

# The Articles of Confederation 1781

## Objectives:

- Explain the purpose of the Articles of Confederation
- Analyze the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation

## Suggested Lesson Activities

1. **What Do We Do About A Government?** Explain to the students that during the war, the colonies worked together because they were fighting for a common cause. After the war was won, the 13 states set up governments that were different from each other. Most people thought of themselves as a citizen of their state rather than of one country. The people referred to themselves as “New Yorkers” rather than “Americans.” Once they were independent, the job was to turn 13 former British colonies into one single country.

- What do you think the colonists will do to create a new government?
- What problems do you think the colonial leaders might face?

The idea of people making their own laws was brand new. At that time, most countries were ruled by kings. The new American citizens did not want a powerful national government. They were afraid of a strong Congress and a strong President.

- Why do you think the former colonists were afraid of a strong national government with a strong Congress and a strong President? (They feared a large, all-powerful government ruling their lives. They had just fought a war of independence to get rid of a strong national government.)
  - What could be the problem with a strong national government?
  - What could be the problem with a weak national government?
  - What type of government do you think they will want to create?
2. **Articles of Confederation** Explain to the students that the Articles of Confederation were written during the war and finally ratified when Maryland agreed in 1781 after the western land question was settled. Written mostly by the Delaware delegate, John Dickinson, they outlined rules for a “firm league of friendship.” They loosely united the states into a confederation, but each state still acted like a separate country. Dickinson preferred strong states and a weak national government. He wanted a *confederation*, a government made up of a group of partners who keep all the power to themselves. There would be no higher power. The central government would serve mainly as an advisor.

In your social studies textbook, read information about the purpose of the Articles of Confederation and identify its weaknesses. The Articles of Confederation did not give the Congress much power to do anything. The only President was the President of the Congress, and he had no power. Congress could declare war but it could not raise an army without the state's permission. It could pass laws for the nation but it had no way of enforcing the laws. The biggest problem was money. Each state made its own money and had its own way of taxing.

- What problems were caused by the weaknesses of the United States government under the Articles of Confederation?
  - How much power is enough power? How much power can you give up and still be able to keep your freedom?
3. **Consensus** Divide the students into small groups. Ask the class, "If you had an extra ten minutes of recess today, what one activity would your group decide to do as a group?"

Most groups will decide fairly quickly on a specific activity. Once the groups are in agreement, let each group announce its choice to the class.

Explain that now the **entire** class must decide upon one activity that **everyone** will participate in if given ten minutes extra recess. Observe students as they try to get organized and reach a consensus. When the decision has been made, if in fact they are able to reach a consensus, ask them questions such as:

- What problems were you faced with in trying to reach an agreement?
- Why do you think that as a small group you could function toward a goal, but once you had to decide as an entire class, you found it more difficult?

Lack of consensus was the reason the Articles of Confederation failed. With states printing their own money (valid only within their borders), taxing out-of-state goods, and failing to contribute to the national treasury funds necessary for the federal government to operate, the failure to cooperate almost caused the new country to fail.

4. **Equal Votes** The Articles of Confederation limited the authority of Congress by requiring 9 of 13 states to agree before a law was passed. However, the states seldom agreed on anything. Each wanted its own way. Each state had an equal vote even though some states were small and others were large. For example, even though Rhode Island had 68,000 people and Virginia had 747,000 people, they each had only one vote.

To illustrate the problem of the states equal votes, divide your class into 13 groups so that some of the groups have only 1 student and other groups have 2, 3, 4 or 5 students. (For example, a class of 32 might have groups of 5, 4, 4, 3, 3, 3, 2, 2, 2, 1, 1, 1, and 1.) Present the students with a decision to make such as **creating a set of class rules**. Give each group one vote. 9 out of 13 of the groups must agree on a rule before it can be accepted. (Note: All 13 states were needed to change the Articles.)

- Were you able to agree on a set of class rules? Why or why not? What challenges did you have to overcome?
  - Just as it was difficult to agree on class rules, what are the things the newly independent states could not agree on?
5. **What Happened Next?** Explain to the students that it took six years to develop a workable form of government. On May 25, 1787, 55 delegates, from all states except Rhode Island, arrived in Philadelphia for the Constitutional Convention. James Madison got the convention organized. The delegates were suppose to revise the Articles of Confederation, but Madison thought rewriting it was a bad idea. He knew he would have to convince a lot of the delegates of that, so he read all he could about governments all over the world and throughout history. He took the best ideas he could find and wrote them in notebooks and brought them to the convention. They agreed to have Virginia's governor, Edmund Randolph, present the plan to the Constitutional Convention. It was called the Virginia Plan. It made the work much easier for the delegates because they had a document that served as a starting point.

