

Thad Rice  
A More Perfect Union

## **Framing the Constitution of the United States**

### Constitution Day Unit Review for A.P. U.S. 11

This lesson plan is designed to actively review the formation of the US Constitution by analyzing primary documents and role-playing. This mini-unit will be presented during national Constitution Day, September 17 to students who have already studied this period in an honors US 10 class last year. It can be presented over 3 days in double periods or six days in single periods. Students are expected to know basic chronology and cause and effect relationships from this time period, and this unit is designed to elevate their historical knowledge, practices and habits of mind.

Students will be exposed to multiple ideas in historiography concerning the revolution and the Framers of the Constitution, evaluating a variety of ideas and opinions about the reasons for the revolution and the motivations of the Framers of the Constitution. They will also role-play the Constitutional Convention and analyze primary documents from this time period. Students will also have multiple opportunities throughout the class (which studies the period 1876-2000) to discuss key ideas of the framers in blogging discussions related to the era we are studying.

**Unit Rationale:** To provide an overview and review of the Revolutionary and Constitutional periods that concentrates on changing historical ideologies and historiographies as well as understanding the political and social compromises and ideas of the framers of the Constitution.

### **Day One: September 16**

#### **Objectives:**

- To evaluate Carol Berkin's ideas concerning multiple revolutions within one revolution and the changing roles that women played in the Revolution.
- To reinforce prior learning about historiography and have students consider four historians perspectives regarding the causes and effects of the Revolution.
- To practice skills in analyzing primary documents about women in this period.

**Pairs-** (10 minutes) What caused the American Revolution? Write out phrases. Listen to answers, most of which will be right. Introduce added complexities of individual points of view and other interpretative frameworks.

**Brief overview lecture:** (25 minutes)

Introduce students to ideas of 4 historians- (4 B's) Brief foundation lecture-

-Beard- Revolution really about class warfare, Founders really antidemocratic.

-Bailyn- Not about taxes but ideas. Republicanism possible in a large land, sincere concern for public virtue and corruption, liberty, parochial realism and idealism.

-Bernstein-Family quarrel, Wouldn't say "British are coming, ' loyal opposition as in England, long colonial history of political involvement, Constitutions-state and federal are the way Americans give their revolution form

- Berkin- Many revolutions in one-reaction of Native and African-Americans and women.

- Rev told as Stag story without women- Husband owns-"rule of thumb" SC rule for switch to beat wives-prior to Rev-listen to husband, now boycotting,
- Daughters of liberty (-then newly worthy to teach children after rev to be moral and virtuous), non-importation societies, active integral workers (lice, clothes washing, family farms and businesses) no real Molly Pitcher but manufactured bullets, candles etc., 250 women petitioned for veterans pay wives and mates in war camps, fought, Deborah Sampson, Abigail Adams, Mercy Otis Warren
- Children and servants-routinely beaten, no egalitarian ethos-life was short and brutish. Past as foreign country-different norms.

- Native Americans and African Americans fought against US in rev-as did back country farmers against plantations and over taxing-regulators, Shays, Whiskey rebellion

-Conclude lecture with review of definition of historiography-

"The study of changing historical interpretations, shifting emphasis, and different methodologies." AP ARCO US History, 6<sup>th</sup> edition.

**Primary Source Analysis**-3 groups, (25 minutes)

Groups read and analyze 3 sources about women in the Revolution.

**Documents:** Readings from July 1, 2008 in "A More Perfect Union" book of readings  
Petition of Deborah Gannett 1797, Female Patriots poem, and Judith Murray letter

Groups explain their source by first identifying source, giving historical context, and explaining meaning. Discuss the attitudes of women about men likely inferred from these passages. How is this different from our usual focus about this time period? Importance of social history emphasized.

**Convention Overview Lecture and Role play Assignments:** (20 minutes)

Handout timelines-1774-1791

Lecture/discussion-Problems with Articles of Confederation-, not ratified by people, lack of central govt. powers, no confederation, states quarrelling, no strong economy-debt, no defense-BUT makes sense coming out of revolution

-State Constitutions as important models-Mass process and Const, Virginia

-Shays and fear, secretive, overview of 55 delegates and procedure

-Who is not there? Jefferson, Adams, Paine, Henry

Process of Committee as a whole discussion and compromise, then adjourn and vote as delegates. Washington presides, Madison takes notes, Franklin widely respected, Delegates as characters, followers, adulterers, family men, lawyers and businessmen.

