Standard 1: Foundations of Government, Law, and the American Political System

SS.5.C.1.4

#2

Identify the Declaration of Independence’s grievances and the Article of Confederation’s Weaknesses.


What were the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation?
Teacher Note: These lessons should be taught in conjunction with American history benchmarks to add historical perspective to these important civics understandings.

**Teacher Content Knowledge Resource**

**The Core Components of the Articles of Confederation**

The first government of the United States following the *Declaration of Independence* was the *Articles of Confederation*. A confederation is a state-centered, decentralized government where the primary powers of government are held at the state level. The *Declaration of Independence* spoke of the many abuses of King George III, who, as a monarch, ruled over the executive, legislative and judiciary powers of the government. In the *Declaration*, Thomas Jefferson stated that both King George III and the form of government in place at the time failed to protect the colonists’ “life, liberty and pursuit of happiness.” The unitary government, one that centralized power in government, was unacceptable to the colonists when they sought to create a government after declaring their independence from the British crown.

The colonists decided to create a government that was quite different from a unitary system where the powers of government were concentrated in a single person. This decentralized system reflected the colonists’ fear of a powerful central government.

**The Weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation**

Under the *Articles of Confederation*, states retained their freedom and independence. Each of the 13 states had a vote in the weak national Congress (appointed by the state governments), while a vote of 9 states was required in order to pass any laws and a unanimous vote of all 13 states was required for the *Articles* to be amended. The national Congress was also denied the power to tax, so it could not pay for the army and navy needed to defend the nation.

The result of this decentralized approach was that each state functioned in many ways as an independent country. Several states negotiated their own trade agreements with those countries that the king had previously convinced not to have a relationship with the colonies, while other states established their own militaries. The result of these state actions was that the states did not function as a nation. Fears emerged that 13 states functioning as independent countries would make the nation vulnerable.

Together the lack of powers held by the weak national Congress coupled with each state’s independent and often conflicting actions, raised concerns that the *Articles of Confederation* were not designed in a way to protect the new nation.

Adding to these concerns was Shays Rebellion in 1786, when 2000 western Massachusetts farmers marched on county courthouses to prevent land foreclosures. The

---

1 This content also covers American History Benchmark SS.5.A.5.10: Examine the significance of the Constitution including its key political concepts, origins or those concepts, and their role in American democracy.
farmers’ land was threatened with foreclosure because they were assured that they did not have to pay taxes and other debts on their land during the Revolutionary War. These promises were not kept, which prompted the farmers to revolt. Congress would not respond because it was too weak and did not have its own army.

Shays’ Rebellion prompted representatives from five states to meet in Annapolis, Maryland in February 1787 to call for a constitutional convention of all 13 states the following May in Philadelphia. Congress stated that the purpose of this May convention was “the sole and express purpose of revising the Articles of Confederation.”

**Articles of Confederation Timeline**

July 4, 1776: The *Declaration of Independence* is approved by Congress

July 12, 1776: The *Articles of Confederation* are officially adopted by Congress and forwarded to the states for ratification

November 17, 1777: The *Articles of Confederation* are adopted by Congress

March 1, 1781: The *Articles of Confederation* take effect (Maryland is the last state to ratify the Articles)

September 3, 1783: The *Treaty of Paris* is signed, which officially grants independence to the United States

August 1786: Shays’ Rebellion

September 11 - 14, 1786: The Annapolis Convention, which called for amending the *Articles of Confederation*

May 25 - September 27, 1787: The Constitutional Convention, which was intended to amend the *Articles of Confederation*, produces the *U.S. Constitution*
Common Core State Standards
Grade 5 English Language Arts, Reading: Literature

Key Ideas and Details

RL.5.1. Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

RL.5.2. Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.

RL.5.3. Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).

Craft and Structure

RL.5.4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative language such as metaphors and similes.

RL.5.5. Explain how a series of chapters, scenes, or stanzas fits together to provide the overall structure of a particular story, drama, or poem.

RL.5.6. Describe how a narrator’s or speaker’s point of view influences how events are described.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

RL.5.7. Analyze how visual and multimedia elements contribute to the meaning, tone, or beauty of a text (e.g., graphic novel, multimedia presentation of fiction, folktale, myth, poem).

RL.5.8. (Not applicable to literature)

RL.5.9. Compare and contrast stories in the same genre (e.g., mysteries and adventure stories) on their approaches to similar themes and topics.

Range of Reading and Complexity of Text

RL.5.10. By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poetry, at the high end of the grades 4–5 text complexity band independently and proficiently.
Key Ideas and Details

RI.5.1. Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

RI.5.2. Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by key details; summarize the text.

