

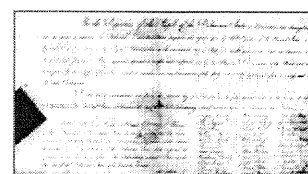
LESSONS BY ERA

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Teaching With Documents: The Ratification of the Constitution

Background

On September 17, 1787, a majority of the delegates to the Constitutional Convention approved the documents over which they had labored since May. After a farewell banquet, delegates swiftly returned to their homes to organize support, most for but some against the proposed charter. Before the Constitution could become the law of the land, it would have to withstand public scrutiny and debate. The document was "laid before the United States in Congress assembled" on September 20. For 2 days, September 26 and 27, Congress debated whether to censure the delegates to the Constitutional Convention for exceeding their authority by creating a new form of government instead of simply revising the Articles of Confederation. They decided to drop the matter. Instead, on September 28, Congress directed the state legislatures to call ratification conventions in each state. Article VII stipulated that nine states had to ratify the Constitution for it to go into effect.



Beyond the legal requirements for ratification, the state conventions fulfilled other purposes. The Constitution had been produced in strictest secrecy during the Philadelphia convention. The ratifying conventions served the necessary function of informing the public of the provisions of the proposed new government. They also served as forums for proponents and opponents to articulate their ideas before the citizenry. Significantly, state conventions, not Congress, were the agents of ratification. This approach insured that the Constitution's authority came from representatives of the people specifically elected for the purpose of approving or disapproving the charter, resulting in a more accurate reflection of the will of the electorate. Also, by bypassing debate in the state legislatures, the Constitution avoided disabling amendments that states, jealous of yielding authority to a national government, would likely have attached.

Ratification was not a foregone conclusion. Able, articulate men used newspapers, pamphlets, and public meetings to debate ratification of the Constitution. Those known as Antifederalists opposed the Constitution for a variety of reasons. Some continued to argue that the delegates in Philadelphia had exceeded their congressional authority by replacing the Articles of Confederation with an illegal new document. Others complained that the delegates in Philadelphia represented only the well-born few and consequently had crafted a

document that served their special interests and reserved the franchise for the propertied classes. Another frequent objection was that the Constitution gave too much power to the central government at the expense of the states and that a representative government could not manage a republic this large. The most serious criticism was that the Constitutional Convention had failed to adopt a bill of rights proposed by George Mason. In New York, Governor George Clinton expressed these Antifederalist concerns in several published newspaper essays under the pen name Cato, while Patrick Henry and James Monroe led the opposition in Virginia.

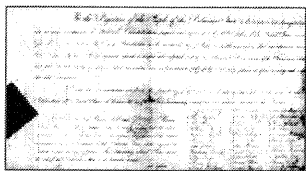
Those who favored ratification, the Federalists, fought back, convinced that rejection of the Constitution would result in anarchy and civil strife. Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay responded to Clinton under the pen name Publius. Beginning in October 1787, these three penned 85 essays for New York newspapers and later collected them into 2 volumes entitled *The Federalist*, which analyzed the Constitution, detailed the thinking of the framers, and responded to the Antifederalist critics.

They successfully countered most criticism. As for the lack of a bill of rights, Federalists argued that a catalogued list might be incomplete and that the national government was so constrained by the Constitution that it posed no threat to the rights of citizens. Ultimately, during the ratification debate in Virginia, Madison conceded that a bill of rights was needed, and the Federalists assured the public that the first step of the new government would be to adopt a bill of rights.

It took 10 months for the first nine states to approve the Constitution. The first state to ratify was Delaware, on December 7, 1787, by a unanimous vote, 30 - 0. The featured document is an endorsed ratification of the federal Constitution by the Delaware convention. The names of the state deputies are listed, probably in the hand of a clerk. The signature of the President of Delaware's convention, Thomas Collins, attests to the validity of the document, which also carries the state seal in its left margin. Delaware's speediness thwarted Pennsylvania's attempt to be first to ratify in the hope of securing the seat of the National Government in Pennsylvania.

The first real test for ratification occurred in Massachusetts, where the fully recorded debates reveal that the recommendation for a bill of rights proved to be a remedy for the logjam in the ratifying convention. New Hampshire became the ninth state to approve the Constitution in June, but the key States of Virginia and New York were locked in bitter debates. Their failure to ratify would reduce the new union by two large, populated, wealthy states, and would geographically splinter it. The Federalists prevailed, however, and Virginia and New York narrowly approved the Constitution. When a bill of rights was proposed in Congress in 1789, North Carolina ratified the Constitution. Finally, Rhode Island, which had rejected the Constitution in March 1788 by popular referendum, called a ratifying convention in 1790 as specified by the Constitutional Convention. Faced with threatened treatment as a foreign government, it ratified the Constitution by the narrowest margin (two votes) on May 29, 1790.

