

Topic:

Framers of the Constitution
1778

Time:

One week

Grade:

5

Core:

5: 6050-0501

Objectives: Students will:

1. Understand the reasons the Constitution was written.
2. Have an opportunity to view the “Framers” as real people with conflicting needs and values.
3. Synthesize their knowledge by reenacting the Convention.

Procedure:

- I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION
 - A. Write “Constitution” on the board. Ask the class if anyone can say what the Constitution of the United States is. (Accept any answer to the effect that it is the basic law of the land.)
 - B. Ask “Does anybody know how our Constitution came to be written?” Use this as a lead-in to the lesson.
 - C. Distribute Handout 1: Framers of the Constitution. Read the article together and discuss using the following questions:
 1. Before the delegates came to Philadelphia, they had not intended to write a new Constitution, only to improve the Articles of Confederation.
 2. Write “Articles of Confederation” on the board. Identify the problems the colonists were facing.
 3. Suggest the image of a body with 13 heads. Who would be in control? How would it move, or eat, or make a decision to protect itself? Compare this creature with the 13 separate colonies.
 4. What do we mean by calling the authors of the Constitution the “Framers”?

Additional Resources:

1. Handout 1: Framers of the Constitution.
3. Handouts 2 (a-l): Life sketches of the Framers.
4. U.S. Constitution. (Copy of a handwritten one if possible.)

Author:

Procedure: (Continued)

5. Write “Characteristics of the Framers” on the board. As the students read, have them identify and name characteristics. How are they similar or dissimilar? Evaluate whether they are truly “representative” of the American people or not. Explain why.
 6. What skills or experiences did they have that qualified them for this important job?
 7. Expand the explanation of James Madison’s role in framing the Constitution.
 8. Write “compromise” on the board. Define it. Give examples of the compromises made in order to pass the Constitution:
 - a. The “Great Compromise” requiring equal representation in the Senate and proportionate representation based on population in the House.
 - b. The Compromise on slave trade which assured the South that Congress would not interfere in slave trade for twenty years after which Congress would regulate commerce.
- D. Extending the Lesson
1. Neither John Adams nor Thomas Jefferson, two of the strongest advocates of the Declaration of Independence, attended the Constitutional Convention. Ask students to use biographies to find out what these two men were doing during the summer of 1787 and report their activities to the class. (Both were on diplomatic service in Europe.)
 2. Central to understanding the framing of the Constitution and a democratic way of life is understanding the notion of “compromise.”
 - a. Classroom level: Think about a problem you have faced recently in which there was a difference of opinion. Write the problem down, showing both sides. Then show a way that compromise might have been used to solve the problem.
 - b. Small groups: Choose a problem that is affecting your community right now. Choose one for which different people have different solutions. Think of a way to solve the problem through compromise. Present solutions to the class.

II. RE-ENACTMENT OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

A. Getting to know the Framers as “Real People.”

Each student will select (or be assigned) a state and a delegate for whom he/she will play the part during the Convention. See Handouts 2 (a-1). He must be prepared to introduce himself on the first day of the Convention, briefly explaining his background, education, occupation, and experience.

B. Getting to know the Framers’ view on the issues.

The students must work with the other delegates from their states to agree on the issues. Each student should research how the delegate actually voted, wherever possible, but at a minimum should be able to work with the other delegates from his/her state to analyze his/her probable vote.

Issues to be debated include (adjust as needed):

1. Leadership of Government.

Should there be a President? Should there be one leader or two? How long should the term of office be? How can the country be protected from this office becoming too powerful?

2. Representation in the Legislature.

3. Congressional control over trade.

C. Using Parliamentary Procedure.

Parliamentary procedure should be reviewed or quickly taught before the Convention begins. A strong student should be chosen as President of the Convention (George Washington) or it may be appropriate for the teacher to handle this process so that the debate keeps moving.

D. Suggested format for re-enactment.

Day 1:

Choose state and delegate’s name for each student.

