



Lesson 6.10 “The Great Compromise”

Unit 6: Establishing Government

Lesson Objectives

- Students will identify how different methods of counting votes would affect decisions from the legislative branch.
- Students will organize information detailing the problems, proposals, and solutions that made up the Great Compromise.
- Students will reflect on why compromise matters in government.

Lesson Competencies

- I can identify, explain, and analyze the core civic practices and foundational principles that guide governments and communities. (Moose SS)
- I can analyze primary and secondary sources and draw appropriate conclusions. (Moose SS)
- I can present grade-appropriate information that is supported with evidence, elaborating when elicited, and respond to questions with relevant ideas or comments. (ELA 7)

Essential Questions

How has New Hampshire come to be the way it is?

Focus Questions

Why is compromise necessary for effective government?

Estimated Time

One 45-minute class session

Materials & Equipment

Video: “[Mason Explains the Constitutional Convention](#)”
Graphic Organizer: [5Ws](#)
Unit 6: Learn It! “[The U.S. Constitution](#),” pp. 3–10
Set of “Virginia,” “Maryland,” “New Hampshire,” and “New Jersey” cards based on class size—see chart for reference
Access to a virtual color mixing site (e.g., [www.trycolors.com](#))
Class set of “Problems, Proposals, and Solutions”





Educator Introduction & Rationale

During the summer of 1787, 55 representatives from 12 of the 13 states (Rhode Island did not attend) drafted a constitution for the new country. The process of writing constitutions was neither speedy nor smooth. The Constitutional Convention held that summer produced numerous drafts and discussions, with a few key points turning out to be particularly contentious. One of the biggest issues was how the people would be represented in the legislative branch of the national government. Agreement on state-based representation made the most sense, but would that representation treat all states the same regardless of the number of people who lived in them? Or would it give more power and influence to larger states, where more people lived? And what impact would that have on the smaller states? The delegates had to compromise to create a constitution and a form of government that was acceptable—even if not ideal—for everyone. Reference the [Educator Overview](#) for more information.

This lesson is the fourth lesson for middle school students in Unit 6: Establishing Government. A visual illustration of the two different plans for the legislative government—the Virginia Plan and the New Jersey Plan—opens this lesson. After reviewing the context of compromise at the Constitutional Convention, students will complete a graphic organizer detailing the problem, proposals, and solutions that made up the Great Compromise. An extension activity is recommended for students ready to think about more complicated historical compromises such as the Three-Fifths Compromise, which determined how enslaved people would be counted as part of the national population.

Please adapt all the material in this lesson, as necessary, to meet the needs of the students in your classroom. Note that lesson vocabulary and definitions are at the end of the document. You may wish to preview these with your students.





Before the Learning Activity

Student reading and comprehension questions

What happened at the Constitutional Convention? Students watch the video "[Mason Explains the Constitutional Convention](#)" and then fill out a [5Ws](#) graphic organizer. Students should be able to answer:

1. When and where was the Constitutional Convention?
2. Who was there?
3. Why was it held? What was decided?

Learning Activity

Activation

Why does representation matter? One of the core issues debated during the Constitutional Convention was representation in the legislative body—that is, Congress. Smaller states wanted each state to have the same number of votes, but larger states wanted representation to be based on population.

Do a simple simulation to illustrate these differences. Distribute a card to each student placing them in one of the following groups:

- Virginia: instructions are to "Vote Yellow"
- Maryland: instructions are to "Vote Blue"
- New Hampshire: instructions are to "Vote Blue"
- New Jersey: instructions are to "Vote Blue"

When making the groups, the number of students making up Virginia should out-represent the total of the groups representing Maryland, New Hampshire, and New Jersey. So, as an example, for a class with 25 students: 18 students should be grouped in Virginia, 3 in Maryland, 3 in New Hampshire, and 1 in New Jersey. A 70/30 split (70% Virginia and 30% everybody else) generates the best results.

Use an online color mixing application to visually demonstrate student's votes, such as <http://www.trycolors.com/mixer>, which can be used for free without registration.

For the first round, take a color vote with each state group voting as one—1 vote for Virginia vs. 3 votes for Maryland, New Hampshire, and New Jersey. The resulting color will be mostly blue.

