

Lesson 1: Understanding America's First Government: The Articles of Confederation

Essential Questions:

1. What was America's first form of government, and what were the basic characteristics?
2. What were the reasons the government was structured as it was under the Articles?
3. What were the priorities of the United States in the late 18th-century? What were the objectives of the major European nations of France, Great Britain, Spain, and the Netherlands at that time?

Objectives:

1. Students will gather information about the Articles of Confederation. (Lesson 1)
2. Students will analyze the Articles of Confederation. (Lesson 1)
3. Students will determine the weaknesses of American government under the Articles of Confederation. (Lesson 1)
4. Students will interpret the Articles of Confederation, the 13 states, and the original Congress through word associations. (Lesson 1)
5. Students will recognize the significant factors of international relations during the 1780's. (Lessons 1 and 2)

SOLs: Govt 1 a-g (social studies skills); Govt 4c (examining fundamental principles upon which Constitution is based)

Content: This lesson covers the Articles of Confederation, with specific emphasis on the powers of Congress and states in the first form of government in the US. Additionally, the students will provide some of the chosen content through the KWL activity. Teachers should also be prepared to remind students about economic and political interests of major international players, such as France, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and Spain during the time period.

Rationale: This lesson serves two primary purposes. First, the KWL to open the lesson will allow students the opportunity to recall prior knowledge, and focus their attention on the American foundations unit. That will also give the teacher the opportunity to see what students already know about this subject. Second, this lesson will allow students to explore the Articles of Confederation as a document of government, rather than as a historical timeline piece. Reading the actual Articles themselves will give students the chance to learn the powers of government firsthand. It will also give students a clear understanding of what the US government was like between the Revolutionary War and the Constitution.

Materials: Smartboard, white board, chalkboard, or butcher paper; marker for teacher, a copy of the Articles of Confederation for each student (*note: most US government textbooks contain the Articles*); guided reading questions for each Article (**Attachment 1A**)

Procedures:

1. Do-Now— KWL Think/Pair/Share
 - a. Students write down on their own paper answers to: “Brainstorm what you already know about the Articles of Confederation, politics of the late 1700’s, the Constitutional Convention, and the Constitution. No complete sentences—just brainstorming” (5 minutes)
 - b. Students share their brainstormed list with a neighbor (3-5 minutes)
 - c. Class KWL: Students volunteer answers from their partners’ lists. Teacher writes the suggestions on the board/butcher paper. ****Most likely, students will need help remembering the political and economic interests of the time period. Instructor should be prepared to remind students about economic interests of Great Britain, France, Spain, and the Netherlands.** (10 minutes)
 - d. Teacher asks students to come up with, on their own paper and individually, at least ONE thing they *want* to know about the content.
 - e. Students volunteer responses. Teacher writes them (about 5 or 6 total) on the board. (5-7 minutes)
2. Activity—Analyzing the Articles of Confederation
 - a. Teacher divides students into 7 groups, of approximately 2-3 students each group.
 - b. Each group will be assigned 2-3 articles. Teachers should use what they know of students’ reading abilities in order to assign certain Article groups. ***Note—Articles 4 and 5 are longer, and are grouped together. Article 9 is extremely long and daunting, and therefore has been split in two. Stronger students should be assigned these sections***
 - c. Each student will be given a worksheet with questions on it, based on which articles they are assigned (**Attachment 1A**); all directions and transitions should take approximately 5-10 minutes)
 - d. Students, in small groups, will read the assigned Articles, and answer the questions about them. Students should be given the “Articles vocab cheat sheet” to help them in their research (**Attachment 1B**) (20 minutes)

- e. Discussion—Teacher facilitates discussion of all Articles. Some questions are common for all students and all Articles, so special attention should be paid to those. (20-25)
- 3. Closing Activity—Exit Pass
 - a. Students complete a word association activity. (**Attachment 1C & 1D**); 10 minutes
- 4. Review

Assessment:

- 1. Students will turn in completed question sheets and exit passes as formal, summative assessments. They will be included in the overall portfolio grade (summative) that students will receive at the end of the series of lessons. An explanation of the portfolio assessment breakdown is included on the unit plan.
- 2. The KWL is a formative, informal assessment, used for teachers to gather how much students already know about the content, specifically the Articles of Confederation and the state of international relationships during the late 1700's. It is not a formal grade.
- 3. The discussion questions about each of the Articles provide students with knowledge about the Articles, as well as opportunities to identify weaknesses with the Articles.
- 4. The political cartoon is a formal assessment, which gets students to use creative comparisons through word association in order to understand the Articles of Confederation.

Technology: This lesson can be adapted to the technological resources of nearly any classroom. The KWL can be on paper, a chalkboard, whiteboard, or smartboard. Depending on the particular classroom, students can write answers in front of the class. The Articles analysis can be completed with paper copies of the Articles, or on laptops with internet access. Students can either go to a particular website, or teachers can combine the Articles and questions in to a common file for students to access. The word association exit pass can also be done either on paper or on an Elmo or Smartboard.

Works Cited:

“The Articles of Confederation” <http://www.usconstitution.net/articles.html>