



Lesson 6.9 “Articles of Confederation”

Unit 6: Establishing Government

Lesson Objectives

- Students will analyze the transcript of the Articles of Confederation.
- Students will determine which powers lie with the states and which with the national government.
- Students will hypothesize what changes the Framers of the Constitution choose to make in the new form of government.

Lesson Competencies

- I can analyze primary and secondary sources and draw appropriate conclusions. (Moose SS)
- I can compare or integrate relevant information from multiple sources and resolve conflicting information on the same topics/subjects when developing my understanding of a text. (ELA 3)
- I can identify, explain, and analyze the core civic practices and foundational principles that guide governments and communities. (Moose SS)

Essential Questions

How has New Hampshire come to be the way it is?
How have New Hampshire's people shaped its government?

Focus Questions

What is a constitution?

Estimated Time

One 45-minute class session

Materials & Equipment

Unit 18, Learn It! [“The Path to the U.S. Constitution,”](#) pp. 1–5
[Two-column graphic organizer](#) for distribution
“Article III” for projection
“Articles of Confederation excerpt, Structure of Government” handout
“Articles of Confederation excerpt, Powers of the Government” handout





Educator Introduction & Rationale

When the 13 colonies joined together to form a new nation, they had to create an entirely new form of government, one that the world had never seen before. No other country in the developed world was governed collectively by the people at this time. What sort of government should they create?

Throughout the American Revolution, representatives from the states worked together in the Continental Congress. Most of their energy was spent on fighting the war rather than governing. The delegates left governing to the states themselves. But as it became clear that the United States was going to win the war, political leaders recognized the need for a more organized and energetic national government to coordinate foreign policy, manage international trade, and oversee national defense.

The Framers first attempt at creating a national government was called the Articles of Confederation, which proposed an alliance of friendship between the states as most Americans did not want a strong national government. Instead, they wanted most government to come at the state level, where government could more effectively be held responsible by the people. The Articles of Confederation reflected this idea, but as time would prove, the government created by the Articles of Confederation was too weak to get much done. After just a few years, many Americans thought the Articles of Confederation needed to be rewritten so that the government could work better at protecting Americans and promoting their interests.

This is the third lesson for middle school students in Unit 6: Establishing Government. The lesson opens with an activation that encourages students to reflect on Article III of the Articles of Confederation, which created a “league of friendship” between the states. Next, students examine excerpts from the Articles of Confederation and decide whether it gives key powers to the states or to the national government. Students will then have the opportunity to discuss problems with the Articles of Confederation and what changes they hoped to make when rewriting the document.

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.





Learning Activity

Activation

“Friendship” between states. Display the simplified text from Article III in the Articles of Confederation, which reads, “The states hereby enter into a firm league of friendship with each other.”

Teaching Tip: if students are not already familiar with the Articles of Confederation, reframe this discussion as a hypothetical—e.g., what if our national government wasn’t a union but a “firm league of friendship”?

Ask students if they think “friendship” is a solid enough foundation for a national government. How would a league of friendship work between the states? What could go wrong?

Remind students that the writers were determined to **not** create another monarchy. How does a “league of friendship” prevent this?

Possible Responses:

- They may not agree on how to solve a problem
- Some of the states may join together against others
- There’s nothing holding them together if they disagree
- They may want to get along because they have a common goal
- All the states have an equal voice, so no one gets too powerful

Direct Instruction

Creating a National Government. Direct students to Unit 6, Learn It! [“The Path to the U.S. Constitution,”](#) pp. 1–5 and to the edited excerpts of the Articles of Confederation.

Students can use a two-column graphic organizer to write down in the first column why the 13 states needed a national government (on p. 1 of the reading) and then write in second column whether they think a “firm league of friendship” could address each need and why or why not.

Guided Practice

The Articles of Confederation. Students then turn their attention to learning about the form of government created by the Articles of Confederation and its powers.

Structure of Government. Either working independently or with a partner, students should read “Structure of Government,” complete the chart, and answer the comprehension questions.

Powers of the Government. Break students up into groups and divide the articles in “Powers of the Government” between them, with each group charting its section. Place sheets of large white paper around the room with one article number at the top of each sheet. Then have students summarize what each article is about.

As a class, discuss whether “a firm league of friendship” is enough for the government to carry out its responsibilities under the Articles.





Could the federal government do what its supposed to do with the power it has under the Articles? Does it require the cooperation of the states? What recourse does the federal government have to deal with states that don't agree? Do the students think this will be an effective national government? Why or why not?

This exploration of the document can also link backwards chronologically. How do the Articles of Confederation reflect the circumstances Americans found themselves in during the late 1770s and early 1780s? How is the government created by the Articles a reaction to the form of government the colonists lived in under the British? What parts of the Articles reflect the concerns Americans had during the Revolutionary War, which was still going on when the Articles were written and adopted?

Extension

Explore some of the national events that occurred after the Articles were adopted but before the framers decided to create a new form of government with the U.S. Constitution. Did the Articles provide the government with the authority it needed to enact the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 or deal with Shay's Rebellion in 1786?





Standards

New Hampshire Social Studies Frameworks:

- ✓ Civics and Governments: The Nature and Purpose of Government (SS:CV:8:1.1)
- ✓ Civics and Governments: Structure and Function of United States and New Hampshire Government (SS:CV:8:2.1, SS:CV:8:2.3)
- ✓ US / NH History: Political Foundations and Development (SS:HI:8:1.4)

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, D2.Civ.6.6-8)
- ✓ Processes, Rules, and Laws (D2.Civ.12.6-8)
- ✓ Change, Continuity, and Context (D2.His.1.6-8)
- ✓ Perspectives (D2.His.6.6-8)

Common Core ELA:

- ✓ XX Key Ideas and Details (RH.6-8.1, RH.6-8.2)
- ✓ XX Craft and Structure (RH.6-8.4)
- ✓ XX Integration of Knowledge and Ideas in Reading Literature (RH.6-8.9)
- ✓ Production and Distribution of Writing (WHST.6-8.4)





Lesson Vocabulary

American Revolution (noun) From 1763 to 1783 when the 13 American colonies were increasingly unhappy with British control and then fought a war for their independence

Articles of Confederation (noun) The constitution establishing the first government of the United States that had weaknesses, which led to its failure; it was in place from 1781 to 1789

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

government (noun) A group of people that have the power to make and carry out laws for a community

