

## Lesson 1: The Articles of Confederation

### Big Ideas of the Lesson

- The Articles of Confederation created our first plan for a national government.
- The Articles of Confederation set up a republic. This is a system where people elect representatives to run the country.
- There were many weaknesses in the Articles of Confederation. For example, it set up a weak national government that did not have the power to tax. Therefore, there was little money to run the government.
- Under the Articles of Confederation, there were some successes, however. For example, the national government passed the Northwest Ordinance. This provided for a method for new states to come into the Union.

### Lesson Abstract:

In this lesson, students examine the national government set up under the *Articles of Confederation*. They begin with a discussion of challenges facing the young country. Students then examine the structure of the government set up under the *Articles of Confederation*, as well as its weaknesses and successes, as demonstrated by events such as Shays' Rebellion and the adoption of the Northwest Ordinance.

### Content Expectations

5 – U3.3.1: Describe the powers of the national government and state governments under the Articles of Confederation.

5 – U3.3.2: Give examples of problems the country faced under the Articles of Confederation (e.g., lack of national army, competing currencies, reliance on state governments for money).

### Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects:

RI.5.7: Draw on information from multiple print or digital sources, demonstrating the ability to locate an answer to a question quickly or to solve a problem efficiently

### Key Concepts

Articles of Confederation  
limited government

### Instructional Resources

Equipment/Manipulative

Chart paper

Overhead projector or document camera/projector

### Student Resource

Bower, Burt, et al. *America's Past*, Social Studies Alive Program. Palo Alto, CA: Teacher's Curriculum Institute, 2010 or a similar fifth grade social studies textbook. Pp. 187-188.

Fritz, Jean. *Shh! We're Writing a Constitution*. New York: Putnam Juvenile, 1996.

*Independence: The Articles of Confederation*. Congress for Kids. 3 April 2012  
<[http://www.congressforkids.net/Independence\\_articles.htm](http://www.congressforkids.net/Independence_articles.htm)>.

### Teacher Resource

*The Articles of Confederation. Primary Documents in American History*. Library of Congress. 3 April 2012 <<http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/articles.html>>.

*The Articles of Confederation*. Liberty Online. 3 April 2012  
<<http://libertyonline.hypermall.com/ArtConfed.html>>.

*Centuries of Citizenship: A Constitutional Timeline, 1787-1790*. National Constitution Center. 3 April 2012 <<http://www.constitutioncenter.org/timeline/html/cw02.html>>.

Egbo, Carol. *Supplemental Materials (Unit 7, Lesson 1)*. Teacher-made material. Michigan Citizenship Collaborative, 2012.

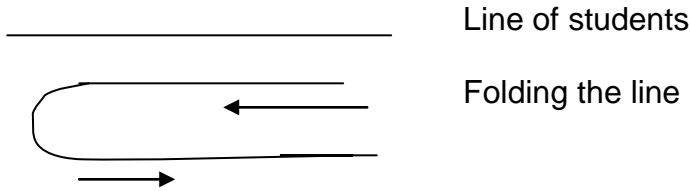
*The Northwest Ordinance*. Early America.com. 3 April 2012  
<<http://www.earlyamerica.com/earlyamerica/milestones/ordinance/>>.

*Shays' Rebellion and the Constitution*. Calliope. 3 April 2012  
<<http://www.calliope.org/shays/shays2.html>>.

"Shays' Rebellion, 1787." *The History Channel*. YouTube. Series of 5 videos. 3 April 2012  
<[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OnRCc5gbmNk&feature=results\\_main&playnext=1&list=PL301D94AA9D3279C9&safety\\_mode=true&persist\\_safety\\_mode=1](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OnRCc5gbmNk&feature=results_main&playnext=1&list=PL301D94AA9D3279C9&safety_mode=true&persist_safety_mode=1)>.

### **Lesson Sequence**

1. Begin the lesson by having students engage in a communication line in which they discuss their knowledge of the final events of the American Revolution. In order to do this, write the following on the board: "Final Events of the American Revolution – Battle of Saratoga, Role of the French, Battle of Yorktown, and Treaty of Paris." Line up students in a single file line and fold the line in half so that each student is facing another student. Have one side of the line talk about the topic for a minute and a half with their respective partners. The partners are to listen, but not engage in the conversation. Then, have the other half of the line talk about the same topic for the same period of time. Have students shift one of the lines, moving down two people in order to have a new partner. Again, those students at the end of the line will need to fold into the other side. Then, have the students engage in a conversation about the topic for another one and a half minute period each, just as the previous discussion. Shift the line again so students get to discuss the topic for a third time.