Provide in-class time and resources to do research and learn about the delegates’ lives (using life sketches as a minimum).

Have the delegates met with the other people from their state to decide how the issues will be decided. Consider the state’s economic structure, population, geographical location, and leading citizens’ views.

Day 2:

Arrange the room appropriately for the Convention. Have the students make name placards for themselves (using their delegate’s name!) And for their state. Dress in costume.

Recognize the need for a leader and elect George Washington as President of the Convention.

Begin the Convention with a brief self-introduction by each delegate. George Washington should call each delegation by state order (call according to custom which is the northern-most state first and moving south).

Day 3:

George Washington begins the session by reviewing the need for changes in the Articles of Confederation.

Washington entertains motions from the floor about alternative ways to lead the government.

Debate the issue of leadership and the Presidency. Reach a compromise.

Washington entertains motions from the floor about representation in Congress. Debate and compromise.

Day 4:

Washington entertains motions from the floor about Congressional control over trade (slave issue).

Debate and compromise.

Signing the constitution:

Use a copy of the original handwritten Constitution (signatures omitted). Have each “framer” sign. Follow the historical procedure. George Washington signs first in the center, then the states are called north to south by delegation. Alexander Hamilton signs his state name to the left (see original). For an authentic touch, use a quill pen.

Convention ends:

1. Benjamin Franklin remarks on the Rising Sun Chair.
2. The delegates are dismissed. In actual history, they went to the tavern for ale; a post-convention party with appropriate food and drink is an appropriate ending to the Convention.

E. Extending and reinforcing the lesson

1. Using a briefer, more rehearsed script, put on the re-enactment for other classes.
2. Challenge the children to “become” James Madison. Have them keep a journal of the events of the Convention or write a letter to someone back in Virginia explaining Madison’s hopes for the outcome of the convention.

HANDOUT 1

FRAMERS OF THE CONSTITUTION

Late in the Revolutionary War, the colonies had agreed to a group of rules called the Articles of Confederation. The Articles set up a Congress that would handle the affairs of the whole nation. The Articles did not set up a strong national government. People went on thinking of themselves not as Americans, but as New Yorkers, or Virginians, or whatever.

Under the Articles of Confederation, the Congress could ask for money from the states, but the States did not have to pay. The Congress could not control trade. There were no courts to settle arguments. The Congress was not very strong, but most Americans liked that. They had had enough strong government under the British.

The years after the American Revolution were hard. The United States was a small nation with fewer than three million people. The country owed a lot of money from the war years. The British refused to give up the forts they had in the West. Britain also kept American ships out of many ports that Britain controlled.

Other nations didn't take the United States seriously. In England, American statesman John Adams was teased. Did he represent one nation or thirteen? The government under the Articles of Confederation could do little. Several leaders grew worried. George Washington was one of them. How could such a weak government defend the nation? How could the United States become great? These leaders felt that something had to be done. So they arranged to meet in Philadelphia in May of 1787.

Each state, except Rhode Island, sent delegates to the Philadelphia meeting which was called the Constitutional Convention. Despite wide differences in their beliefs about politics, most of the delegates were "nationalists" and believed that the Articles of Confederation needed to be changed. Practically all of them believed that the United States should be a single, unified nation, not just a loose grouping of states. This vision or "picture" of how the government of America ought to be was the guiding force as the Constitution was written. The Constitution became the "law of the land", and its authors were called the "framers" of the Constitution.

There were fifty-five delegates to the Constitutional Convention, although not all of them were on hand for the entire convention because of illness, business, or disagreements. Most of these men were actively involved in colonial government and had helped write their state constitutions and laws. Forty-four of the fifty-five were serving in or had been members of the Continental Congress. Most had heartily backed the rebellion against England and about half had fought in the Continental Army or state Militia. Eight of the framers also had signed the Declaration of Independence. These "framers" were educated, experienced men who took part in one of the most important events in American history.

