

PROJECT TITLE: America Under the Articles of Confederation	
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CLASSROOM PRACTICE

- HI Overview/Teaching Thesis:** Students often have a hard time grasping the Articles of Confederation and usually end up knowing little more than that they were weak. Often, however, time is not devoted to understanding why they were weak and how these weaknesses affected the United States at home and globally. By having students look at primary sources that show what the Articles could and could not do, they should have a much clearer grasp on what the Articles were all about. The activity involves reading historical situations, mainly from letters of the American Revolutionary time period and beyond, and assessing what those historical situations can show us about the Articles today. They will finish the first day by playing a game that reinforces the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation. The students will also analyze political cartoons that focus on the global connection of the United States to the rest of the powerful nations of the time. The final assessment of the lesson involves making a foldable or creating a comic strip.

- Suggested Grade Level and Length of Activities:** 6th grade, 2 days (80 minute blocks)

- Significance & Relevance:**

Selected State & National Standards –

- **USI.1a, d, e:** The student will demonstrate responsible citizenship and develop skills for historical and geographical analysis, including the ability to identify and interpret primary and secondary source documents to increase understanding of events and life in United States history to 1865, interpret ideas and events from different historical perspectives, and evaluate and discuss issues orally and in writing.
- **USI. 7a:** The student will demonstrate knowledge of the challenges faced by the new nation by identifying the weaknesses of the government established by the Articles of Confederation.

OAH Historical Inquiry Skills –

- **Standards: 3- Historical Analysis and Interpretation:** Students will identify key problems with the Articles of Confederation.
- **4- Historical Research Capabilities:** Students will use primary sources (letters on founding fathers) to discover the problems of the Articles of Confederation.

- **5- Historical Issues- Analysis and Decision Making:** Students will look at the primary sources to find out how the founding fathers felt about the new nation and the Articles of Confederation.

4. Lesson Objectives –

- Students will be able to analyze the Articles of Confederation in order to assess its weaknesses in a domestic and global context by interpreting and categorizing historical situations according to the Article that they match.
- Students will record their information and evaluate which Articles were the most contentious.
- Students will interpret political cartoons.
- Students will appraise the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation through the game.

5. Lesson Plans or Instructional Activities –

Day 1

Part 1: What is the structure of the Articles of Confederation?

What are the Articles of Confederation?

- Students will receive a copy of “Constitutional Topic: Articles of Confederation” available at http://www.usconstitution.net/consttop_arti.html. This topic gives information the Articles and explains what each of the thirteen Articles was about. Students will need this handout for Step 2.

Part 2: What did the founding fathers think about the Articles of Confederation?

- Each group of students will get the handouts “Article Cards” and “Quotation Cards”. Each of the handouts needs to be cut out along the dotted lines. Students should place all article cards out on their desk. Half of the group can do the even numbered cards and half of the group can do the odd numbered cards. One by one, the students read each quote and put it with the article he/she believes it best matches. Do this activity until all quotes have been sorted.

Part 3: Understanding the Articles of Confederation

- Use the Quotations PowerPoint. Flash up each quote, for discussion, and record findings on the “Match-up Sheet”. Key provided.

Part 4: Is Anything Going Right?

- Students can play “Road to the World Stage: America Under the Articles of Confederation Board Game” which reinforces the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation.

Day 2

Part 1: What’s the Weakness?

- Students will use the previous day’s game to assess their understanding of the Articles of Confederation using the Reflection handout. (20 minutes)

Part 2: Cartoons: What’s happening here?

- Students should now use their knowledge to interpret a political cartoon. (Each website has an explanation to make it easier for the teacher to guide the students.) (20 minutes)

Part 5: Show What You Know!

- Students will make a Foldable to show their new knowledge of the Articles of Confederation. Allow 40 minutes.

6. <ATTACH INDIVIDUAL LESSON PLANS/ACTIVITIES AS SEPARATE DOCUMENTS IN THE APPENDICES>

SEE FORMAT ON UVaCollab

9. Technology (if applicable) – Website to access PowerPoints- Quotations and Board Game

10. Modifications, Differentiation, and Extensions – This activity can be modified by having students work in partners or groups. There are many quotes that can be modified or shortened for inclusion classes. With a higher group, students could do outside research on John Adam, James Madison, Benjamin Franklin, and Daniel Shays.

11. Annotated list of supplemental resources:

Adams Papers Digital Edition. (n.d.). *Massachusetts Historical Society, an Independent Research Library Founded in 1791*. Retrieved March 15, 2010, from <http://www.masshist.org/ff>

Summary: This is an extensive database of all of John Adams letters. The letters from when he was serving in Holland as an emissary for the United States are of particular interest. Many of these letters help one to understand the global problems facing the United States.

