

Compromise: Why was compromise necessary during the Constitutional Convention?

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Abstract: Compromise was important to the success of the Constitutional Convention. Students will learn why compromise was necessary and what compromises were actually reached. Students will play a prisoner's dilemma game, analyze primary source documents, and participate in a Constitutional Convention simulation. Assessment will occur through student participation in the simulation and writing a short reflective paper. Duration for this lesson is approximately four to five days.

Enduring Understandings:

1. Students will understand the concepts of compromise, interests, and cooperation and how it is applied to the Constitutional Convention.
2. Students will know and be able to explain the significant compromises reached during the Constitutional Convention.
3. Student will be able to use primary source documents to understand historical events.

Assessment: Students will analyze primary sources from the Constitutional Convention. Students will complete a source evaluation worksheet and share their interpretations. Students will also participate in a mock Constitutional Convention simulation. Students will understand the issues facing the delegates and the need to compromise. Finally students will be required to write a short reflection paper. The central questions: "Why was compromise necessary during the Constitutional Convention?" And "What compromises were reached during the Convention?"

Setting the Purpose: Students should have a basic understanding as to why the Constitutional Convention was meeting. Students should know why the Articles of Confederation was not an effective government. Students will begin by participating in a game demonstrating the concepts of compromise, interests, and cooperation. Students will discuss the issues and natural responses they faced during the game. This will lead to an analysis of documents from the Constitutional Convention. From these documents students should gain an understanding of the historical time period and issues the delegates faced. Students will conclude by participating in a Constitutional Convention simulation and writing a short reflective paper. These activities will help students understand the need for compromise an important historical time period.

Duration: 4-5 class periods

Procedure: Day 1

Tell students that as a class they are going to play a point game. The simple goal is to get points (**do not** tell them the goal is to get the most points). Competition will/should naturally occur. It is helpful if you offer in incentive like candy or extra credit.

Divide class into three groups. Teacher can divide or let students divide themselves for playing the game.

Rules to the game

1. Each group will take turns.
2. Teacher is point keeper (keep score on the board so it is visible to all groups.)
3. The group can opt to take 3 points or talk with another group.
4. If both agree to cooperate, each group gets 5 points.
If one cooperates and one defects (say you agree but then don't), Cooperating group gets 0 points, defecting group gets 7 points.
If both groups defect, each group gets 0 points.
5. The two groups may have one-minute to negotiate in the hall. Each group will have only one representative in hall. Representative will report to group and have one-minute to discuss decision on whether to cooperate or defect. Decision will be written on a note card and turned into teacher.

(Once a group asks to talk to another group, they must decide to cooperate or defect.

The groups may not ask for 3 points if meeting goes bad.)

Spend the class period playing the game. Total the points at end of period.

Days 2-3

Debrief on activity. Discuss cooperation, competition, interests, and compromise. Give definitions and how it influenced the game and decisions made. Relate how these concepts are central the Constitutional Convention.

After the discussion, have students recall the failures of the Articles of Confederation.

Discuss them as a class and have the students predict what the delegates at the Convention may try to change.

Next, have the students analyze the documents: Virginia Plan (both the original copies and transcript), Madison notes from June 11, 1787 and Madison notes from July 11, 1787. Have students use the source evaluation sheet. The evaluations may be done as a class, in groups, or individually. As a class, discuss the sources and review the evaluation worksheets. Students should come away with an understanding that debate occurred and compromise was necessary.

Prepare students for a Constitutional Convention Simulation. Divide the students into 12 groups and assign each group a state. Give the groups their state's agenda. Have the groups discuss their issues and organize arguments for their positions.

Days 4-5

Students will participate in the Constitutional Convention Simulation. Teacher will act as moderator, ensure all groups are participating, and encourage the groups to compromise. After the simulation, lead a class discussion on the compromises reached, level of debate and intensity that occurred, and compare actual results to the class simulation.

Finally, have students complete a short reflection essay. Students should answer the following questions.

Why was compromise necessary during the Constitutional Convention?

What compromises were reached during the Convention?

Ties to national sources:

This requires the use of Madison's notes from June 11, 1787 and July 11, 1787, original Virginia Plan copy, and transcript of the Virginia Plan. All documents are provided on the 2008 Summer Institute CD from ATHC.

Materials and Resources:

Paper, pencils, note cards, and chalkboard or LCD projector will be needed.

Compromise Source Evaluation Form

Constitutional Convention Agendas

Madison Notes from June 11, 1787

Madison Notes from July 11, 1787

Virginia Plan photographed copy

Transcript of Virginia Plan