Many of these men were friends. They had gone to college together or had worked together in politics or business. Most were wealthy or well-to-do and lived in comfortable circumstances. More than half of the delegates were lawyers, although many were businessmen, planters, or large-scale farmers. At least twelve were public officials, three were doctors, and three were retired.

The average age of the framers was forty-three. Jonathan Dayton from New Jersey was twenty-six. Three others were in their twenties, eleven were in their thirties, thirteen were in their forties, eight were in their fifties, three were in their sixties, and one, Benjamin Franklin, was eighty-one. Franklin was so ill that prisoners from the city jail usually had to carry him from his nearby home to the sessions in his sedan chair, which had been specially made for him when he returned from France.

Best known of all the framers were George Washington of Virginia and Franklin from Pennsylvania. They were well respected by everyone and helped to ensure the success of the Convention. Washington was chosen as President of the convention. James Madison from Virginia also played a very important role. He was the first to arrive in Philadelphia, and he came carefully prepared to work for a strong government. He presented the Virginia plan which was in large part the basis for the Constitution. His journal of the Convention is the single best record of this important occasion. He also played an important role later on in getting the Constitution ratified (approved) by all the States.

After four months, on September 17th, 1787, the Constitution was finally approved by the delegates. In order to be approved, many **compromises** had to be made. Even though these were made, three of the delegates refused to sign, leaving only thirty-nine to affix their names. George Washington, as President of the Convention, signed first and other delegates followed. They signed according to their home states, from New England to the South. Franklin remarked that he had often looked at George Washington's chair which was decorated with a sun at horizon. He said he had wondered if the sun were rising or setting, but he now knew. "I have the happiness to know that it is a rising and not a setting sun," he said.

A new day was indeed beginning for the United States. These delegates had written the United States Constitution which set up a new kind of government. It has guided Americans for more than two hundred years and helped the United States to grow and become a strong and free nation.

LIFE SKETCHES OF THE FRAMERS OF THE CONSTITUTION

Connecticut

Roger Sherman CONNECTICUT

By dint of self-education, hard work, and business acumen, Roger Sherman soared above his humble origins to prominence in State and National affairs. He was a member of the committee that drafted the Declaration of Independence and played a leading role at the Constitutional Convention. He and Robert Morris were the only men to sign the three bulwark documents of the Republic: the Declaration, Articles of Confederation, and Constitution. Twice married, Sherman fathered 15 children.

William Samuel Johnson CONNECTICUT

Scholar, lawyer-jurist, and politician, Johnson was one of the best educated of the signers. The good friend of famous men on both sides of the Atlantic, he found his loyalties torn by the War for Independence. This did not prevent him, however, from serving Connecticut, Columbia College, and the Nation. He chaired the convention's Committee of Style and backed the Great Compromise.

Delaware

Richard Bassett
DELAWARE

Bassett was a well-to-do planter and lawyer who also enjoyed a career as soldier, judge, legislator, and Governor. At the Constitutional Convention, he played a silent role and confined himself to casting votes on the issues as they arose.

John Dickinson
DELAWARE

An outstanding conservative patriot and sage, the aristocratic Dickinson was respected by friend and enemy alike for the brilliance of his mind and the depth of his philosophy. He made major contributions to Delaware, Pennsylvania, and the Constitution. Because illness caused his early departure from the Convention, he authorized a fellow delegate to sign on his behalf. Nevertheless, he served on the committee on postponed matters and helped arrange the Great Compromise.

Gunning Bedford, Jr.
DELAWARE

Lawyer-jurist Bedford, one of the most outspoken delegates at the Convention and a small-State spokesman, was a Philadelphian who moved to Delaware. He bore arms in the War of Independence and served as a delegate to the Continental Congress, was attorney general of Delaware, and a Federal judge.