RI.5.3. Explain the relationships or interactions between two or more individuals, events, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text based on specific information in the text.

Craft and Structure

RI.5.4. Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases in a text relevant to a grade 5 topic or subject area.

RI.5.5. Compare and contrast the overall structure (e.g., chronology, comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in two or more texts.

RI.5.6. Analyze multiple accounts of the same event or topic, noting important similarities and differences in the point of view they represent.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

RI.5.7. Draw on information from multiple print or digital sources, demonstrating the ability to locate an answer to a question quickly or to solve a problem efficiently.

RI.5.8. Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text, identifying which reasons and evidence support which point(s).

RI.5.9. Integrate information from several texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

RI.5.10. By the end of the year, read and comprehend informational texts, including history/social studies, science, and technical texts, at the high end of the grades 4–5 text complexity band independently and proficiently.
Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

L.5.4. Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 5 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

- Use context (e.g., cause/effect relationships and comparisons in text) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.
- Use common, grade-appropriate Greek and Latin affixes and roots as clues to the meaning of a word (e.g., *photograph, photosynthesis*).
- Consult reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation and determine or clarify the precise meaning of key words and phrases.

L.5.5. Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

- Interpret figurative language, including similes and metaphors, in context.
- Recognize and explain the meaning of common idioms, adages, and proverbs.
- Use the relationship between particular words (e.g., synonyms, antonyms, homographs) to better understand each of the words.

L.5.6. Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, including those that signal contrast, addition, and other logical relationships (e.g., *however, although, nevertheless, similarly, moreover, in addition*).
Common Core State Standards
Grade 5 English Language Arts, Reading: Writing

Text Types and Purposes

W.5.1. Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

- Introduce a topic or text clearly, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure in which ideas are logically grouped to support the writer’s purpose.
- Provide logically ordered reasons that are supported by facts and details.
- Link opinion and reasons using words, phrases, and clauses (e.g., consequently, specifically).
- Provide a concluding statement or section related to the opinion presented.

W.5.2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

- Introduce a topic clearly, provide a general observation and focus, and group related information logically; include formatting (e.g., headings), illustrations, and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.
- Develop the topic with facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples related to the topic.
- Link ideas within and across categories of information using words, phrases, and clauses (e.g., in contrast, especially).
- Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.
- Provide a concluding statement or section related to the information or explanation presented.

W.5.3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

- Orient the reader by establishing a situation and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally.
- Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, description, and pacing, to develop experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations.
- Use a variety of transitional words, phrases, and clauses to manage the sequence of events.
- Use concrete words and phrases and sensory details to convey experiences and events precisely.
- Provide a conclusion that follows from the narrated experiences or events.

Production and Distribution of Writing

W.5.4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.)

W.5.5. With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.
W.5.6. With some guidance and support from adults, use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others; demonstrate sufficient command of keyboarding skills to type a minimum of two pages in a single sitting.

**Research to Build and Present Knowledge**

W.5.7. Conduct short research projects that use several sources to build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.

W.5.8. Recall relevant information from experiences or gather relevant information from print and digital sources; summarize or paraphrase information in notes and finished work, and provide a list of sources.

W.5.9. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

- Apply *grade 5 Reading standards* to literature (e.g., “Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or a drama, drawing on specific details in the text [e.g., how characters interact]”).

- Apply *grade 5 Reading standards* to informational texts (e.g., “Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text, identifying which reasons and evidence support which point[s]”).

**Range of Writing**

W.5.10. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.
Civics Content Vocabulary

Teacher Note: Preteach vocabulary words and definitions. As a vocabulary extension following the lesson, have students complete the chart for each word providing examples and non-examples (if applicable) and a gesture/visual/symbol for each word.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Non-Example</th>
<th>Gesture/Visual/Symbol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Articles of Confederation</td>
<td>the first constitution of the United States, adopted in 1781 and replaced in 1788</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Declaration of Independence</td>
<td>a document that listed the basis for democratic government and the grievances of the colonists</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grievances</td>
<td>a cause of distress, giving reason for complaint</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Instructions for conducting a Read Aloud

Preparing for a Read Aloud:
1. Select a read aloud text that will provide a springboard for teaching the civics benchmark (See suggested books within this module, but not limited to).

2. Along with the content civics vocabulary for this module, identify additional vocabulary terms within the selection necessary for text comprehension and understanding the civics benchmark.

3. Generate questions of varying complexity related to the text that support deeper understanding of the civics benchmark.

4. Plan opportunities for authentic student engagement with the text during the Read Aloud (text discussion, turn & talk, think-pair-share).

Conducting a Read Aloud:
1. Introduce the book.

