

The Constitutional Convention “The Major Players”

Guiding Question: Who were the main participants in the Constitutional Convention of 1787 and what motivated their roles?

Lesson Objective: Students will understand the background, political agendas, and the various differences of the major players in the Constitutional Convention debates that were held. It is critical that students today understand the diversity of ideas that propelled the discussions of representation, slavery, individual rights, and relationships between the states.

Time Frame: Two 50 minute periods

Lesson Activities Day One

- Introduction: Teacher will discuss the events that led up to the Constitutional Convention. Review the taxes and policies of King George III and why we became a nation. Discuss the Declaration of Independence and the Articles of Confederation and the various weaknesses of that government. Students will understand the need for a powerful central government for this new fragile nation. They will understand why this convention was called and who were the delegates
- Students will understand that Rhode Island did not participate. Out of the 12 states, 74 delegates had been selected but only 55 actually attended and this Constitutional Convention will only present discussion from 13 of the major participants:
- Students will be assigned roles for the following participants with background information: Students are to study their roles and be prepared to role play their positions.
 - a. George Washington, Virginia
 - b. James Madison, Virginia
 - c. Elbridge Gerry, Mass
 - d. Alexander Hamilton, New York
 - e. Benjamin Franklin, Pennsylvania
 - f. Roger Sherman, Connecticut
 - g. William Livingston, New Jersey
 - h. Gouverneur Morris, Pennsylvania

- i. Charles Pinckney, South Carolina
- j. George Mason, Virginia
- k. Luther Martin, Maryland
- l. James Rutledge, South Carolina
- m. Oliver Elsworth, Connecticut

Students to role play the Constitutional Convention will review their assigned role and be prepared to discuss the major issues of concern in the debates: representation in the legislative branch, slavery, individual rights and commerce between the states.. Students will be given handouts for each roles. Other students will observe and make notes of what each participant stood for and what was their rationale for the positions they presented.

All students are asked to attend school the following day in the customary attire of 1787. Students will have wear a sign signifying who they are , what state they represented, and what section of the nation they represented: North or South

Lesson Activity Day Two

Constitutional Convention May 25, 1787 State House, Philadelphia, Penn

- Welcome and call for meeting to come to order, agenda for the day and explanation of rules for proceeding: George Washington
- Introduction and brief biographies: Each participant will give a brief introduction.
- Representation Debate: Virginia Plan presented by James Madison and New Jersey Plan presented by William Livingston
 - a. Debates on the merit of the plan : Mason, Sherman, Gerry, Mason, Hamilton, and others. Franklin calling for prayer
- Slavery Debate: Should they be counted for representation: Participants Pinckney, Martin, Sherman, Elsworth, Rutledge, Debates gets very animated based on the point of whether slaves should be counted as people when the south treats them as property. Finally agreed to 3/5 compromise
- Commerce and Trade Compromise: Pinckney Rutledge, Madison lead the discussion with others adding comments. Agreed to not act on Slave trade for a period of 20 years

- Individual Rights Debate presented by Pinckney, Gerry, Mason, and Sherman. Refusal from anti-federalist group to approve any form of government that did not include basic rights for individuals. Federalist agreed to add a Bill of Rights to the documents once approved
- Final vote and comments: Madison will acknowledge that only 39 of the participants signed the document and the significance of what had transpired in the 92 of the 116 days that they had been in session.

Homework Assignment: Each student is to write a paper with a minimum of 400 words on the Constitutional Convention and the diversity of participants. Paper should be typed in font of 12 double-spaced and is due one week from today. (See attached handout). Students should first explain how the region that the framer came from impacted their position and how the economic condition of the participants impacted their participation. Secondly, students should try to visualize and explain how various factors impacted the proceedings in 1787: the attire that was worn, the size of the room that they convened in and the secrecy of the proceedings, lack of the modern conveniences we take for granted like air conditioning or indoor plumbing facilities. Third, they are to agree or disagree on the compromises made at the Constitutional Convention and support their position. Finally, utilizing critical thinking skills what were the implications of those actions for the future of the nation.

Grading Process with Rubrics for each category

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| • Preparation, Research, and Knowledge | 20% |
| • Participation | 40% |
| • Written Assignment | 40% |

Bibliography: American Government, Magruder

Plain, Honest Men: The Making of the American Constitution by Richard Beeman