The Document



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Lesson Resources

[Standards Correlations](#)

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[Document Analysis Worksheet](#)

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Friday, August 25, 2006

Transcription: Delaware's Ratification of the Constitution

We the Deputies of the People of Delaware State in Convention met having taken into our serious consideration the Federal Constitution proposed and agreed upon by the Deputies of the United States in a General Convention held at the city of Philadelphia on the seventeenth day of September in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty seven, Have approved, assented to, ratified, and confirmed and by these Presents, Do, in virtue of the Power and Authority to us given for the purpose for and in behalf of ourselves and our Constituents, fully, freely, and entirely approve of assent to, ratify, and confirm the said Constitution.

Done in Convention at Dover this seventh day of December in the year aforesaid and in the Independence of the United States of America the twelfth. In Testimony whereof we have hereunto subscribed our names

To all whom these Presents shall come Greeting. I Thomas Collins President of the Delaware State do hereby certify that the above instrument of writing is a true copy of the original ratification of the Federal Constitution by the Convention of the Delaware State which original ratification is now in my possession. In Testimony whereof I have caused the seal of the Delaware State to be hereto annexed.

Thomas Collins

Sussex County

John Ingram
John Jones
William Moore
William Hall
Thomas Laws
Isaac Cooper
Woodman Storkly
John Laws
Thomas Evans

Israel Holland Kent County

Nicholas Ridgely
Richard Smith
George Truitt
Richard Bassett
James Sykes
Allen McLane
Daniel Cummins, Sr.
Joseph Barker
Edward White

George Manlove New Castle County

James Latimer,
President
James Black
John James
Gunning Bedford, Sr.
Kensley Johns
Thomas Wastson
Solomon Maxwell
Nicholas Way
Thomas Duff
Gunning Bedford, Jr.

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Page URL: <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/constitution-day/transcript.html>

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Friday, August 25, 2006

Teaching With Documents Lesson Plan: The Ratification of the Constitution

Teaching Activities

Standards Correlations

This lesson correlates to the National History Standards.

- Era 3-Revolution and the New Nation (1754-1820s)
 - Standard 3A-Demonstrate understanding of the issues involved in the creation and ratification of the United States Constitution and the new government it established.
 - Standard 3B-Demonstrate understanding of the guarantees of the Bill of Rights and its continuing significance.

This lesson also correlates to the National Standards for Civics and Government.

- Standard I. C. 3: Evaluate, take, and defend positions on what conditions contribute to the establishment and maintenance of constitutional government.
- Standard II. A. 1: Explain central ideas of American constitutional government and their history.
- Standard III. A. 1: Explain how the U.S. Constitution grants and distributes power to national and state government and how it seeks to prevent the abuse of power.

Cross-curricular Connections

Share this exercise with your history, government, language arts, and math colleagues.

Activities

1. Prepare students to work with a 200-year-old document by discussing such unique qualities as handwriting, spelling, formation of the letter "s," vocabulary, style, and the use of parchment and iron-based ink (which bleeds through in time). Distribute copies of the document. Read aloud the first two lines of the transcription as the students read the document silently. As a group activity, the students should continue reading the document aloud. You may help them if they stumble. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of working with a handwritten original source.
2. Provide a copy of the Constitution for each student. Ask students to consult Articles V and VII along with the Delaware ratification document and compare point-by-point the procedures for ratifying the Constitution with the procedures for ratifying amendments to the Constitution.
3. Instruct the students to research the arguments of the debate over ratification. You could share the information in this article with your class. Ask the students to list the arguments of the Antifederalists and the counterarguments of the Federalists and then write a paragraph in response to these questions: What has been the outcome of these arguments? Are the arguments still significant today?

4. Consider the Constitution as a framework of government. On the chalkboard make a list with your students of practical steps needed to activate the Constitution and institute a government, beginning with the ratification procedures, election of the President, selection of a capital site, and other requirements. The Resolution of Transmittal to the Continental Congress on September 17, 1787, sometimes referred to as the fifth page of the Constitution, is a good source for this activity. In a discussion of these steps, lead your students to recognize the difference between the theory in a document written to describe a government and the reality of putting a government into action.
5. Assign your students to research the ratification story in specific states (their own home states and states selected as case studies). Set up a storytelling day in which each student tells the best stories they found in their research.
6. The delegates of the Delaware convention whose names appear on the ratification document provide the basis for an interesting sociological study. Ask your students to look carefully at the names and describe the patterns or categories they recognize. Note: Your students should observe the emerging patterns of ethnic groups, the sex, and the national origin of the names listed.

