

A More Perfect Union

Lesson 1 The Articles of Confederation

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Why do people form governments?

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. *What kind of government was created by the Articles of Confederation?*
2. *What process allowed new states to join the union?*
3. *In what ways was the Confederation government weak?*

Terms to Know

bicameral having two separate lawmaking organizations

republic a government in which citizens rule through elected representatives

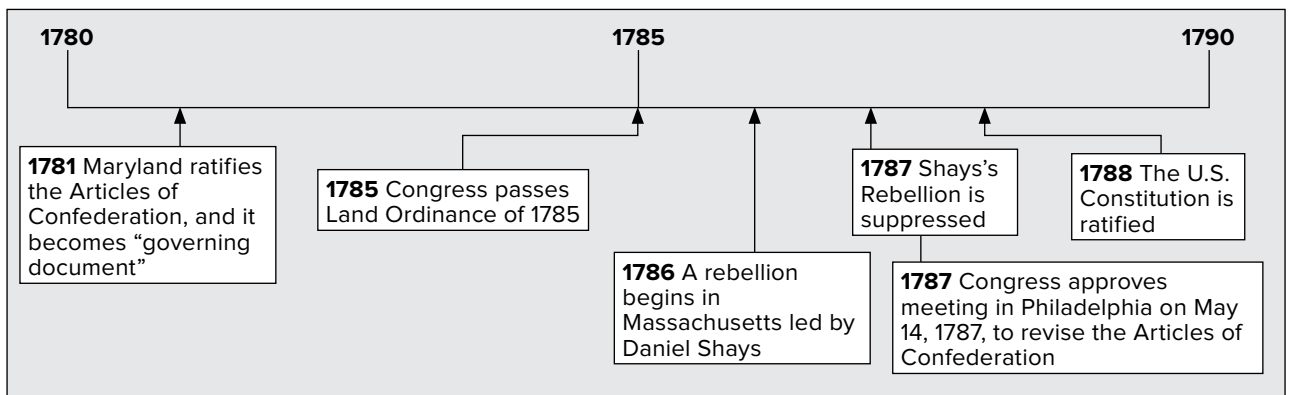
ordinance law

depreciate lose value

Where in the world?



When did it happen?



A More Perfect Union

Lesson 1 The Articles of Confederation, *Continued*

The Making of a Republic

In May 1776, the Continental Congress asked each state to set up its government. Each state wrote a constitution. A constitution is a plan of government.

Americans did not want to give too much power to one ruler or one branch of government. State constitutions solved that problem. They split the power between the governor and legislature. The governor had less power than the legislature. Most states set up two-house, or **bicameral**, legislatures. This divided the power even more.

Americans had to set up a national government, too. Americans wanted their country to be a **republic**. In a republic, citizens elect people to represent them and make decisions based on what they want.

People could not agree on what powers the national government should have. Americans felt the central government should have only the power to fight wars and to deal with other countries.

In 1776 the Second Continental Congress had a group of people make a plan for a central government. This group created the Articles of Confederation. The Articles called for a weak central government. They also let states keep most of their powers. Congress accepted the Articles of Confederation in November, 1777.

The Articles of Confederation gave Congress certain powers, but there were important powers that Congress did not have. For example, if Congress needed to raise money or an army, it had to ask the states. The states did not have to say yes.

Powers of Congress Under The Articles of Confederation	
Congress had these powers:	Congress did NOT have these powers:
manage foreign affairs	control trade
keep up armed forces	force citizens to join army
borrow money	impose taxes
issue money	

The central government did not have a chief executive. A chief executive is an official, such as a president or a governor. A chief executive is the leader of the government and has the job of carrying out the laws. All states had to approve the Articles of

 **Mark the Text**

- Underline the meaning of a *constitution*.

 **Analyzing**

- What might be one result of state constitutions that limited the power of the governor?

 **Mark the Text**

- Circle the meaning of *republic*.