George Read
DELAWARE

Conservative lawyer-jurist George Read attained many State offices and signed both the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. He naturally defended the rights of the small States. Later, he served as a Senator in the First Congress and ended his career as the Chief Justice of Delaware.

Georgia

Abraham Baldwin GEORGIA

Rising from a humble background, Baldwin achieved success as a minister, educator, lawyer, and politician. He was a Connecticut Yankee transplanted to Georgia, and he served his adopted state in many capacities. He helped found the college that was the forerunner of the University of Georgia and sat in the U. S. House of Representatives and the Senate for almost two decades. During the Convention, he supported the small States on the crucial vote in the representation clash and sat on the committee on postponed matters.

William Few GEORGIA

Few, one of the lesser lights in the Convention, was a self-made man. He began life as the son of a poor farmer and ended it as a renowned and wealthy politician, philanthropist, lawyer-jurist, and bank president. He served in the U. S. Senate during the years 1789 to 1793. Like several other signers, he took part in the affairs of more than one State: Georgia and New York.

Maryland

Daniel Carroll
MARYLAND

Carroll, a distinguished Maryland planter-aristocrat, was one of two Roman Catholic signers of the Constitution. He served on the Convention's committee on postponed matters and took a moderate nationalist stance. His public career included service in the Continental Congress, the Maryland senate, and the U.S. House of Representatives. He also was one of the first commissioners of the District of Columbia.

James McHenry
MARYLAND

A soldier, physician, and politician who was one of several foreign-born signers of the Constitution, McHenry served as a surgeon and as an aide to Washington and Lafayette during the War for Independence. He sat in the Maryland legislature and the Continental Congress and held the position of Secretary of War in the Washington and John Adams administrations. Baltimore's Fort McHenry was named after him.

Daniel of St. Thomas Jenifer
MARYLAND

Jenifer was a wealthy, aristocratic bachelor who expended long years of effort on behalf of Maryland - Colony and State - where he was a popular figure in political circles. Although he attended the Mount Vernon Conference, he had little impact at the Constitutional Convention.

Massachusetts

Nathaniel Gorham MASSACHUSETTS

Despite his humble beginnings, this signer became President of the Continental Congress and was one of the most successful businessmen and landowners in Massachusetts. At the Convention, he chaired the committee of the whole, served on the committee of detail, and made numerous other contributions. His fall was equally spectacular, and he died in bankruptcy.

Rufus King MASSACHUSETTS

Although one of the youngest delegates at the Convention, King was one of the most influential and spoke eloquently for the nationalist cause. He also sat on two major committees. Beyond that, he made other vital contributions to the Nation, as well as to Massachusetts and New York. Not only was he one of the country's ablest diplomats, but he also was a U. S. Senator for a long period. Although he twice won the Federalist nomination for Vice President and once for President, he failed to win the offices.

New Hampshire

Nicholas Gilman
NEW HAMPSHIRE

Gilman's career ranged from clerking in a store to long tours of duty in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate. Although never in the front rank of politics, he associated with some of the leading Americans of his time. He was one of the three bachelor signers.

John Langdon
NEW HAMPSHIRE

Langdon, who stood out at the Convention despite his late arrival, was a politician and businessman who had enthusiastically backed the patriot cause during the War for Independence. He also enjoyed long and fruitful careers in New Hampshire and national politics.

New Jersey

Jonathan Dayton NEW JERSEY

Dayton, youngest of the signers at 26 years of age, lived a busy and adventurous life. A lawyer, land speculator, and Revolutionary soldier, his ambition was unbounded. He held a variety of political offices, including seats in the U. S. House and Senate. He also supported Aaron Burr's ill-fated and murky scheme of 1806 to carve out some sort of empire in the Southwest.

David Brearly NEW JERSEY

Although an advocate of the interests of the small States at the Convention where he chaired the committee on postponed matters, lawyer-jurist Brearly was a reasonable man who showed a willingness to compromise. He had been a fervent Revolutionary patriot and during the war, served as an officer in the New Jersey militia.

