

Lesson 3: A Convention of Compromises

Big Ideas of the Lesson

- Many issues had to be resolved by compromises during the Constitutional Convention.
- One issue related to representation in Congress. Small states wanted membership in Congress to be based on an equal number of representatives from each state and large states wanted it based on population
- As a compromise, a two body Congress was established.
- One of the most complicated issues at the Convention was that of slavery.
- Compromises over slavery resulted in slaves being counted as 3/5ths of a person and the continuation of the slave trade for 20 years.

Lesson Abstract:

In this lesson, students examine the role of compromise at the Constitutional Convention. Using what they have learned in Unit 1 as well as Unit 5 of fourth grade, they examine compromises relating to representation in Congress. Then, they take part in a short simulation designed to engage them in resolving issues relating to slavery.

Content Expectations

- 5 – U3.3.3: Explain why the Constitutional Convention was convened and why the Constitution was written.
- 5 – U3.3.4: Describe the issues over representation and slavery the Framers faced at the Constitutional Convention and how they were addressed in the Constitution (Great Compromise, Three-Fifths Compromise).
- 5 – U3.3.5: Give reasons why the Framers wanted to limit the power of government (e.g., fear of a strong executive, representative government, importance of individual rights).

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

- SL.5. 1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 5 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

Key Concepts

compromise
Constitutional Convention
Framers
representation
slavery
U.S. Constitution

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. Pages 189, 196-200.

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

"#40 We the People 1 / 2" *Liberty Kids*. Youtube. 3 April 2012

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CNTNueTI904&feature=related>>.

Teacher Resource

Egbo, Carol. *Supplemental Materials (Unit 7, Lesson 3)*. Teacher-made material. Michigan Citizenship Collaborative, 2012.

Lesson Sequence

1. Begin the lesson by showing students Part 1 of 2 of Episode 1 of the Liberty Kids at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CNTNueTI904&feature=related>. The video begins with a review of Shays' Rebellion and ends with a discussion of the issue of representation. Stop the video several times throughout the almost 11 minute video to discuss the following topics:

- What were the reasons for Shays' Rebellion?
- What was one significant consequence of Shays' Rebellion?
- What did some states disagree upon?
- Why did they seek a system of separation of powers and checks and balances?
- What did states disagree about regarding representation in Congress?

Be sure to explain to students that the video is entertainment. While the subject of the video is based on actual events from the past, there may be some sections in which the creators took "creative liberty." Briefly discuss how entertainers' accounts may vary based on what information they have available, and their desire to make the story exciting to the viewer. Some questions the video may raise include the following:

- How might we find evidence of uprisings in Virginia and Maryland as depicted in the video?
- Why did George Washington attend the convention?
- Did certain people plan ahead of time that to write a new constitution?
- Do you think the dialogue in the cartoon is accurate? Why or why not?

2. Explain that although the Framers of the Constitution agreed on some basic ideas such as the need for limited government as explored in the previous lesson, there were a lot of issues upon which people disagreed. One big issue for the convention related to the following question: How should states be represented in the new congress? Display "Representation: Two Different Plans", located in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 7, Lesson 3)* and discuss the two

major plans that were suggested about representation. As you discuss each plan, have students determine which states would have favored each plan. Note that the Virginia Plan was favored by the large states and the New Jersey Plan was favored by the smaller states.

3. Using Word Card #8, discuss the term “compromise”. Ask students to describe examples of compromises from their own experiences. Explain that in order to solve the representation problem, a compromise was needed. Ask students to use what they have learned about the structure of Congress in both fourth grade and Unit 1 of fifth grade to describe in their social studies journal what they think the compromise relating to representation entailed. Give students time to write.
4. Have students share what they wrote first with a partner and then in the large group. Using “Roger Sherman’s Great Compromise”, located in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 7, Lesson 3)* and Word Cards #9 and #10, discuss how the issue of representation was resolved. Have students compare the Great Compromise to what they wrote in their journals.
5. Explain that the issue of slavery became perhaps the most disagreed upon issue at the convention. Explain that students will have an opportunity to take part in a short simulation relating to this issue. Divide students into pairs and then place two pairs together to form groups of four. Give one pair in each group the “Pair #1 Simulation Role Card” and the other group the “Pair #2 Simulation Role Card”, located in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 7, Lesson 3)*. Have pairs read over the information on their role cards. Then, give each group of four a copy of the “Compromise Plans”, located in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 7, Lesson 3)*.
6. Display “Issues”, located in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 7, Lesson 3)* and read Issue #1 and Issue #2 out loud to students. Explain that the pairs in each group should work to come up with a compromise to solve each of these issues. Their compromise should be describing in writing on the “Compromise Plans” paper given to them in step 5.. Give groups ten to fifteen minutes to reach and write out their compromises. Then, have each group share how they resolved the two issues.
7. Display “Issues” again and read Issue #3 out loud to students. Explain that pairs should work together again to come up with a compromise to resolve the issue of whether or not to abolish the slave trade. Give groups five to ten minutes to reach and write out their compromises. Then, have each group share how they resolved this issue.
8. Using “Slavery: Compromises”, located in the *Supplemental Materials (Unit 7, Lesson 3)* and the following information, discuss how issues relating to slavery were finally resolved at the Convention:
 - Population would affect a state’s taxes and its representation in Congress.
 - Northern states did not want enslaved people to count for representation, but wanted them counted for tax purposes.
 - The South wanted the enslaved people to count for representation, but not for tax purposes (the opposite of the northern states).
 - As a compromise, three-fifths of the total number of slaves would be counted for taxation and representation purposes.

- Many of the delegates to the convention were slave owners themselves. Others wanted slavery completely abolished. In the end, delegates decided that Congress could stop the slave trade but not for at least 20 years.
- The delegates did not to resolve the issue about abolishing slavery in the new Constitution.

9. Pose the following question: Do you think the compromises relating to slavery ended disagreements over slavery in the country? Why or why not? Have students write an answer to the question in their social studies journal. Give students time to write and then lead a discussion by having students share their answers.

Assessment

Have student explain in writing two compromises that were made in creating the Constitution.