Handout biographies from descriptions of delegates from Berlin's "A Brilliant Solution"

**Homework:** (Assigned previous night also) Read assigned bio page and p. 68-95, Chap. 4 entitled "The Perils of Power" in Berkins, "A Brilliant Solution". Use any texts to research your person and understand the New Jersey Plan, the Virginia Plan and the three fifths compromise. Be prepared to speak and debate from your assigned constitutional convention delegate's political position on the following questions;

1. How should the new US legislature be framed, and how should members be represented?
2. What should be the powers and limits of the new chief executive of the US?

**Day Two: September 17 (National Constitution Day)**

**Objectives:**

- To understand various political positions and compromises made during the Constitutional Convention.
- To consider the personalities of some of the framers and analyze some of their writings and decisions.
- To debate specific topics that were debate at the Constitutional Convention.

**Primary Source Analysis**-3 groups, (25 minutes)

Groups read and analyze 3 letters from Washington and Hamilton written during the Constitutional Convention that show worry and tentative support for the Constitutional process. Each group explains the source and historical context but also estimates the feelings these men were having about the process.

**Documents:** Letters 11, 12 and 13 from Hamilton and Washington in Private Correspondence of the Founders 1787-1788, in "The Origins of the American Constitution: A Documentary History," edited by Michael Kammen.

**Discussion:** (10 minutes) Discuss last night's reading. The dominant topic? The format and powers of the US executive branch. Any agreements or compromises? None, many different suggestions and no agreements in that early July time period. Discuss the chaos of opening suggestions at the convention and the concerns about powers and payment for the Executive. Review the multiple outcomes possible at that moment.

**Introduction to Constitutional Convention Role-play:** (15 minutes)

- Students sit by state, Washington presiding in front with gavel.
- Madison is asked to participate AND take notes
- Student playing Edmund Randolph is asked to be ready to begin and given opening remarks from Madison's notes detailing problems with the Articles and why they must start a brand new government.
- Students should use notes detailing their assigned delegate's position on the executive and legislative branch in order to participate and debate.
- Students will first debate the executive, probably without a clear outcome, and then mimic the proposals and compromises that led to our legislative branch through Washington's guidance. (The teacher can help Washington coordinate this.) First Randolph's Virginia Plan, then Paterson's New Jersey Plan, then Sherman's compromise, then the 3/5ths compromise.
- Review their homework before starting.

**Constitutional Convention Role-play:** (40 minutes)

Students participate in debate and discussion while acting in character.

**Homework:** Evaluate yourself and two others. Use two criteria of four- (realism, research, debate, acting). Explain the actual outcomes in history of those two topics, and your real opinion about them. Read Chapter eight entitled "The Battle for Ratification" in Berkin's "A Brilliant Solution." Compare and contrast opinions of our more famous framers concerning the debates during ratification.

### **Day Three: September 18**

#### **Objectives:**

- Students will know specific powers in the Constitution and which part of the Constitution they are located within.
- Students will consider and evaluate how to conclude their opinions about the Framers after considering various ideological and historiographical viewpoints.
- Students will debate and explain viewpoints from one specific Constitutional Convention delegate.

**Constitutional Convention Role-play:** (40 minutes)

Students finish Constitutional debate after 3/5ths compromise is explained and voted upon. Debrief by discussing ratification proceedings and looking at timeline.

**Constitution Review Race:** (20 minutes)

Students, grouped by New England, Middle and Southern states from Convention compete in race to locate various clauses and powers in the Constitution.

Review answers.

See handout [Appendix A](#)

**Conclusion lecture:** (20 minutes)

Various views of the framers of the Constitution are presented. Which do you most agree with and why?

- **FOUNDING FATHERS-** Revered and honored. Appreciators of democracy and liberty, architects of near perfect government.
- **FRAMERS OF THE CONSTITUTION-** Brilliant politicians who compromised to create the longest lasting democracy. Framed federalism so that it could work.
- **FOUNDING BROTHERS-** Elite men who knew each other well and shared a love for a reserved democracy. Constant revision of biographies.
- **FOUNDING MOTHERS-** Social history emphasis, importance of all in community of the new US.
- **REVOLUTIONARY HEROES-** Political and military heroes, revered for breaking from England and codifying freedom.
- **INCREDIBLE GENIUSES-** Jefferson's "demigods," unique men in unique time construct a masterpiece through their brilliant intellects. Influenced by Greek, Roman and Enlightenment philosophers.
- **OLD RICH WHITE MEN-** Creditors and capitalists, anti-democratic, securing liberties for the rich and powerful, economic determinism.
- **RACIST HYPOCRITES-** Morally bankrupt slave-owners, adulterers and hedonists, no real belief in equality or democracy.

