

Examining the Articles of Confederation: Why Was The Constitutional Convention Necessary?
AHTC Summer Institute 2008 Lesson
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Abstract: This lesson plan will focus on analyzing the Articles of Confederation in order to better understand why the Constitutional Convention was necessary in the eyes of the founding fathers. By examining the document firsthand students will make historical inferences about the document and the time period in which it existed, as well as provide specific reasons why the government that existed under the Articles of Confederation was flawed resulting in the creation of the Constitution.

Assessment: Students will complete three separate activities regarding the Articles of Confederation document:

- **Primary Document Analysis Worksheet**
 - This will give students a better basis of knowledge regarding the document to help with historical thinking and analysis in the following activities.
- **Articles of Confederation Graphic Organizer**
 - Students will use this graphic organizer to summarize each section of the Articles of Confederation and also pick out the governmental weaknesses of each section which would have influenced the framers' decision to convene in Philadelphia during the summer of 1787.
- **Reflective Writing**
 - Students will take on the identities of various people (farmer, slave, woman, intellectual, etc.) during the pre-constitution era and write about whether they would have wanted the Articles of Confederation to remain in place, simply revised, or completely wiped out based on how their identity would have been impacted by the laws outlined in the document.

Essential Questions/Enduring Understandings:

- During what time period did the Articles of Confederation exist?
- What are the main defining characteristics of the Articles of Confederation?
- What are the Articles of Confederation's strengths and weaknesses?
- How would you rate the overall effectiveness of the Articles of Confederation?
- How did the Articles of Confederation impact the various groups of society differently at the time of its existence?
- What major characteristics of the Articles of Confederation resulted in its demise and inspired the framers to create the Constitution?

Setting the Purpose: As the governing document of America that preceded the Constitution it is essential that students understand this document and its shortcomings. The best way to do this is by examining the actual document rather than read about other's interpretations of it in a textbook. Students will be challenged to use and refine their skills of historical thinking and analysis in order to better understand why the Constitutional Convention, the momentous event that changed the course of this nation, was absolutely necessary.

Materials:

- Primary Document Analysis Worksheet
- Articles of Confederation Graphic Organizer
- Articles of Confederation. 1777

Lesson Procedure: Three Days

Day 1

- Distribute copies of the Articles of Confederation as well as the Primary Document Analysis Worksheet
 - The Articles of Confederation document can be found at the following site.
<http://ourdocuments.gov/index.php?flash=true&>
 - For the first activity I would print out a copy of the actual document.
- After materials have been distributed give students around 20 minutes to examine the document and complete the Primary Document Analysis Worksheet.
 - I personally allow students to complete the activity in partners but that is a judgment call for you to make in your own classroom.
- When students are done with the first activity reconvene as a class and go over the assignment together.
 - Allow for each partner group to share their findings in order to gather a variety of discussion points and interpretations of the document.
- At the end of class, go over how you would have completed the Primary Document Analysis Worksheet in order to make sure students have the correct background knowledge regarding the document.
 - This can easily be done by making an overhead copy of the Primary Document Analysis Worksheet.

Day 2-3

- Break students into groups of four and distribute to each student the Articles of Confederation Graphic Organizer as well as copies of the Articles of Confederation.
 - The Articles of Confederation document can be found at the following site.
<http://ourdocuments.gov/index.php?flash=true&>
 - For this activity I would print out a copy of the transcript document since it is much easier to read and students will need to be able to read every word.
- Student groups will need to complete the Articles of Confederation Graphic Organizer.
 - Each student needs to complete the activity; one assignment per group is not acceptable.
- On the Articles of Confederation Graphic Organizer student groups will be summarizing each section of the Articles of Confederation and thinking about possible conflicts that could and did arise out of each section.
- As student groups are working on the assignment you should be circulating around the room assisting and reminding students to read this document based on a historical perspective NOT based on the society they live in.
- At the end of class allow each group to share one possible problem that could have arisen out of the Articles of Confederation.

- Discuss all or some of the following issues regarding each group's response.
 - Why could this potentially be a problem?
 - Would this potential issue compound into other problems?
 - What groups of society would this issue potentially impact?
 - Does the problem identified have a simple solution or need a complete overhaul?
- After the class discussion have students pick an identity from the following list.
 - State's rights supporter
 - Big government supporter
 - Southern farmer
 - Northern upper class intellectual
 - Woman
 - Minority
- After students have chosen an identity have them write a one page response to the following question for homework.

Based on your identity summarize how the Articles of Confederation would have affected you and your family and explain whether you would have supported keeping the Articles of Confederation, simple revision to the articles, or getting rid of the articles completely?

- Remember to support your position using actual evidence from the Articles of Confederation and to respond with the viewpoint of someone living during that time period and NOT using a worldview of current society.