William Livingston NEW JERSEY

Livingston, who chaired the Convention committee that reached a compromise on slavery, was a member of one of the most politically and economically powerful families in the colonies. He spearheaded popular, rather than conservative, causes and was a fervent Revolutionary. A gentleman farmer at heart, he excelled in politics and the law, serving in the Continental Congress and as the first Governor of his State. His elder brother, Philip, had signed the Declaration of Independence.

William Paterson NEW JERSEY

Paterson, one of the authors of the New Jersey, or Paterson Plan, was one of seven foreign-born signers. Although he made his career primarily as a lawyer-jurist and reached the pinnacle of his success as Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, his political offices included attorney general, legislator, Governor of New Jersey, and, briefly, U.S. Senator.

North Carolina

William Blount
NORTH CAROLINA

Planter and land speculator Blount, who played an insignificant part at the Constitutional Convention, carved out a career in North Carolina and Tennessee as well as in national politics. It was marred, however, when he earned the dubious distinction of being the first man to be expelled from the U.S. Senate.

Richard Dobbs Spaight, Sr.
NORTH CAROLINA

During a short career that ended in a tragic duel, Spaight, an aristocratic planter who was one of the youngest signers, held many major political posts: legislator and Governor of North Carolina, member of the Continental Congress, and U.S. Representative. He was the first native-born Governor of his State.

Hugh Williamson
NORTH CAROLINA

Few men have enjoyed so varied a career as Hugh Williamson--preacher, physician, essayist, scientist, businessman, and politician. He traveled and studied in Europe, witnessed the Boston Tea Party, participated in the Revolution, served as a U.S. Congressman, and numbered among the leading scientific authors of his day. In addition to all these achievements, he was one of the leading lights at the Constitutional Convention.

New York

Alexander Hamilton NEW YORK

Hamilton, a brilliant and pragmatic politician-lawyer who soared to fame and power from modest origins, was one of the giants of the early period of U.S. history. An ardent nationalist, he was instrumental in the convening of the Constitutional Convention and spearheaded ratification in New York, although he did not play a key role in the Convention. Later, he served as the first Secretary of the Treasury, laid the foundations for national economic growth, and helped found the Federalist Party. His life ended tragically in a duel with Aaron Burr.

Pennsylvania

George Clymer
PENNSYLVANIA

Clymer, a leading Philadelphia merchant, rendered long years of service to his city, State, and Nation. He signed the Declaration of Independence, as well as the Constitution, and applied his commercial acumen to the financial problems of the colonies and the Confederation.

Thomas Fitzsimons
PENNSYLVANIA

Fitzsimons, one of several foreign-born signers and one of two Roman Catholics, was a fervent Revolutionary and, later, a zealous supporter of the Federalist Party. His career also embraced business, where he achieved his greatest success and eminence.

Benjamin Franklin
PENNSYLVANIA

Franklin, elder statesman of the Revolution and oldest signer of both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, sat on the committee that drafted the Constitutional Convention and distinguished himself as a diplomat. He was a self-made man and a self-educated intellectual whose interests far transcended politics. He won international renown as a printer-publisher, author, philosopher, scientist, inventor, and philanthropist. On both sides of the Atlantic, he mingled with the social elite, whom he impressed with his sagacity, wit, and zest for life.

Jared Ingersoll
PENNSYLVANIA

Although Ingersoll was the son of a well-known Loyalist during the Revolution, he rendered meritorious service to Pennsylvania and the United States. He made his greatest mark as a lawyer in Philadelphia, a city that boasted the Nation's most respected Bar.

Thomas Mifflin
PENNSYLVANIA

Merchant-politician-soldier Mifflin lived in affluence for most of his years, but died in poverty. He had forsaken his Quaker faith to fight in the War for Independence. Later, he served as President of the Continental Congress and as Governor of Pennsylvania.