2. Briefly introduce the predetermined vocabulary words.

3. During the Read Aloud, conduct think alouds so students are provided a model of thinking that is applied while reading. Use the generated questions to ask students about the text to allow opportunities for authentic student engagement (text discussion, turn & talk, think-pair-share) and to clarify understanding.

4. After the Read Aloud, provide opportunities for students to discuss and write about civics concepts learned.
Suggested Book

*Understanding the Articles of Confederation* by Sally Isaacs

Information about the Articles of Confederation
Bell Work

Module Objective:
1. The student will identify the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation.

Activity:

1. Post the following scenario on the board: Think about what might happen if we did not have a national government and instead each state was independent without any national control.
2. Instruct students to make a list of five things they think might happen.
3. Have students share their ideas with the class.
Guided Practice Activity

Activity:

1. Have pairs of students engage in a shared reading activity on the Articles of Confederation passage.
2. Answer the comprehension questions as a whole class.
3. Provide additional information to students regarding the Articles of Confederation by using material from the Teacher Content Knowledge Resource page.
Articles of Confederation

After the Revolutionary War, the American states were independent from Great Britain. They needed to create a system of government to run this new nation. The first system created was known as the Articles of Confederation and was adopted by the Congress on November 15, 1777. In its final form, the Articles of Confederation were comprised of a preamble and 13 articles.

The Articles of Confederation were finally ratified by the last of the 13 American states, Maryland, in 1781 and became the ruling document in the new nation. The Articles created a nation that was “a league of friendship and perpetual union.”

The state governments retained most of the power under the Articles, with little power given to the central government. Congress, for example, had to rely upon the states for its funds and for the execution of its decrees. The central government received little respect and was not able to accomplish much because it had little authority over states or individuals in America.

In the words of George Washington, the government created by the Articles of the Confederation was “little more than the shadow without the substance.” As the need for a stronger federal government began to be realized, leaders from throughout the states got together to decide how to create it. The Federal Constitutional Convention of 1787 was responsible for drafting the Constitution of the United States, the document which took the place of the Articles of Confederation in 1789 and created a stronger central government.

Articles of Confederation Discussion Questions

1. Who were American states independent from after the Revolutionary War?

______________________________________________________________________________

2. What was the first system of government for the American states known as?

______________________________________________________________________________

3. Which American state was the last to ratify the Articles of Confederation?

______________________________________________________________________________

4. When did the Articles of Confederation become the ruling document of the new nation?

______________________________________________________________________________

5. What did George Washington mean when he said that the Articles of Confederation were "little more than the shadow without the substance"?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________
Application Activity

Activity:

1. Lead a class discussion about the history and significance of the Articles of Confederation by utilizing the information from the Teacher Content Knowledge Resource page.

2. Pass out the information sheet: 5 Major Weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation. Discuss each of the weaknesses with the students.
   a. A weak national (or central) government.
      i. All the power rested with the individual states.
      ii. The national government had to get the permission and support from the states to do anything.
   b. Congress could not tax or regulate trade.
      i. States would tax everything and collect the revenue.
      ii. There was not a set tax amount from state to state.
      iii. States would not trade with each other.
      iv. Other countries did not want to trade with the states.
   c. One vote per state no matter the size of the population or land size.
      i. In order for the central government to pass laws 9 out of 13 had to approve them.
   d. The national government did not have an executive or judicial branch.
      i. There was not a separation of powers.
   e. No common currency among the states.
      i. States printed their own money.
      ii. National currency was worthless.

3. Ask the students why these weaknesses would cause problems.

4. Write their responses on the board.

5. Pass out the activity sheet: The Articles’ Weaknesses.

6. Have the students draw representations of each of the 5 major weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation.
5 Major Weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation

1. A weak national (or central) government.
2. Congress could not tax or regulate trade.
3. One vote per state no matter the size of the population or land size.
4. The national government did not have an executive or judicial branch.
5. No common currency among the states.
The Articles’ Weaknesses
Independent Practice Activity

Writing Prompt: The Articles of Confederation was our nation’s first constitution and it had many weaknesses. Identify one of those weaknesses and explain how it affected the running of the government.

__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
## Supplemental Resources and Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Web Address</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td><a href="http://www.brainpop.com">www.brainpop.com</a></td>
<td>BrainPop – videos and quizzes to build background knowledge (interactive online videos with questions)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
<pre><code>                                                                             | Causes of the American Revolution                                           |
                                                                             | Declaration of Independence                                                  |
                                                                             | Thomas Jefferson                                                            |
                                                                             | James Madison                                                               |
</code></pre>
Answer Key

Articles of Confederation Reading

1. Great Britain
2. Articles of Confederation
3. Maryland
4. 1781
5. Answers may vary