

**TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT**  
***Lesson Title -The Constitutional Convention- Role-Playing***  
***Kyra Kasperson***

**Grade – 7**

**Length of class period – Two 42-minute periods**

**Inquiry**

What were the opposing views regarding representation at the Constitutional Convention and what compromise did the delegates finally reach?

**Objectives**

- Students will identify the major tenets of the Virginia and New Jersey plans.
- Students will advocate a point of view and support it in a debate with classmates.
- Students will participate in the process of resolution via discussion and comprehension of the Great Compromise and 3/5 Compromise.

**Materials (all attached)**

1. Copies of the Virginia and New Jersey Plans
2. Cast of Characters
3. Worksheet on the Convention

**Activities**

Prior to this lesson students should have mastered the Articles of Confederation and be able to identify events leading up to the Constitutional Convention. They should also have acquired an overview of the Constitutional Convention via their textbook, class discussion, or both.

1. On day one, students will read copies of both the Virginia and New Jersey Plans. Depending upon your students, you may choose to do this either as a class, or in small cooperative groups followed by a class discussion. Discuss the stipulations of each plan regarding structure of government and representation in the legislative branch. Ask students to note references or omissions in regard to the slave and Native American populations.
2. On day two, assign each student a character from the cast of characters and give him/her a character card from the attached list. Students should sit with fellow state delegates and with delegates from 1 or 2 other states, depending on class size. States might be teamed up with other states depending on state size (population) or on a North versus South basis. Allow groups 5-10 minutes to discuss their characters' views on representation.
3. The student representing George Washington should open the Convention.

Edmund Randolph will present the Virginia Plan and William Paterson the New Jersey Plan. Washington will ask the delegates to stand, introduce themselves, and briefly state their position on representation. Students may then debate the issue and question other delegates before the convention. They should also discuss the question of whether to count slaves for representation or taxation purposes.

4. Roger Sherman will present a summary of the Great Compromise. George Washington will ask for a vote from the delegates on whether to accept the compromise.
5. Many extensions of this lesson are possible. Although I have provided minimal biographies of the delegates that can be distributed on the day of role-playing, more complete biographies may be found at [America's Founding Fathers - Delegates to the Constitutional Convention](#). Students might read the whole biography of their character as homework on the night before the Convention. Students might also spend a day researching their characters. There is also an excellent portrayal of the Constitutional Convention in the History Channel's American Revolution video set. Although my students enjoyed watching it after the Convention lesson and "identifying" themselves, I would probably show it before the lesson next year. A voting record may be found at [Voting Record of the Constitutional Convention](#), but students may have some difficulty deciphering it. The rules decided upon the Convention, including secrecy, are widely available online and would be an interesting extension of the lesson.

### **How will you assess what student learned during this lesson?**

1. Students will be informally assessed via monitoring of their class participation and discussion.
2. Students will complete a worksheet on the Constitutional Convention for homework.

### **Connecticut Framework Performance Standards**

- 2.2 Explain why one would use a primary or secondary source in a specific context.
- 2.3 Assess an author's purpose and point of view and respond in literal, critical, and evaluative ways.
- 2.4 State and defend points of view using relevant evidence.

## Copies of the Virginia and New Jersey Plans are from

**Bruce Frohnen, *The American Republic: Primary Sources*, ed. Bruce Frohnen (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2002).**

Accessed from <http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/669> on 2011-06-26

### Virginia Plan

- 1. Resolved, that the Articles of Confederation ought to be so corrected and enlarged as to accomplish the objects proposed by their institution, namely *common Defence, Security of Liberty and general welfare*.
- 2. Resolved therefore, that the rights of Suffrage in the National Legislature ought to be proportioned to the Quotas of contribution, or to the number of free inhabitants, as the one or the other rule may seem best in different cases.
- 3. Resolved, that the National Legislature ought to consist of *two branches*.
- 4. Resolved, that the Members of the first Branch of the National Legislature ought to be elected by the people of the several States every \_\_\_\_ for the term of \_\_\_\_ years, to be of the age of at least \_\_\_\_, to receive liberal stipends, by which they may be compensated for the devotion of their time to public service—to be ineligible to any office established by a particular State, or under the authority of the United States, (except those peculiarly belonging to the functions of the first Branch) during the term of service, and for the space \_\_\_\_ after its expiration; to be incapable of re-election for the space of \_\_\_\_ after the expiration of their term of service, and to be subject to recall.
- 5. Resolved, that the members of the second branch of the National Legislature ought to be elected by those of the first, out of a proper number of persons nominated by the individual Legislatures, to be of the age of \_\_\_\_ years at least; to hold their offices for a term sufficient to ensure their independency; to receive liberal Stipends by which they may be compensated for the devotion of their time to the public service; and to be in-eligible to any office established by a particular State, or under the authority of the United States (except those peculiarly belonging to the functions of the second Branch) during the term of service, and for the space of \_\_\_\_ after the expiration thereof.
- 6. Resolved, that each Branch ought to possess the right of originating Acts, that the National Legislature ought to be empowered to enjoy, the *Legislative rights vested in Congress* by the Confederation, and moreover to Legislate in all cases to which the Separate States are incompetent; or in which the harmony of the United States may be interrupted, by the exercise of individual Legislation—to negative all Laws passed by the several States, contravening, in the opinion of the National Legislature, the articles of Union; and to call forth the force of the Union against any Member of the Union, failing to fulfil its duty under the articles thereof.
- 7. Resolved, that a National Executive be instituted; to be chosen by the National Legislature, for the term of \_\_\_\_ years—to receive punctually at stated times a

