

Northwest History Consortium

Constitutional Debates

Revised version of “The Constitution and Student Rights” by Betsy Gottschalk

Betsy Gottschalk
8th Grade

National Standard

Era 3: Revolution and the New Nation (1754-1820s) / Standard 3

Standard 3: The institutions and practices of government created during the Revolution and how they were revised between 1787 and 1815 to create the foundation of the American political system based on the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

Washington Standard

United States History 1.2.2: Identify and analyze major issues, people, and events in U.S. history from the Revolution to 1900 including: Revolution, Constitution, and New Nation (1763-1820).

Archdiocese of Seattle EALR

Civics Grade 8: 1: The student understands and can explain the core values and principles of the U.S. democracy as set forth in foundational documents, including the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

SCENARIO

After the Constitution of the United States was written, it needed to be ratified by nine of the thirteen states before it was a binding document for the country. Each state held a convention in which elected representatives decided if their state would ratify the Constitution.

Immediately, conflict arose at the state conventions. Supporters—the Federalists—of the Constitution as it was written were for a strong national government. They argued that too much power had been left to individual states in the Articles of Confederation. The power vested in the states had created a weak, disempowered central government.

Federalists Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay wrote convincing essays in favor of a strong central government which would still uphold the rights and powers of individual states.

However, the Anti-Federalists feared that a strong central government would deprive the individual states of most power. They also feared that after Washington’s presidency, since most assumed that he would become the first president of the republic, no other man would be as honorable or as skilled at leadership.

This Constitution is said to have beautiful features, but . . . they appear to me to be horribly frightful. . . . Your President may become king. . . . If your American chief be a man of ambition and abilities, how easy is it for him to render himself absolute! (Patrick Henry, Speech to the Virginia Convention, 1788.)

The Constitution of the United States had to be ratified by nine of the thirteen states. From 1787-1788 states held conventions in order for representatives to vote for or against ratification.

Anti-Federalists were determined to add amendments to the constitution that would assure states rights as well as individual rights.

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TASK(S)

1. Each PBL team becomes a ratification debate team at a state convention. No state will be represented by another PBL team.
2. Each team is to study the issues and arguments for ratifying the Constitution as it stands, or for adding amendments to it.
3. Members of the teams may get into a historical character’s shoes by using props and or costumes.
4. The debate will follow debate guidelines set out below under “Resources.”

Pair of Teams

PBL Team: Federalists: Your team will debate the Constitution from a strong federal government position.

PBL Team: Anti-Federalists: Your team will debate the Constitution from a strong states’ government position.

RESOURCES

Books

The Anti-Federalist Papers and the Constitutional Convention Debates. Ralph Ketchum, editor. New York, NY: New American Library (Penguin Putnam), 2003.

Davidson, James West and Stoff, Michael B. The American Nation. Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2004.

Davidson, Josephine. The Middle School Debater. Bellingham, WA: Right Book Company, 1997.

Hamilton, Alexander, Madison, James and Jay, John. The Federalist Papers. New York, NY: Bantam Books, 2003.

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Documents/Forms

Debate Guidelines:

No put downs.

Raise your hand if it's not your time to speak.

A team will lose a point for any interruption.

A team will lose a point for whispering while another speaker is talking.

Debate Times:

Opening statement for sides=three minutes each.

Arguments for sides=three minutes each.

Rebuttal conference=one minute.

Rebuttals=two minutes each.

Closing statements=three minutes each.

Gulick, Connie. "Debate Roles and Rules [Debate Guidelines/Debate Times]." Internet.Archive.Org. 2010. San Francisco, CA. 18 June 2010 <<http://web.archive.org/web/20060503194518/http://w3.tvi.edu/~cgulick/roles.htm>>. Adapted by Betsy Gottschalk for the Northwest History Consortium.

Vocabulary:

Anti-Federalist, n. 1. a member or supporter of the Anti-federal Party. 2. an opponent of federalism.

Federalist, n. an advocate of federalism.

Federalism, n. the federal principle of government.

Federal, adj. 1. of or pertaining to the compact of a league, especially a league between nations or states. 2. pertaining to or of the nature of a union of states under a central government distinct from the individual governments of the separate states.

Dictionary.com Unabridged. Random House, Inc. 18 June 2010 <<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/>>.

Internet

"The Anti-Federalist Papers (Audio File, Recording by Leon Meyer)." 4 July 2007. Internet.Archive.Org. 2010. San Francisco, CA. 16 June 2010 <http://www.archive.org/details/antifederalist_0707_librivox>.