**Homework:**

1. Write a paragraph that explains your opinion of the founders.
2. Explain your assigned Constitutional Convention delegate's opinion of ratification of the Constitution on our class blog:

**[ricet.edublogs.org](http://ricet.edublogs.org)**

3. Contrast your assigned delegates point of view with Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, Elbridge Gerry, or George Mason regarding ratification of the Constitution.

**Future blog assignments** will have the class grouped by one of the framers of the Constitution and follow their ideas throughout the eras we cover in class. They will debate and comment on the blog throughout each unit. Some possible questions these groups could comment upon for each era are;

**Hamilton-** In what way is Hamilton’s financial ideas concepts and policies being followed? In what ways are his ideas about the importance of a strong executive relevant?

**Jefferson-** In what way is Jefferson’s ideas about the importance of unalienable and delineated rights being followed? In what ways does society resemble the divided hypocritical element of equality and a loose vrs strict interpretation of the Constitution?

**Adams-** In what way do we see citizens acting for the public good? In what ways does an aristocracy rule our society?

**Madison-** In what ways do states differ with the federal government?

**Washington-** Is the President “above” politics? Is the President a good commander-in-chief?

### **Assessments:**

Day One- None

Day Two- Students are evaluated in their performance during the Constitutional Convention role-play. The criteria used would include the following and all of these could be put on a three-point scale of excellent (3), good (2), and below average (1) performance:

Quantity and quality of contributions, research, realism, debate, and acting.

Additionally students will self-evaluate themselves and another student.

Day Three- Students will be evaluated by their paragraph on their opinion of the framers of the Constitution. Evaluation should consider the strength of their argument’s support and logic using ideological ideas presented in class.

In addition their blog comments about the Convention will be graded.

**Historical Habits of mind:**

- Students evaluate a variety of historiographies and form opinions about the Framers of the Constitution.
- Students empathize with Constitutional Convention delegates by debating from their point of view.
- Students read and analyze primary documents.

**Massachusetts State Frameworks:**

USI.1 Explain the political and economic factors that contributed to the American Revolution.

USI.2 Explain the historical and intellectual influences on the American Revolution and the formation and framework of the American government.

USI.6 Explain the reasons for the adoption of the Articles of Confederation in 1781, including why its drafters created a weak central government; analyze the shortcomings of the national government under the Articles; and describe the crucial events (e.g., Shays’s rebellion) leading to the Constitutional Convention.

USI.7 Explain the roles of various founders at the Constitutional Convention. Describe the major debates that occurred at the Convention and the “Great Compromise” that was reached. (H, C)

*Major Debates*

- A. the distribution of political power
- B. the rights of individuals
- C. the rights of states
- D. slavery

*Founders*

- A. Benjamin Franklin
- B. Alexander Hamilton
- C. James Madison
- D. George Washington

*Seminal Primary Documents to Read: the U.S. Constitution*

USI.8 Describe the debate over the ratification of the Constitution between Federalists and Anti-Federalists and explain the key ideas contained in the Federalist Papers on federalism, factions, checks and balances, and the importance of an independent judiciary.

USI.13 Explain why the United States government is classified as a democratic government.

USI.14 Explain the characteristics of American democracy, including the concepts of popular sovereignty and constitutional government, which includes representative institutions, federalism, separation of powers, shared powers, checks and balances, and individual rights.

USI.21 Describe how decisions are made in a democracy, including the role of legislatures, courts, executives, and the public.

**Appendix A**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mr. Rice

**Constitution Day- September 17, 1787**

**Group Review Race**

Locate the part of the Constitution that contains details about the following concepts, and answer the question.

1. Locate and explain the Constitution “shall be the supreme law of the land.”
2. Locate and explain two of the four steps that must be taken to amend the Constitution.
3. Locate and list three powers of the President.
4. Locate and list four powers of the Congress.



BONUS: Which two presidents signed the Constitution? What and where is the elastic clause?