

Lesson Outline: The Constitutional Convention

Introduction

- Overview of the Constitutional Convention held in Philadelphia in the summer of 1787.
 - Importance of understanding the historical context leading to the convention.
 - Motivation behind forming a new constitution: balancing state sovereignty and mutual benefit.
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Historical Background

1. **Preceding Constitution: The Articles of Confederation**
 - Legal foundation for a union created by the Lee Resolution (July 2, 1776).
 - Continental Congress approved the Articles on November 15, 1777.
 - Ratified only in 1781 due to Maryland's delay over property disputes and economic issues.
 - Issues with the Articles:
 - Lack of defined federal powers.
 - Confusion between state and federal roles.
 - Ineffectiveness in governance, treaties, and financial stability.
 - Events like Shays' Rebellion highlighted weaknesses.
 2. **The Call for Change**
 - Articles of Confederation deemed inadequate for unifying the states.
 - Decision to amend the Articles or draft a new governing document.
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The Constitutional Convention

1. **Purpose and Challenges**
 - Focus: Amend the Articles but prepared to draft a new constitution if needed.
 - Delegates: All states participated except Rhode Island, fearing loss of sovereignty.
 - Key debates:
 - Representation of states and people.
 - Balancing state independence with an effective central government.
 2. **George Washington's Role**
 - Reluctantly presided over the convention due to a sense of responsibility.
 - Shays' Rebellion influenced his decision to return to public service.
 3. **Benjamin Franklin's Speech**
 - Urged unity and divine guidance through prayer.
 - Shifted the tone of the convention and encouraged productive dialogue.
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Major Plans and Compromises

1. Representation Debate

- **Virginia Plan** (James Madison):
 - Bicameral Congress with representation based on population.
 - Supported by larger states.
- **New Jersey Plan** (William Paterson):
 - Unicameral Congress with equal representation for all states.
 - Supported by smaller states.
- **Connecticut Compromise** (Roger Sherman):
 - Bicameral Congress:
 - House of Representatives: Based on population (Virginia Plan).
 - Senate: Equal representation for states (New Jersey Plan).

2. Three-Fifths Compromise

- Addressed representation and taxation issues tied to slavery.
 - Key points:
 - Slaveholding states could count 3/5 of their enslaved population for representation.
 - Aimed to limit the political power of slaveholding states.
 - Did not classify enslaved individuals as property or fractions of a person.
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Key Themes

1. Preservation of Sovereignty

- States entered the union voluntarily.
- Emphasis on a confederation, not a consolidation.

2. Avoiding Monarchy

- Balancing central authority with state independence.
 - Ensuring representation while respecting sovereignty.
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Conclusion

- The Constitutional Convention marked a pivotal moment in U.S. history.
 - Key compromises ensured the survival of the union and established the framework for governance.
 - The Constitution reflected the balance between creating an effective federal government and preserving state independence.
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Multiple Choice Questions

1. What was the primary goal of the Constitutional Convention in 1787?
 - a) Drafting the Declaration of Independence
 - b) Amending the Articles of Confederation
 - c) Writing the Bill of Rights
 - d) Dissolving the Continental Congress
2. Which state refused to send delegates to the Constitutional Convention?
 - a) New Jersey
 - b) Virginia
 - c) Rhode Island
 - d) Maryland
3. The Articles of Confederation failed primarily because:
 - a) They created a central government with too much power.
 - b) They lacked a clear definition of federal and state powers.
 - c) They imposed excessive taxes on states.
 - d) They excluded smaller states from representation.
4. What event highlighted the financial instability under the Articles of Confederation?
 - a) Boston Tea Party
 - b) Shays' Rebellion
 - c) Battle of Saratoga
 - d) Whiskey Rebellion
5. What was the primary purpose of Benjamin Franklin's speech during the Constitutional Convention?
 - a) To introduce the Virginia Plan
 - b) To argue for equal representation for states
 - c) To call for prayer and unity among delegates
 - d) To propose the Connecticut Compromise
6. What was the key feature of the Virginia Plan?
 - a) Equal representation for states in Congress
 - b) A unicameral legislature
 - c) Representation based on population in a bicameral legislature
 - d) The abolition of slavery
7. The Connecticut Compromise combined elements of which two plans?
 - a) Virginia Plan and New Jersey Plan
 - b) New Jersey Plan and Rhode Island Plan
 - c) Virginia Plan and Franklin Plan
 - d) New York Plan and Massachusetts Plan
8. The Three-Fifths Compromise addressed:
 - a) The taxation of imported goods.
 - b) The counting of enslaved individuals for representation and taxation.
 - c) The equal representation of states in the Senate.
 - d) The establishment of a federal court system.

9. Which of the following is true about the Three-Fifths Compromise?
 - a) It defined enslaved individuals as property in the Constitution.
 - b) It treated all enslaved individuals as citizens for representation.
 - c) It limited the political power of slaveholding states.
 - d) It was primarily designed to increase taxation of non-slaveholding states.
 10. Who proposed the Connecticut Compromise?
 - a) James Madison
 - b) George Washington
 - c) William Paterson
 - d) Roger Sherman
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Answer Key

1. b) Amending the Articles of Confederation
2. c) Rhode Island
3. b) They lacked a clear definition of federal and state powers.
4. b) Shays' Rebellion
5. c) To call for prayer and unity among delegates
6. c) Representation based on population in a bicameral legislature
7. a) Virginia Plan and New Jersey Plan
8. b) The counting of enslaved individuals for representation and taxation.
9. c) It limited the political power of slaveholding states.
10. d) Roger Sherman

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think some states, like Rhode Island, were hesitant to join the Constitutional Convention? Do you think their concerns about a stronger central government were valid? Why or why not?
2. Shays' Rebellion was one of the major events that showed the deficiency of the Articles of Confederation. How do you think this event influenced the decision to create a new Constitution?
3. The delegates had to balance the needs of large states and small states when designing Congress. If you were a delegate, would you support the Virginia Plan, the New Jersey Plan, or the Connecticut Compromise? Why?
4. The Three-Fifths Compromise was a controversial solution to the issue of representation. Do you think it was fair or unfair? How would you have handled the debate over representation of enslaved people differently?
5. Benjamin Franklin's speech encouraged delegates to pray and work together despite their disagreements. Why do you think unity was so important to the success of the convention? How can we apply that lesson today when we have disagreements?