State	Order
Date	Votes For
	Votes Against
	1
	2
	3
	4
	5
	6
	7
	8
	9
	10
	11
	12
	13
Delaware	
Pennsylvania	
New Jersey	
Georgia	
Connecticut	
Massachusetts	
Maryland	
South Carolina	
New Hampshire	
Virginia	
New York	
North Carolina	
Rhode Island	December 7, 1787
	December 12, 1787

December 18, 1787	30
January 2, 1788	46
January 9, 1788	38
February 6, 1788	26
April 28, 1788	128
May 23, 1788	187
June 21, 1788	63
June 25, 1788	149
July 26, 1788	57
November 21, 1789	89
May 29, 1790	30
	194
	34
	0
	23
	0
	0
	40
	168
	11
	73
	47
	79
	27
	77
	32

Additional information about the [Constitution](#), instructions for a [simulation](#) related to the Constitutional Convention, and [biographies of each signer](#) are also available online.

A [teaching packet](#) containing a detailed Teacher's Guide and a set of 34 document reproductions that highlight the making of the Constitution, the beginning of the Government, and the evolution of a constitutional issue is available for purchase from the National Archives.

[Ratification of the Constitution Main Page](#)

Page URL: <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/constitution-day/activities.html>

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Friday, August 25, 2006

Written Document Analysis Worksheet

1.	<p>TYPE OF DOCUMENT (Check one):</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 33%; padding: 2px;"> <input type="checkbox"/> Newspaper <input type="checkbox"/> Letter <input type="checkbox"/> Patent <input type="checkbox"/> Memorandum </td> <td style="width: 33%; padding: 2px;"> <input type="checkbox"/> Map <input type="checkbox"/> Telegram <input type="checkbox"/> Press release <input type="checkbox"/> Report </td> <td style="width: 33%; padding: 2px;"> <input type="checkbox"/> Advertisement <input type="checkbox"/> Congressional record <input type="checkbox"/> Census report <input type="checkbox"/> Other </td> </tr> </table>	<input type="checkbox"/> Newspaper <input type="checkbox"/> Letter <input type="checkbox"/> Patent <input type="checkbox"/> Memorandum	<input type="checkbox"/> Map <input type="checkbox"/> Telegram <input type="checkbox"/> Press release <input type="checkbox"/> Report	<input type="checkbox"/> Advertisement <input type="checkbox"/> Congressional record <input type="checkbox"/> Census report <input type="checkbox"/> Other
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2.	<p>UNIQUE PHYSICAL QUALITIES OF THE DOCUMENT (Check one or more):</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 2px;"> <input type="checkbox"/> Interesting letterhead <input type="checkbox"/> Handwritten <input type="checkbox"/> Typed <input type="checkbox"/> Seals </td> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 2px;"> <input type="checkbox"/> Notations <input type="checkbox"/> "RECEIVED" stamp <input type="checkbox"/> Other </td> </tr> </table>	<input type="checkbox"/> Interesting letterhead <input type="checkbox"/> Handwritten <input type="checkbox"/> Typed <input type="checkbox"/> Seals	<input type="checkbox"/> Notations <input type="checkbox"/> "RECEIVED" stamp <input type="checkbox"/> Other	
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3.	<p>DATE(S) OF DOCUMENT:</p> <hr/>			
4.	<p>AUTHOR (OR CREATOR) OF THE DOCUMENT:</p> <hr/> <p>POSITION (TITLE):</p> <hr/>			
5.	<p>FOR WHAT AUDIENCE WAS THE DOCUMENT WRITTEN?</p> <hr/>			
6.	<p>DOCUMENT INFORMATION (There are many possible ways to answer A-E.)</p> <p>A. List three things the author said that you think are important:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <p>B. Why do you think this document was written?</p> <hr/> <hr/> <p>C. What evidence in the document helps you know why it was written? Quote from the document.</p> <hr/> <hr/> <p>D. List two things the document tells you about life in the United States at the time it was written:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <p>E. Write a question to the author that is left unanswered by the document:</p> <hr/> <hr/>			

**Designed and developed by the
Education Staff, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC 20408.**

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