

People and Events that Shaped The Constitution



TEACHER'S GUIDE Grades 7 to 12

PROGRAM OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVE

From May to September 1787, delegates from the American colonies met at the Pennsylvania State House in Philadelphia to address the problems of the weak central government that existed under the Articles of Confederation. After months of grueling debates, compromise and an exhausting drafting process the United States Constitution was signed on September 17, 1787. It took four months to create the document, however, in fact, the tenets and principals of the United States Constitution had been evolving over hundreds of years. There were many people, ideas, and events that shaped the document that established America's national government, its fundamental laws and guaranteed basic rights for its citizens. This program explores just a few of the factors that influenced the founding fathers to create the constitution.

CHAPTER 1. Montesquieu's Ideas About Government

In this segment students will learn about Montesquieu one of the foremost political philosophers of the Enlightenment. Viewers will come to understand that his writings explore various forms of government and finding ways to prevent governmental corruption in order to reduce society's problems. The program examines how Montesquieu's doctrine of "separation of powers" inspired the principles of the United States Constitution.

KEY VOCABULARY TERMS

Age of Enlightenment

Despotism

Doctrine

Jurisprudence

Monarch

Republic

Separation of Powers

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What were Montesquieu's reasons for studying government? What did he hope to accomplish?
2. Define the three types of government and the differences in how leaders derive their power.
3. What is the Separation of Powers doctrine? What is the purpose of the Separation of Powers?
4. Define "Checks and Balances". How does it limit the powers of the branches of government?

ACTIVITIES

1. Pretend your Montesquieu's publicist. Create a poster to promote his book "Spirit of the Laws".
2. You're a book critic for the Philadelphia Gazette. Write a short review about the concepts presented in Montesquieu's book "Spirit of the Laws".
3. You're a talk-show-host and Montesquieu is an upcoming guest. Develop three questions you would like to ask him. As an additional activity, video-record a mock interview with one student as the interviewer and another playing the role of Montesquieu.
4. In your own words explain what Montesquieu is saying in the excerpts below.

EXCERPT #1

"The Greek political thinkers, who lived in governments of the people, recognized no other force which could sustain them except that of virtue. Today's political thinkers speak to us solely of manufactures, of commerce, of finances, or riches, and even of luxury. When that virtue ceases, ambition enters the hearts of those who can receive it, and avarice enters the hearts of everyone."

EXCERPT #2

"When legislative power is united with executive power...there is no liberty. Nor is there liberty when the power of judging is not separate from legislative power and from executive power."

EXCERPT #3

"The executive should have a right of putting a stop to the legislative body to prevent it from becoming despotic. But too the legislative power in a free government ought to have a right to examine in what manner its laws have been executed. And whatever may be the issue of that examination, the legislative body ought not to have a power of judging the executive, that should be the province of the judiciary."

CHAPTER 2. Colonial Governments

Students will learn that before the American Revolution each of the thirteen original colonies had governments formed according to three different legal models; Royal, Charter and Proprietary. The chapter discusses the differences in each of the models, but points out elements of democracy were common. Viewers will learn that most colonial governments consisted of a governor, a council and assembly or House of Representatives.

KEY VOCABULARY TERMS

Charter Colony

Proprietary Colony

Royal Colony

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Define the three different legal models found in the American colonies before the American Revolution.
2. What were the common features of the different government models? What were the differences between the different government models?
3. What type of legal model would you've preferred to live under? Explain your answer.
4. In what ways were the various colonial governments similar to the local, state and Federal Government that exist in the United States today?

CHAPTER 3. Shays' Rebellion

This chapter examines the people, places and events that led to Shay's Rebellion. Students will learn about the weaknesses of the United States' original federal government established under the Articles of Confederation. Viewers will realize how the lack of a strong federal government impacted the union of the states and its citizens. The video discusses the events that led to Shays' Rebellion and how it sparked a movement to create a strong central government.

KEY VOCABULARY TERMS

Arsenal

Confederation

Federal

Foreclosure

Militia

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What were Shays and the Shaysites major grievances?
2. How did Shays' Rebellion reveal the weaknesses in the federal government under the Articles of Confederation? Discuss.
3. Do you think that limiting the powers of the federal government positively or negatively impacted the growth and development of the new country? Explain your answer.
4. What were Shays' goals in launching the rebellion? Did his original goals change over time? Why?
5. What was the significance of Daniel Shays having been a veteran of the Revolutionary War?

