitution and state governments protected individual freedoms without bill of rights. Since people could take back delegated power to the gov't, there was no risk that the national gov't would overreach.
7. In favor of establishing the Constitution with almost any means possible.
8. More sympathetic to separation of church and state.