Butler, A. (n.d.). The Continental - America's First Paper Money - Associated Content - associatedcontent.com. *Associated Content - associatedcontent.com*. Retrieved April 20, 2010, from http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/289149/the_continental_americas_first_paper.html?cat=37

Summary: This short article is helpful for understanding the financial problems of the United States during the Revolutionary War. The Continental Congress continuously printed money and as a result, inflation was out of hand. Counterfeiting also became a problem, thanks to the British. Ultimately, many people found themselves in debt after the war.

Cheney, Lynne. (2008) *We The People*. New York: Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division.

Summary: With thoughtful quotations and beautiful illustrations, this book tells the story of the writing of the Constitution by the founding fathers. It is a good book for younger students to help them understand the reasons for writing a constitution when there was already in effect. It mentions weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation from both domestic and global examples.

Collier, Christopher and James Lincoln. (1998) *Creating the Constitution: 1787*. Tarrytown, New York: Benchmark Books.

Summary: This book, especially the first two chapters, does a great job of explaining the background of the American colonies and the American Revolution. There are vivid pictures and graphs to understand the big moments in history. The Articles of Confederation are explained in detail as to what Congress had power to do and what it did well- financed a revolution however difficult that was. The book also discusses how other nations of the world saw the weaknesses in the United States and were ready to attack from several angles.

Index of /jm. (n.d.). *Constitution Society Home Page*. Retrieved March 17, 2010, from <http://www.constitution.org/jm>

Summary: This website also provides a database of James Madison's letters. Madison writes on various

topics of foreign and domestic issues faced by the United States. Also included is his “Vices of the Political System of the United States”, an overview of everything wrong, in his view, with the confederation government.

Fritz, Jean. (1987) *Shh! We're Writing the Constitution*. Toronto, Canada: General Publishing Company.

Summary: Jean Fritz's illustrated book, which has also been made into a video, tells the story of the secrecy of the Constitutional Convention. It begins by explaining that the thirteen colonies viewed themselves as separate and individual. It goes on to talk about the Declaration of Independence and Articles of Confederation were written to form the new government separate from Great Britain. The book outlines the Articles of Confederation Congress and what it could and could not do ultimately leading to a need for a complete overhaul of the government.

Hull, Mary. (2000) *Shay's Rebellion And the Constitution In American History*. Berkeley Heights, New Jersey: Enslow Publishers, Inc.

Summary: This book is all about Shays' rebellion. It explains how the Articles of Confederation had failed to address the issues of taxation on the states in order to lessen financial burdens of the states due to the Revolutionary War. The book has many primary sources that enhance the story of Shays' rebellion, including portraits, pictures of paper money, and maps.

Lynch, R. (n.d.). Paper Money and the Constitution. *Welcome to The Future of Freedom Foundation*. Retrieved April 30, 2010, from <http://www.fff.org/freedom/fd0901e.asp>

Summary: This essay discusses the crises caused by paper money around the time of the Constitutional Convention that led to a nearly total overhaul of the government structure. The essay has several worthy quotations from founding fathers of the time and contemporary authors. According to the author, the problems of paper money become the problems created by “greed, corruption, and an unchecked democracy”.

Mount, S. (n.d.). Constitutional Topic: Articles of Confederation - The U.S. Constitution Online - USConstitution.net. *Index Page - The U.S. Constitution Online - USConstitution.net*. Retrieved March 31, 2010, from http://www.usconstitution.net/consttop_arti.html

Summary: Understanding the Articles of Confederation becomes so much easier with the use of this website topic. Each Article is broken down into simpler terms. The topic also explains what was “wrong” with the Articles such as the need for a 9/13 majority in voting and the problems of taxations that weakened the treasury.

Teaching With Documents. (n.d.). *National Archives and Records Administration*. Retrieved April 12, 2010, from <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons>

Summary: This website provides a simple overview of problems the Continental Army during the American Revolution. It discusses its lack of training and supplies and how Congress was really powerless to provide necessary provisions due to its inability to tax. There is also the mention of the need for global recognition and aid. There are also links to primary sources of the time period.

12. Acknowledgements

APPENDIX (FOLDER)

13. Related Materials & Resources

- **Lesson Plans: Articles of Confederation or Articles of Confusion? AND Who Cares About America?**

http://www.usconstitution.net/consttop_arti.html

http://edcommunity.apple.com/ali/galleryfiles/578/Political_Cartoons.pdf (page 21 and 47)

www.americanantiquarian.org/Inventories/Europeanprints/b3f2.htm

- **Supplementals:**

Quotations PowerPoint

Road to the World Stage: America Under the Articles of Confederation Board Game

PowerPoint

Article Cards

Quotation Cards

Matchup Sheet

Matchup Key

What's the Weakness?

Weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation Foldable

- **Grading Assessment:**

Rubric (for foldable)