For the second round, take another color vote, but this time, each student votes on behalf of their state—18 votes for Virginia vs. 7 votes for Maryland, New Hampshire, and New Jersey. The resulting color will be mostly yellow.

Discuss with students that both colors are shades of green, because there are both blue and yellow in the mix, but which color is more dominate was determined by how the votes were counted. The opinions of the states did not change between the rounds.





This simulation helps illustrate one of the core issues facing the Constitutional Convention: what was a way to count votes that was fair to both large and small states?

Direct Instruction **Why is compromise essential to democracy?**

Have students complete the reading from Unit 6, Learn It!, "[The U.S. Constitution](#)," pp. 4–7, which covers the need for compromise at the Constitutional Convention. Students may find it helpful to chart the various proposals regarding representation.

Independent Practice

Problems, proposals, and solutions. Remind students that under the Articles of Confederation, each state had one vote in the legislature, a system that prompted many complaints while the Articles were in effect. This was one of the chief issues delegates hoped to resolve at the Constitutional Convention.

Distribute "Problems, Proposals, and Solutions." Students may complete this handout using the reading or the card set. Consider having students work in small groups or pairs to move the cards into the correct space on the graphic organizer.

Then, students should complete the reflection questions and discuss their results as a class.

Reflection

Discuss with students the necessity of compromise during the Constitutional Convention and the role compromise continues to play in our form of government. Possible :

- Explore just how many compromises the framers had to make to draft the U.S. Constitution. Will the government have a president? When will elections be held? Who will be able to hold office? How many representatives should be in the legislature? How many from each state? There were so many details to consider. Writing the U.S. Constitution involved so many compromises that at times the representatives did not think they would succeed.
- Define how your students view the concept of compromising. Is compromise a good thing or a bad thing? Are there times when you should compromise and when you shouldn't? Explain that a true compromise means giving up some of what you want in order to get other things you want. Such negotiations require people to prioritize their wants and needs and to be conscious of other people's wants and needs.
- Find examples of when political leaders today have compromised. Did they make the right decision? Did people support them in finding a compromise or were they criticized for it?
- Help your students imagine a world in which no one compromised. What would that world be like? Who would get





what they wanted, and who wouldn't? is that a world they would like to live in?

Extension

Complicated compromise. There were other major compromises that had to be made in order for the Constitution to be ratified. In 1787, slavery was still legal in the United States. The southern states wanted enslaved people to be counted toward their population so that they would have more representatives at the federal level. (Note that the southern states were not arguing that enslaved people should vote, only that states should receive more delegates in Congress by counting enslaved people as part of their population. Northern states, where there were fewer enslaved people, argued that it was unfair to count enslaved people when these same people were denied their rights generally. The higher population count for southern states, if they could include enslaved people in that number, would give the South much more power in the federal government. The delegates compromised by counting three out of every five enslaved people toward a state's population. Did this compromise work for everyone involved? Use the ["Tug of War" Thinking Routine from Project Zero](#) to explore this critical issue in our history.





Supporting Materials

Other Resources

- Project Zero Thinking Routines: Tug of War
pz.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/Tug%20of%20War_0.pdf
 - Project Zero's Thinking Routine Toolbox is an excellent resource for all teachers:
pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines





Standards

New Hampshire Social Studies Frameworks:

- ✓ Civics and Governments: Structure and Function of United States and New Hampshire Government (SS:CV:8:2.3)

NCSS Themes:

- ✓ Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- ✓ Theme 6: Power, Authority, and Governance
- ✓ Theme 10: Civic Ideals and Practices

C3 Frameworks:

- ✓ Civic and Political Institutions (D2.Civ.3.6-8, D2.Civ.5.6-8)
- ✓ Participation and Deliberation (D2.Civ.8.6-8, D2.Civ.9.6-8)

Common Core ELA:

- ✓ Key Ideas and Details (RH.6-8.1, RH.6-8.2)
- ✓ Production and Distribution of Writing (WHST.6-8.4)





Lesson Vocabulary

compromise (verb) The process of coming to a solution that works for everyone

constitution (noun) A document laying out the rules for how a government will work

proportional representation (noun) Representation in government based on the population; a larger population has more representation than a small population

representative democracy (noun) When a group of people select someone to communicate their views and make laws for them

