

Title: Articles of Confederation or Articles of Confusion?

Lesson Author: Jennifer Conley

Key Words: confederation

Grade Level: 6

Time Allotted: 80 minutes

Lesson Overview	Students will read historical situations from letters of the period that speak to specific problems and issues faced by the United States under the Articles of Confederation.
Guiding Question(s)	What did the Articles of Confederation allow the United States do as a new country, both at home and abroad? What powers did the Articles of Confederation have and what did they lack?

Learning Objectives: Students will be able to analyze the Articles of Confederation in order to assess its weaknesses in a domestic and global context.

Standards of Learning Taught:

- **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.

Essential Historical Skills Taught:

- **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.**

Assessment Tool(s): Game Reflection.

Materials/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. He wrote to Benjamin Franklin often concerning issues of credit, trying to borrow money, and trying to receive acknowledgement of the United States as a nation. 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.

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.

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Dougherty, K. & Cain, M.J. (1997) Marginal cost sharing and the Articles of Confederation. *Public Choice*, 90, 201-213.

Summary: The article is about costs under the Articles of Confederation. It discusses how money was needed to make the government run effectively and how the government was very dependent on the public treasury supplied by the states. Although the article is mainly a lot of math equations, the beginning mentions a few examples of problems the United States faced with other nations of the world.

Dougherty, K.L. (2001) Collective action under the Articles of Confederation. *Public Choice*, 109, 205-209.

Summary: This article discusses the Articles of Confederation problems that were due to lack of funds. Because states did not pay their requisitions, the treasury began to print its own money. Amendments were unsuccessful due to failure to achieve unanimity and ultimately, Shays' Rebellion caused the government to have to take a much harder look at the structure of the federal government. The article also briefly mentions "renewed hostilities with Britain" as a concern.

Hoffert, Robert W. (1992), *A Politics of Tension*, Niwot, Colorado: University Press of Colorado.

Summary: Chapter 2 provides an overview of the Articles of Confederation. It goes into the details of what each article could do and how some of the requirements became too stringent to be effective. The chapter introduced the ideas that there was no need for the coercion of the thirteen states due to a sense of egalitarian sentiment among them. It also gives a lot of explanation on the Articles of Confederation Congress and discusses the states' vigorous desire for states' rights.

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.

Staloff, Darren. (2005) *Hamilton, Adams, Jefferson: The Politics of Enlightenment and the American Founding*. New York: Hill and Wang.

Summary: Chapter 2 goes into detail about John Adams' role in negotiating with the global powers of the day. It extensively mentions the problems of the Articles of Confederation that made it so difficult for Adams to receive diplomatic recognition, particularly with the Dutch. This chapter also discusses at length problems with credit for the United States and the problems of commerce facing the United States under the Articles of Confederation.

Winik, Jay. (2007) *The Great Upheaval*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers.

Summary: The first chapter is a good synopsis of the troubles faced by Washington in war due to a weak Confederation Congress that could not tax. It describes the states as "jealous" when they laid extraneous duties on imports across state lines. The chapter also details Shays' rebellion which ultimately made the founders aware of the need for a stronger government.

Additional Materials –

- **Printout on Articles of Confederation at <http://www.usconstitution.net/consttoparti.html>**
- **Article Cards (Handout)**
- **Quotation Cards (Handout)**
- **Matchup Sheet (Handout)**
- **Matchup Sheet Key**
- **Quotations PowerPoint**
- **Articles of Confederation Board Game (PowerPoint) (print out)**
- **scissors**
- **A Die**
- **4 coins**

Modifications (to meet needs of diverse learners) – 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.

Instructional Procedures/Process:

Part 1: What are the Articles of Confederation?

- **Activity 1:** Students will receive a copy of “Constitutional Topic: Articles of Confederation” available at <http://www.usconstitution.net/consttoparti.html>. This topic gives information about the Articles and explains what each of the thirteen Articles was about. (Allow 10 minutes to read.)

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

- **Activity 2:** 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 historical situation and put it with the article he/she believes it best matches. Do this activity until all quotes have been sorted. (approx. 30 min.)

Part 3: Understanding the Articles of Confederation

- **Activity 3:** Use the Quotations PowerPoint. Flash up each historical situation, for discussion, and record findings on the “Match-up Sheet”. Key provided. (approx. 20 min.)

Part 4: Is Anything Going Right?

- **Activity 4:** Students can play “The Road to the World Stage: America Under the Articles of Confederation Board Game,” which reinforces the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation. (Print this out.) (approx. 20 min.)

Closure: “Game Reflection”.

Part 5: What’s the Weakness?

- **Activity 5:** Students should complete “Game Reflection: What’s the Weakness?” to assess their understanding of the game.
- (Note: If there are time constraints, this can be the bell ringer for Day 2.)