**Lesson Title** \_\_\_\_\_

**Shortcomings of the Articles**

Problems passing new laws

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Congress could not

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Congress depended on states for

\_\_\_\_\_

**The Annapolis Convention**

When \_\_\_\_\_

Where \_\_\_\_\_

Why \_\_\_\_\_

Who \_\_\_\_\_

What they decided \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Shays's Rebellion**

When \_\_\_\_\_ Where \_\_\_\_\_

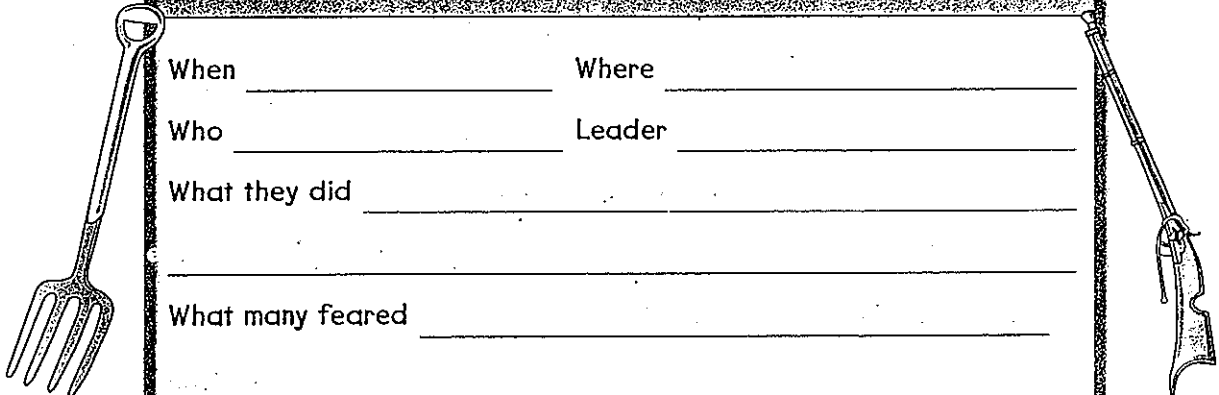
Who \_\_\_\_\_ Leader \_\_\_\_\_

What they did \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What many feared \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_




**A Rope of Sand**

What some leaders wanted \_\_\_\_\_

Why \_\_\_\_\_

What others wanted \_\_\_\_\_

Why \_\_\_\_\_



Lesson Title \_\_\_\_\_

**The Delegates**

When \_\_\_\_\_

Where \_\_\_\_\_

Some famous delegates

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ delegates from \_\_\_\_\_ states

**The Work Begins**

Major decisions

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

Name of plan

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Helped found the

\_\_\_\_\_

**Debate and Compromise**

Disagreement about \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Virginia Plan: number of representatives based on \_\_\_\_\_

New Jersey Plan: each state to be \_\_\_\_\_

Connecticut Compromise: \_\_\_\_\_ Congress, one house based on \_\_\_\_\_, states \_\_\_\_\_ in the other

The \_\_\_\_\_ was approved on \_\_\_\_\_

**Compromises on Slavery**

Disagreement between \_\_\_\_\_ states and \_\_\_\_\_ states about \_\_\_\_\_

Three-Fifths Compromise \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Lesson Title** \_\_\_\_\_

**The Preamble**

First words \_\_\_\_\_

Purpose of the Constitution \_\_\_\_\_

Principles \_\_\_\_\_

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**ARTICLE I** **The Legislative Branch**

Reason for three branches \_\_\_\_\_

Two houses \_\_\_\_\_

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

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**ARTICLE II** **The Executive Branch**

Single chief executive \_\_\_\_\_

Powers \_\_\_\_\_

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

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**ARTICLE III** **The Judicial Branch**

Created a \_\_\_\_\_ Highest court \_\_\_\_\_

Has the power to \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Only way to restore a law \_\_\_\_\_