2. Debrief the review activity by asking students what they noticed about their conversations in the conversation line. Students will probably reflect that with each subsequent conversation, their conversations went deeper and they were able to add more to their conversations as they learned from their classmates. Then guide a discussion of the subject using the following questions:
  - Why was the Battle of Saratoga viewed as a major turning point in the Revolutionary War?
  - What role did the French play in the Revolution?
  - What influence did the French have on the course of the war?
  - How did the war end?
  - What was the Treaty of Paris?
3. Explain to students that the newly independent country of the United States faced many challenges following the Revolutionary War. Ask students to work with a partner to predict what some of these challenges were. Have pairs write their ideas on paper. Give pairs time to think and write. Then, lead a discussion by having pairs share their ideas in the large group. Note that possible challenges included:
  - The war had cost a lot of money and the young country had debts.
  - The territory of the new country was greatly increased following the Treaty of Paris. Decisions had to be made about how to govern this new territory.
  - Loyalists who had not supported the war were still living in the U.S. (Word Card #1)
4. Display the "Quotation" from *Shh! We're Writing a Constitution*, by Jean Fritz located in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 7, Lesson 1)*. Read the quotation out loud to the class and ask students to explain what they think it means.
5. Read the first four paragraphs of the Jean Fritz book which continue on after the quotation used in Step 4. Note that more of the text will be used in the next lesson. Discuss the text using the following questions:
  - Why would states make fun of each other and call each other names like "lousy Buckskins?"
  - What does the word "sovereign" mean? (Word Card #2)
  - Why did people like the term "sovereign states?"
  - How did George Washington feel about the term "sovereign states?"
  - Why did some of Washington's soldiers think "New Jersey was their country?"
  - What was George Washington's hope for the country?
6. Explain that despite strong allegiance to their states, colonial leaders knew some type of a national government was needed. Using Word Card #3, explain that during the American Revolution in 1777, the Continental Congress proposed a plan for a government known as the

*Articles of Confederation.* The Articles were ratified in 1781. Using Word Card #4, remind students that a confederation is a loose group of sovereign states or communities that unite for one or more specific purposes. Remind students that they have previously discussed this term when they studied the Haudenosaunee, or Iroquois Confederation in a previous unit.

7. Display “Organization of the Government under the *Articles of Confederation*” located in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 7, Lesson 1)*. Ask students why they think the *Articles of Confederation* set up a weak national government and strong state governments. Discuss student answers and guide students to the idea that people did not want to give too much power to a central government because of their experience under British rule. Using Word Card #5, review the term “government by consent” and discuss how this term relates to people agreeing to be governed. Explain that after the Revolutionary War, people agreed to be governed by a national government as long as its power was quite limited.
8. Using Word Card #6, explain that the *Articles of Confederation* set up a republic, or a system where people elect representatives to run the country. Display “A Republic”, located in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 7, Lesson 1)* and discuss the characteristics and advantages of a republic. Then, discuss how a republic relates to the ideas of “consent of the governed” and “limited powers.” Note these concepts were explored in Unit 5 of Grade 4.
9. Display “Characteristics of the Government under the *Articles of Confederation*”, located in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 7, Lesson 1)*. Discuss how the government was organized under the Articles. Explain to students that the characteristics of the government related to political feelings and attitudes of the people at the time. For example, after their experiences with the British King, people feared a strong leader so there was no executive branch under the Articles.
10. Divide students into small groups and give each group a copy of the “Prediction Activity”, located in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 7, Lesson 1)*. Explain that groups should discuss the characteristics of the government under the *Articles of Confederation* listed on the chart and think of possible problems that may have occurred as a result of the characteristic. Allow groups time to work (about seven minutes) and then lead a discussion by having groups share the ideas listed on their prediction charts. Note, a chart showing possible answers has been included in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 7, Lesson 1)*. To further the discussion, explain to the class that George Washington called the government under the *Articles of Confederation* a “half-starved, limping government”. Ask students what they think he meant by this. Discuss student responses.
11. At this point in the lesson, you may want to have students read the section in their textbook on the *Articles of Confederation*. For the text, *America’s Past*, see pages 187-188.
12. Explain that despite the many problems experienced under the *Articles of Confederation*, there were successes. These included the following:
  - The national government was able to wage the war of Independence against Britain.
  - The national government was able to negotiate the Treaty of Paris.
  - The Northwest Ordinance was enacted.