Robert Morris PENNSYLVANIA

Merchant Robert Morris was a man of many distinctions. One of the wealthiest individuals in the Colonies and an economic wizard, he won the accolade, “Financier of the Revolution,” yet died penniless and forgotten. He and Roger Sherman were the only signers of all three of the Nation’s basic documents: the Declaration of Independence, Articles of Confederation, and the Constitution. Morris, who turned down an appointment as the first Secretary of the Treasury, also served as a Senator in the First Congress.

Gouverneur Morris PENNSYLVANIA

The apparent drafter of the Constitution and one of the leaders at the Convention, Gouverneur Morris was one of the wittiest and most brilliant Americans of his time. While energetically pursuing his legal and business interests, he contributed to the political systems of New York and Pennsylvania, as well as that of the Nation. He sat in the Continental Congress and the U. S. Senate and held the position of Minister to France. During his last years, he became embittered because of his forced political retirement and the rise of the Democratic-Republican Party to national dominance.

James Wilson PENNSYLVANIA

Brilliant and enigmatic, James Wilson possessed one of the most complex and ambivalent personalities of the signers. Never able to reconcile his strong personal drive for wealth and power with his political goals, nor able to find a middle road between conservatism and republicanism, he alternately experienced either popularity or public scorn, fame or obscurity, wealth or poverty. He signed both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. His mastery of the law and political theory enabled him to play a leading role in framing the latter document and to rise from frontier lawyer to Justice of the Supreme Court.

HANDOUT 2 - k

South Carolina

Pierce Butler
SOUTH CAROLINA

One of the four signers born in Ireland, Butler was a British military officer turned South Carolina planter. He played a substantial role at the Constitutional Convention and afterward gained distinction in the U. S. Senate.

Charles Pinckney
SOUTH CAROLINA

Only 29 years old in 1787, Pinckney was one of the youngest and most able delegates at Philadelphia. During the course of a long political career, he foreswore his aristocratic background and championed Carolina back-country democracy. He governed South Carolina for four terms and also served as a U. S. Senator and Representative, as well as Minister to Spain.

Charles Cotesworth Pinckney
SOUTH CAROLINA

Utilizing his exceptional education and continuing the public service of his distinguished parents, planter-lawyer-politician-soldier-philanthropist Pinckney became one of the outstanding men of his time. During the Revolution, he espoused the Whig cause, bore arms during the War for Independence, and ranked among the leaders at the Constitutional Convention. Besides serving in the State legislature, he rendered diplomatic service to the Nation, and was once the Vice-Presidential and twice the Presidential candidate of the Federalists.

John Rutledge
SOUTH CAROLINA

Aristocratic lawyer-jurist Rutledge, a political moderate, headed the committee of detail and stood in the forefront of the delegates at Philadelphia. Other highlights of his public service included legislator and President of his State legislature, member of the Continental Congress, and short periods on the U. S. Supreme Court bench.

HANDOUT 2 - 1

Virginia

John Blair
VIRGINIA

Blair, a firm supporter of independence and the Constitution, was a member of a leading Virginia family who gained more renown as a lawyer-jurist than as a politician. President Washington appointed him as one of the original Justices of the U. S. Supreme Court.

James Madison
VIRGINIA

A brilliant political philosopher and pragmatic politician who dominated the Constitutional Convention, Madison has deservedly won the epithet, "Father of the Constitution." Other facets of his remarkable career include the founding of the Democratic-Republican Party with his mentor, Jefferson, terms in the Continental Congress and the U.S. House of Representatives, and ascent to the Presidency, during which he led the Nation through the War of 1812 and the ensuing period of nationalistic fervor.

George Washington
VIRGINIA

Peerless military leader of the War for Independence, able chairman of the Constitutional Convention, brilliant first President, and wise statesman, Washington more than any other man launched our Republic on its course to greatness. For all these reasons, he clearly deserves the epithet, "Father of His Country."

