

**CHAPTER 2** Section 3 (pages 68–75)

# The Confederation and the Constitution

## BEFORE YOU READ

In the last section, you learned how the people of the United States won their independence.

In this section, you will read about the early years of the young nation.

## AS YOU READ

Use the chart below to take notes on the characteristics of the government provided by the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution.

|                                  | <b>CHARACTERISTICS</b>         |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <i>Articles of Confederation</i> | <i>Weak central government</i> |
| <i>Constitution</i>              |                                |

### TERMS AND NAMES

**republic** A government in which the people elect representatives to govern

**Articles of Confederation** The first government of the United States

**Northwest Ordinance of 1787** Law that organized the Northwest Territories

**Shays's Rebellion** Anti-tax protest by farmers

**James Madison** One of the leaders of the Constitutional Convention

**checks and balances** Powers given to separate branches of government to keep any one from getting too much power

**ratification** Official approval of the Constitution

**Federalist** Supporter of the new Constitution

**Antifederalist** Person opposed to ratification of the new Constitution

**bill of rights** Set of amendments passed to protect individual rights

## Experimenting with Confederation (pages 68–69)

### *What was the Confederation?*

Americans wanted a **republic**—a government in which the people elect representatives to govern. But the states were not eager to unite under a strong central government.

The Second Continental Congress wrote the **Articles of Confederation**. It gave much power to the states and little power to the *federal government*. This plan set up a Congress elected by the people. Each state had one vote in Congress.

The *Confederation* had some successes. One was the **Northwest Ordinance of 1787**. It organized the land west of the Appalachian Mountains into *territories*. It decided how new states would enter the union.

But the Confederation also had problems.

States with small populations had the same power as large states. Congress did not have the power to tax. The Articles could not be changed without the agreement of all states.

There were economic problems, too. Congress had borrowed large amounts of money during the war. To pay these debts, the states raised taxes. High taxes were a problem for many Americans.

### **1. What problems did the Confederation face?**

## Drafting the Constitution

(pages 69–70)

### *Why did the delegates write a new Constitution?*

Farmers were losing their land because they could not pay the high taxes. In 1787, a tax protest by

farmers, which was called **Shays's Rebellion**, led to violence. The Massachusetts militia killed four protesters.

The weak national government could not solve the nation's problems. In 1787, 12 states sent *delegates* to Philadelphia to fix the Articles of Confederation. Instead, the delegates decided to form a whole new government. **James Madison**, a delegate from Virginia, was one of the leaders of the convention and kept a record of the debates. He is called the Father of the Constitution.

The delegates made compromises. They agreed on a legislature with two houses. Each state would have two members in the Senate, or upper house. In the House of Representatives, or lower house, representation would be based on a state's population. The Three-Fifths Compromise allowed states to count three-fifths of their slaves as part of their population.

## 2. What three important decisions did delegates make at the convention?

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## Creating a New Government

(pages 70–71)

### *Who had the power in the new Constitution?*

Power was still divided between the national government and the states. But the central government was stronger than it was under the Articles.

The delegates agreed to a separation of powers. Congress, the legislative branch, would make the laws. The executive branch would carry out laws. The judicial branch would settle legal disputes. They created a system of **checks and balances** to prevent any branch from getting too much power. They also created a way of changing, or passing *amendments* to, the Constitution.

## 3. How was power divided in the new Constitution?

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## Ratifying the Constitution

(pages 71–74)

### *Would you vote to ratify the Constitution?*

The convention decided that **ratification**, or official approval, of the Constitution would be in state conventions. Voters elected representatives to the conventions.

**Federalists** supported the new Constitution. They published essays called *The Federalist Papers* to explain and defend the Constitution. **Antifederalists** opposed the Constitution. They thought it gave the central government too much power. They wanted a **bill of rights**, a formal, written guarantee of people's rights and freedoms, like many states had. Federalists promised to add a Bill of Rights. Because of this promise, the required nine states ratified the Constitution in 1789.

The Bill of Rights consisted of ten amendments that guaranteed Americans rights such as freedom of religion, speech, and the press. They protected citizens from the threat of standing armies. They protected citizens against having their homes searched and property seized. They also protected the rights of people accused of crimes. Finally, they gave all powers that were not given to the federal government to the people and the states. The Bill of Rights was ratified in 1791.

## 4. How did the Federalists and Antifederalists feel about the Constitution?

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## Continuing Relevance of the Constitution

(pages 74–75)

### *Why is the Constitution still important?*

The Constitution has met the changing needs of Americans for over 200 years. That is because it is flexible.

The Constitution can be changed, or amended, when needed. But the amendment process is difficult. In over 200 years, there have been only 27 amendments to the Constitution.

## 5. Why has the Constitution been able to meet the changing needs of the country for so long?

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# Answer Key

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## Chapter 2: Revolution and the Early Republic (pages 46–85)

### Section 3: Confederation and the Constitution (pages 68–75)

1. The delegates to the Continental Congress were not united in their support of the Declaration of Independence. Many delegates were still loyal to the British crown, and some were even in the process of negotiating a separate peace with the British. The Declaration was adopted only after a long and contentious debate.
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