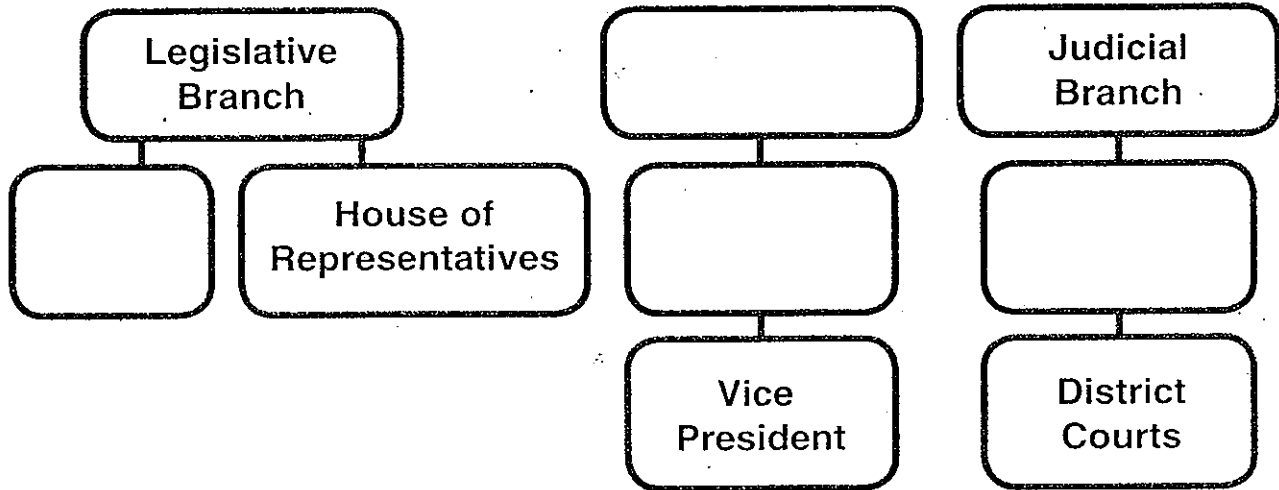
Two steps to make \_\_\_\_\_ to the Constitution

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# Three Branches of Government

**DIRECTIONS** Use the words and phrases in the box to complete the diagram.

Supreme Court	President	Senate	Executive Branch
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**DIRECTIONS** Read the list below of positions in the government. In the space provided, write a brief description of the duties of the person holding that job.

1 President

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2 Supreme Court justice

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3 Representative

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CALIFORNIA STANDARDS HSS 5.7, 5.7.4

Lesson Title \_\_\_\_\_

**The Struggle to Ratify**

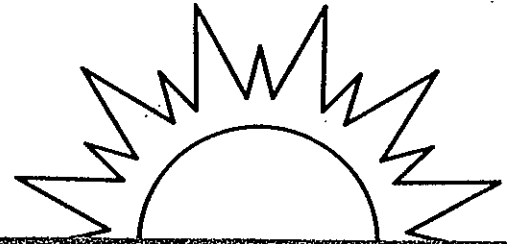
What many state delegates wanted

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What supporters promised

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



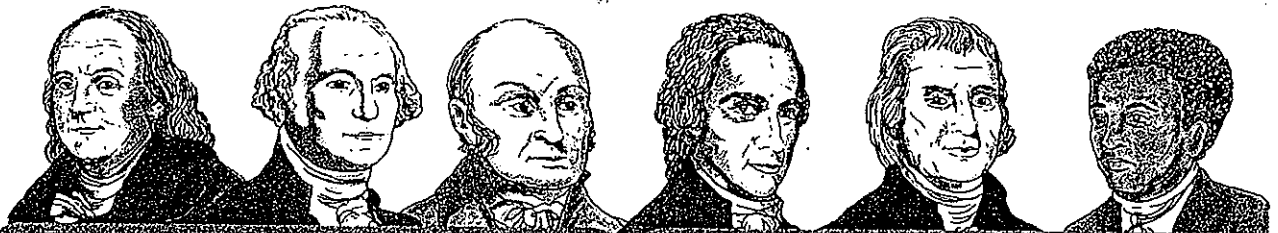
**The Vote of Approval**

First state to ratify \_\_\_\_\_

Citizens who favored the Constitution \_\_\_\_\_

Who disagreed \_\_\_\_\_

When Constitution took effect \_\_\_\_\_



**The Bill of Rights**

How many amendments \_\_\_\_\_

Purpose of the Bill of Rights \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Added to Constitution in \_\_\_\_\_