ACTIVITIES

1. Imagine you're a farmer in Massachusetts in dire financial straits. Write a letter to the Governor describing your complaints about your situation and ideas on how the problems could be solved.
2. Pretend you're a Shaysite and you've been chosen to recruit more people to the cause. Create a poster that will motivate people to take part in the revolt.
3. You're a reporter for a newspaper. Create a political cartoon that outlines the issues that sparked Shays' Rebellion.
4. You are one of the rebels that attempted to seize arms and ammunition at the Armory in Springfield. Make an entry into your diary that describes your feelings and explains how the events unfolded that day.
5. How did the founders of our nation and leaders of the American Revolution feel about Shays' Rebellion? In small groups have students interpret the letters from George Washington and Thomas Jefferson provided below. Have them choose specific phrases from the documents and write in their own words each of the authors' views.

EXAMPLE

Direct Quotes from George Washington's letters	Students' Interpretation of his viewpoint	Direct Quotes from Thomas Jefferson's letters	Students' Interpretation of his viewpoint
"If government is unable to enforce its laws...everything will be turned topsy turvey..."	We need a stronger government to prevent chaos	"Let them take arms...the tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots..."	Rebellion is necessary because it renews citizens' self government

Engage students in a discussion of each man's viewpoint and come to a conclusion as to the similarities and differences. What did the men disagree about? What did they agree about?

EXCERPTS FROM THE LETTERS OF GEORGE WASHINGTON AND THOMAS JEFFERSON

Excerpt from George Washington's Letter to Henry Lee, October 31, 1786

“The accounts which are published of the commotions . . . exhibit a melancholy proof of what our trans-Atlantic foe has predicted; and of another thing perhaps, which is still more to be regretted, and is yet more unaccountable, that mankind when left to themselves are unfit for their own Government. I am mortified beyond expression when I view the clouds that have spread over the brightest morn that ever dawned upon any Country . . . To be more exposed in the eyes of the world, and more contemptible than we already are, is hardly possible.”

Source: Washington, George To Henry Lee, October 31, 1786. The George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799. American Memory, Library of Congress. Washington, D.C.

Excerpt from George Washington's Letter to Henry Knox, February 3, 1787

“The moment is, indeed, important! – If government shrinks [backs away], or is unable to enforce [carry out] its laws; fresh maneuvers [movements] will be displayed by the insurgents [protestors] – anarchy [lawlessness] & confusion must prevail [win out] – and every thing will be turned topsy turvey in that State; where it is not probable [likely] the mischiefs [troubles] will terminate [end].” “If three years ago any person had told me that at this day, I should see such a formidable [dreadful] rebellion against the laws & constitutions of our own making as now appears I should have thought him a bedlamite - a fit subject for a mad house.”

Source: Washington, George to Henry Knox, February 3, 1787. Founders Online. National Archives and Records Administration. Washington, D.C.

Excerpt from Thomas Jefferson to William S. Smith, Paris, Nov. 13, 1787

What country can preserve its liberties if their rulers are not warned from time to time that their people preserve the spirit of resistance? Let them take arms . . . the tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots & tyrants.

Source: Jefferson, Thomas to William Smith, November 13, 1787. Library of Congress, Manuscript Division. Washington, D.C.

Excerpt of a letter from Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, Paris, Dec. 20, 1787

The late rebellion in Massachusetts has given more alarm than I think it should have done. Calculate that one rebellion in 13 states in the course of 11 years, is but one for each state in a century & a half. No country should be so long without one. Nor will any degree of power in the hands of government prevent insurrections. France, with all its despotism, and two or three hundred thousand men always in arms has had three insurrections in the three years I have been here in every one of which greater numbers were engaged than in Massachusetts & a great deal more blood was spilt.

Source: Jefferson, Thomas to James Madison, December 20, 1787. Thomas Jefferson Papers, Series 1, General Correspondence, 1651-1827. American Memory, Library of Congress. Washington, D.C.

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