 **Listing**

- What were three weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation?

A More Perfect Union

Lesson 1 The Articles of Confederation, *Continued*



Reading Check

5. How many votes did each state have in the new Congress?



Mark the Text

6. Underline how a western district could apply to become a state.



Reading Check

7. What did the Northwest Ordinance say about slavery?

Confederation. The Articles could not be changed unless all states agreed to change it. Each state had one vote.

The states also did not agree on what to do with land in the West. Some states believed land west of the Appalachian Mountains belonged to them. Maryland did not want to approve the Articles until other states gave up claims to this land. The states finally agreed and approved the Articles. On March 1, 1781, the Articles of Confederation became the government of the United States of America.

The new national government was weak. This made it difficult for the government to handle the nation's problems. Congress could not pass a law unless 9 states voted for it. Congress also did not have the power to change the Articles of Confederation. Any plan to change the Articles needed to be approved by all 13 states.

Even so, America's government did some important things. America made a peace treaty with Britain. It expanded foreign trade. It set up plans for people to settle lands to the west.

Policies for Western Lands

The Articles of Confederation did not tell how to add new states. Settlers were already living west of the Appalachian Mountains. This was outside the United States. Western settlers wanted to form new states and join the Union. Congress needed to give people a way to settle the Western lands and form new states.

In 1785, the Confederation Congress passed an **ordinance**, or law, about western lands. This law set up a way to divide and then sell the western lands. Land was divided into townships. Land in the township was divided into smaller sections. These sections were sold to settlers.

In 1787, the Northwest Ordinance created the Northwest Territory. This territory included lands north of the Ohio River and east of the Mississippi River. The lands were divided into three to five smaller territories. A territory could apply to become a state when 60,000 people lived there. New states would have the same rights as the original 13 states. Settlers had a bill of rights. They had freedom of religion and trial by jury. The bill of rights said there could be no slavery in the Northwest Territory.

The Land Act of 1800 was passed to make it easier for people to buy land in the Northwest Territory. Some settlers did not have all of the money needed to buy land. The Act made it possible for people to pay for the land over a period of four years.

A More Perfect Union

Lesson 1 The Articles of Confederation, *Continued*

Problems at Home and Abroad

The national government had problems paying its bills. By 1781, American dollars, called Continentals, had **depreciated**, or lost value. They were worth almost nothing. The War for Independence left the Continental Congress with a large debt. Congress did not have the power to raise taxes to pay these debts.

In 1781, Congress created a department of finance, led by Robert Morris. Morris made a plan to charge a 5 percent tax on goods brought in from other countries to help pay the debts. All 13 states had to approve Morris' plan for it to pass, but Rhode Island voted no. The plan did not pass.

The new government faced other problems. The British did not let Americans trade in the West Indies and other British areas. British soldiers were still in several important forts in the Great Lakes region.

The American government had problems with Spain, too. Spain controlled Florida and lands west of the Mississippi River. Spain wanted to stop America's growth in Spanish territory. In 1784, Spain closed the lower Mississippi River to American shipping. Western settlers could no longer use the river for trade.

It became clear that the Confederation was not able to deal with major problems. Americans came to agree that their new country needed a stronger government.

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Check for Understanding

What kind of government was created by the Articles of Confederation?

List three problems the Confederation government faced in its relations with other countries.

? Analyzing

8. Why did Robert Morris's plan to pay the country's war debts fail?

✓ Reading Check

9. Why did Spain close the lower Mississippi River to American shipping in 1784?



10. Glue a three-tab Foldable behind a two-tab Foldable along the anchor tabs to cover *Check for Understanding*. Write *Articles of Confederation* on the anchor tab. Label the two-tabs—*Strengths*, *Weaknesses*. Label the three-tabs—*Problems at Home*, *Problems with Britain*, and *Problems with Spain*. Write two words or phrases you remember about each.

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