Reserved powers belong to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**The New Government**

First President \_\_\_\_\_

Elected in \_\_\_\_\_

Federal government moved to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

When \_\_\_\_\_

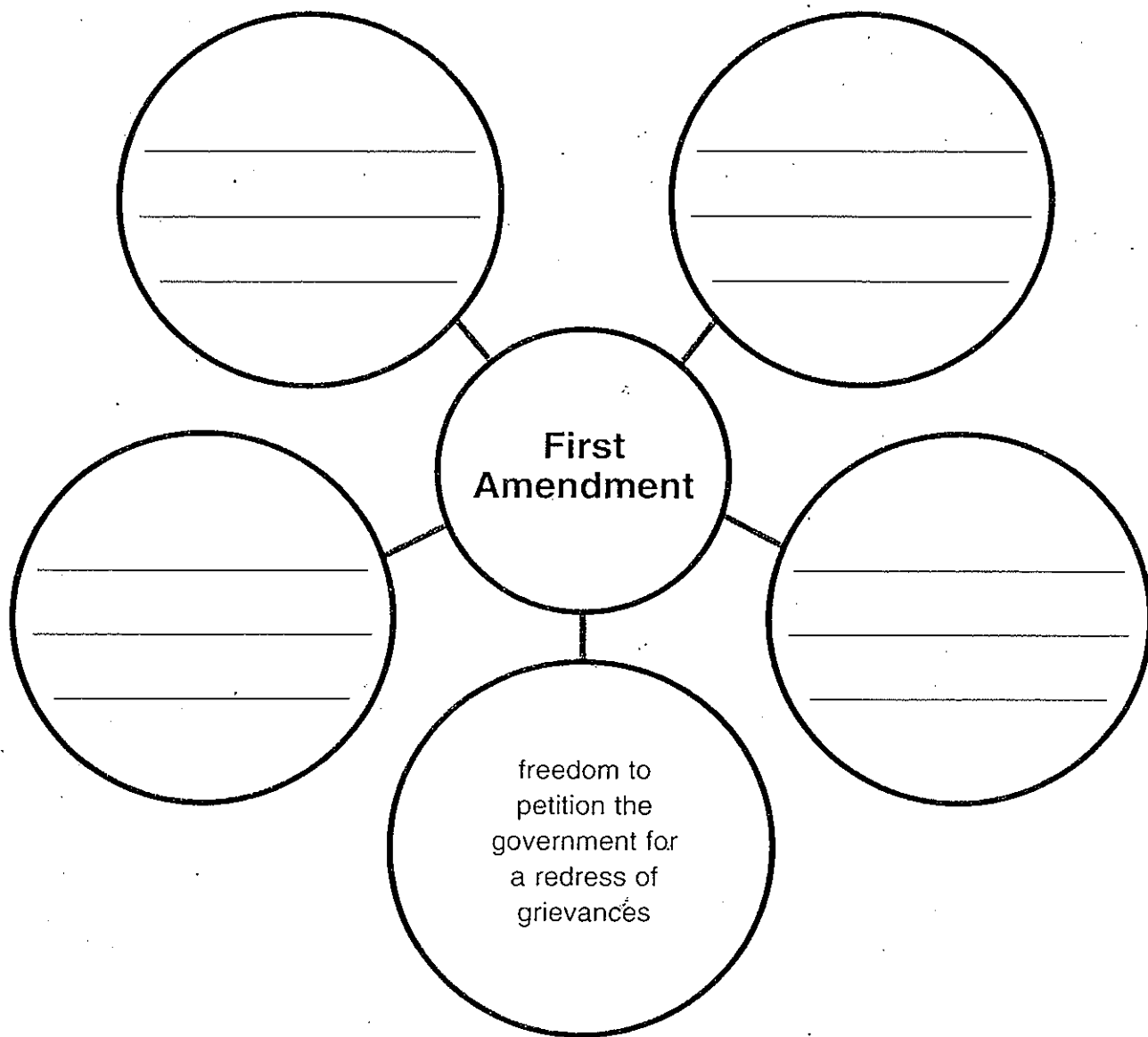
Second President \_\_\_\_\_

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# Approval and the Bill of Rights