"A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774-1875." 1 May 2002. Library of Congress (American Memory). 2010. Washington, DC. 16 June 2010 <<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lawhome.html>>.

"The Constitution of the United States." 1787. The National Archives (The Charters of Freedom). 2010. College Park, MD. 18 June 2010 <<http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution.html>>.

"The Constitutional Amendment Process." The National Archives (The Federal Register). 2010. College Park, MD. 18 June 2010 <<http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/constitution/>>.

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Henry, Patrick. "A Wrong Step Now and The Republic Will Be Lost Forever." 4 June 1788. Academic American History (Northern Virginia Community College). ©1996 – 2010 Henry J. Sage. Annandale, VA. 16 June 2010 <<http://www.academicamerican.com/revolution/documents/HenryConst.htm>>.

Jay, John. "The Papers of John Jay." Columbia University Libraries (Digital Program). 2002 – 2010. New York, NY. 17 June 2010 <<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/jay/>>.

Jefferson, Thomas. "Declaration of Independence." 1776. The National Archives (The Charters of Freedom). 2010. College Park, MD. 16 June 2010 <<http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration.html>>.

Lloyd, Gordon. "Ratification of the Constitution." Teaching American History.Org (Ashbrook Center for Public Affairs at Ashland University). ©2006 – 2010. Ashland, OH. 16 June 2010 <<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/ratification/>>.

Lloyd, Gordon. "Timeline of the Ratification of the Constitution: The Federalist Papers." Teaching American History.Org (Ashbrook Center for Public Affairs at Ashland University). ©2006 – 2010. Ashland, OH. 18 June 2010 <<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/ratification/timeline-federalist.html>>.

Lynch, Jack. "Debating the Bill of Rights" from *Colonial Williamsburg Journal*, Winter 2009. History.Org (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation). Williamsburg, VA. 16 June 2010 <<http://www.history.org/Foundation/journal/Winter09/rights.cfm>>.

Madison, James. "The First Congress: The Bill of Rights (Representative James Madison to Edmund Randolph)." 15 June 1789. The National Archives and Records Administration. 2010. College Park, MD. 17 July 2010 <http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/treasures_of_congress/page_3.html#>.

Shanahan, Dr. Timothy. "Debate Scoring Sheet." Loyola Marymount University. ©2010. Los Angeles, CA. 18 June 2010 <<http://myweb.lmu.edu/tshanahan/nt-debatescoring.html>>.

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ASSESSMENT

Constitutional Debates Rubric

Category	4	3	2	1
Information	All information presented in the debate was clear, accurate, and thorough.	Most information presented in the debate was clear, accurate, and thorough.	Most information presented in the debate was clear and accurate, but was not always thorough.	Information had several inaccuracies or was usually not clear.
Rebuttal	All counter-arguments were accurate, relevant and strong.	Most counter-arguments were accurate, relevant and strong.	Most counter-arguments were accurate and relevant, but several were weak.	Counter-arguments were not accurate and/or relevant.
Respect for Other Team	All statements, body language, and responses were respectful and were in appropriate language.	Statements and responses were respectful and used appropriate language, but once or twice body language was not.	Most statements and responses were respectful and inappropriate language, but there was one sarcastic remark.	Statements, responses and/or body language were consistently not respectful.
Use of Facts/Statistics	Every major point was well supported with several relevant facts, statistics and/or examples.	Every major point was adequately supported with facts, statistics and/or examples.	Every major point was supported with facts, statistics and/or examples, but the relevance of some was questionable.	Every point was not supported.
Presentation Style	Team consistently used gestures, eye contact, tone of voice and a level of enthusiasm in a way that kept the attention of the audience.	Team usually used gestures, eye contact, tone of voice and a level of enthusiasm in a way that kept the attention of the audience.	Team sometimes used gestures, eye contact, tone of voice and a level of enthusiasm in a way that kept the attention of the audience.	One or more members of the team had a presentation style that did not keep the attention of the audience.
Organization	All arguments were clearly tied to an idea (premise) and organized in a tight, logical fashion.	Most arguments were clearly tied to an idea (premise) and organized in a tight, logical fashion.	All arguments were clearly tied to an idea (premise) but the organization was sometimes not clear or logical.	Arguments were not clearly tied to an idea (premise).
Understanding Your Topic	The team clearly understood the topic in-depth and presented their information forcefully and convincingly.	The team clearly understood the topic in-depth and presented their information with ease.	The team seemed to understand the main points of the topic and presented those with ease.	The team did not show an adequate understanding of the topic.

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