Explain to students that they are going to examine this last success in detail.

13. Explain that most historians think the biggest success under the Articles was the development of a method for dividing and governing the new lands west of the Appalachian Mountains. Display “The Western Lands”, located in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 7, Lesson 1)* and discuss how the land was divided into townships in 1785. Further explain that in 1787 the Northwest Ordinance set up a plan for government of the Northwest Territory and for forming new states. Note that students should have learned about the Northwest Ordinance in third grade when they studied Michigan history. Explain that despite the success of the Northwest Ordinance, things on the whole began to grow worse under the *Articles of Confederation*.

14. Explain to students that after independence, economic problems became a serious issue and made life difficult for many Americans, especially farmers who had fought in the Revolution. Share the information below regarding this problem:

- Some soldiers had still not been paid for fighting in the Revolution because the Congress lacked money.
- Most of these were farmers who needed money to farm and money to pay high state taxes.
- Many farmers borrowed money and went into debt.
- They ended up not being able to pay their debts or their taxes.
- Courts in some states began to take away the farms of farmers who were in debt.

Have students do a quick write describing how they think these former soldiers felt when they were in danger of losing their farms.

15. Explain that the situation described in Step 14 led to a rebellion by some farmers under the leadership of Daniel Shays, who had been a captain in the Continental Army. This historical event became known as Shays’ Rebellion. Share the following information:

- In 1786, farmers under Shays attacked courthouses hoping to stop the courts from meeting.
- In January of 1787, Shays led an attack on an arsenal, a building where weapons are kept, in Massachusetts.
- Congress did not have an army to defend the arsenal. Eventually state troops from Massachusetts put the rebellion down.

Explain that Shays’ Rebellion frightened many people. Ask students why they think this was true.

16. Optional Step: Show students one of several videos on Shays’ Rebellion such as those locate at

- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3lmlEcsTEVo&safety\\_mode=true&persist\\_safety\\_mode=1](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3lmlEcsTEVo&safety_mode=true&persist_safety_mode=1) (History Channel 6 minute video with historians explaining historical context and significance of Shays’ Rebellion).\
- Or some from the series [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OnRCc5qbmNk&feature=results\\_main&playnext=1&list=PL301D94AA9D3279C9&safety\\_mode=true&persist\\_safety\\_mode=1](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OnRCc5qbmNk&feature=results_main&playnext=1&list=PL301D94AA9D3279C9&safety_mode=true&persist_safety_mode=1)

Have students describe Shays’ Rebellion in writing after watching the video.

17. Display the “Quotation”, located in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 7, Lesson 1)* and read it out loud, explaining it is a quote from George Washington. Guide students in defining the following terms: mortified, advocates, despotism. Ask students what they think Washington meant by the quotation. Explain that in 1787, the young nation was in a serious crisis. Share the following information regarding this:
- The national government was on the edge of bankruptcy.
  - Farmers under Daniel Shays had closed down courts and threatened an arsenal.
  - States were constantly disagreeing with each other over many different issues.
  - States were imposing tariffs, or taxes, on goods produced in neighboring states.
  - Britain had refused to leave some forts on American soil such as the one at Detroit.
  - Leaders like Washington were very worried about the future of the new nation.
18. For extension or for individual or group activity, have students complete the game at the following website: *Independence: The Articles of Confederation*. Congress for Kids. 3 April 2012 <[http://www.congressforkids.net/Independence\\_articles.htm](http://www.congressforkids.net/Independence_articles.htm)>.
19. Explain that obviously the young country was able to solve many of its problems since it's a strong country today. Ask students to answer the following question in their journals as a culminating activity: “How do you think the U.S. was able to solve the problems it was facing in 1787?”

### **Assessment**

A chart, “The Articles of Confederation” is an assessment requiring constructed responses, has been included in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 7, Lesson 1)*. Note that a chart with possible answers has also been included.