**DIRECTIONS** Complete the diagram to show the freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment.



**DIRECTIONS** Write a sentence telling one way in which people today express one of these freedoms.

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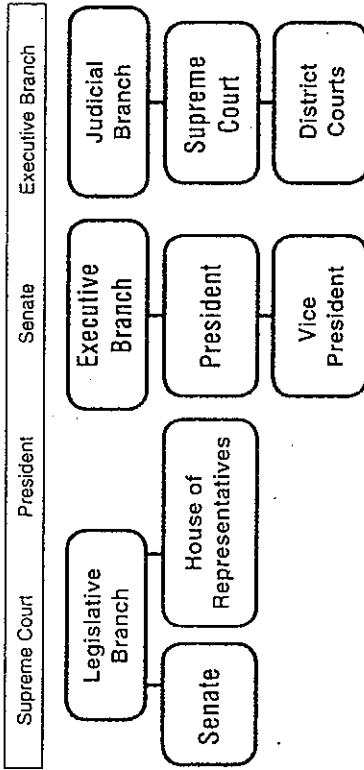
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Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

# Three Branches of Government

**DIRECTIONS** Use the words and phrases in the box to complete the diagram.



**DIRECTIONS** Read the list below of positions in the government. In the space provided, write a brief description of the duties of the person holding that job.

1 President

The President has veto power, is commander in chief of the United States military, and carries out the nation's laws faithfully.

2 Supreme Court justice

Justices decide cases dealing with the Constitution, national law, or treaties. They also decide cases between states and between citizens of different states.

3 Representative

Representatives can make laws, declare war, coin and print money, control commerce, and raise an army and a navy.

CALIFORNIA STANDARDS HSS 5.7, 5.7.4

Use after reading Chapter 10, Lesson 3, pages 434–439.

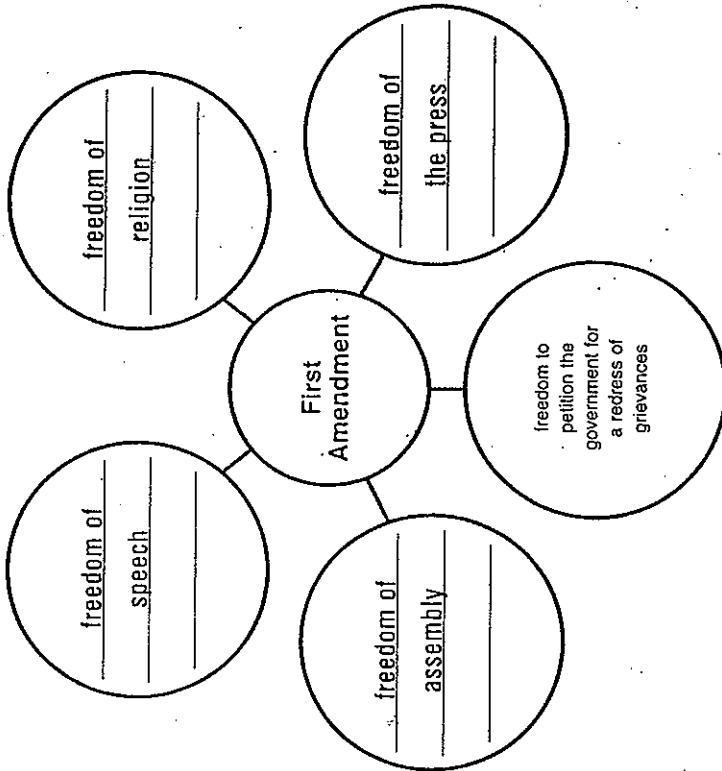
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Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

# Approval and the Bill of Rights

**DIRECTIONS** Complete the diagram to show the freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment.



**DIRECTIONS** Write a sentence telling one way in which people today express one of these freedoms.

Possible response: People express freedom of the press by publishing newspapers.

CALIFORNIA STANDARDS HSS 5.7, 5.7.4

(continued)

106 • Homework and Practice Book Use after reading Chapter 10, Lesson 4, pages 442–447.

## Federal System of Government

Cut out each card and sort it under the proper heading:

<b>POWERS OF THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT</b>	<b>SHARED POWERS</b>	<b>POWERS OF THE STATE GOVERNMENTS</b>
Borrow money	Establish banks	Collect taxes
Conduct elections	Make laws	Set up court systems
Control trade with foreign countries	Declare war and make peace	Make immigration and citizenship laws
Set qualifications for voting	Set up and maintain an army and a navy	Control trade within the state
Print and coin money	Set up local governments	Set up public schools