fixed compensation for the services rendered, in which no increase or diminution shall be made so as to affect the Magistracy, existing at the time of such increase or diminution, and to be ineligible a second time; and that beside a general authority to execute the National laws, it ought to enjoy the Executive rights vested in Congress by the Confederation.

- 8. Resolved, that the Executive and a convenient number of the National Judiciary, ought to compose a *Council of revision*, with authority to examine every act of the National Legislature before it shall operate, and every act of a particular Legislature before a negative thereon shall be final; and that the dissent of the said council shall amount to a rejection, unless the act of the National Legislature be again passed, or that of a particular Legislature be again negatived by \_\_\_\_ of the Members of each Branch.
- 9. Resolved, that a National Judiciary be established to Consist of one or more supreme tribunals, and of inferior tribunals to be chosen by the National Legislature; to hold their Offices during good behavior, and to receive punctually at stated times fixed compensation for their services, in which no increase or diminution shall be made, so as to affect the persons actually in office at the time of such increase or diminution. That the jurisdiction of the inferior Tribunals shall be to hear and determine in the first instance, and of the supreme tribunal to hear and determine in the dernier resort; all piracies and felonies on the high Seas, captures from an enemy; cases in which foreigners or citizens of other States applying to such jurisdictions may be interested, or which respect the collection of the National revenue; impeachments of any National officers and questions which may involve the national peace and harmony.
- 10. Resolved, that provision ought to be made for the *admission of States* lawfully arising within the limits of the United States, whether from a voluntary junction of Government and Territory or otherwise, with the consent of a number of voices in the National Legislatures less than the whole.
- 11. Resolved, that a Republican Government and the territory of each State (except in the instance of a voluntary junction of Government and Territory) ought to be guaranteed by the United States to each State.
- 12. Resolved, that provision ought to be made for the continuance of Congress and their authorities and privileges, until a given day after the reform of the Articles of Union shall be adopted, and for the completion of all their engagements.
- 13. Resolved, that provision ought to be made for the amendment of the Articles of Union whensoever it shall seem necessary (and that the assent of the National Legislature ought not to be required thereto).
- 14. Resolved, that the Legislative, Executive and Judiciary powers within the several States ought to be bound by oath to support the Articles of Union.
- 15. Resolved, that the amendments which shall be offered to the Confederation, by the Convention, ought at a proper time, or times, after the approbation of Congress, to be submitted to an assembly or assemblies of Representatives, recommended by the several Legislatures, to be expressly chosen by the people, to consider and decide thereon.

## New Jersey Plan

- 1. Resolved, that the Articles of Confederation ought to be so revised, corrected, and enlarged as to render the federal Constitution adequate to the exigencies of Government, and the preservation of the Union.
- 2. Resolved, that in addition to the Powers vested in the United States in Congress by the present existing Articles of Confederation, they be authorized to pass Acts for raising a Revenue by levying a duty or duties on all goods or merchandise of foreign growth or manufacture, imported into any part of the United States,—by Stamps on Paper vellum or parchment,—and by a postage on all letters or packages passing through the general Post Office, to be applied to such federal purposes as they shall deem proper and expedient; to make rules and regulations for the collection thereof, and the same from time to time, to alter and amend in such manner as they shall think proper: to pass Acts for the regulation of trade and commerce, as well with foreign Nations, as with each other; provided that all punishments, fines, forfeitures and penalties to be incurred for contravening such acts, rules, and regulations shall be adjudged by the common Law Judiciarys of the State in which any offence contrary to the true intent and mean-ing of such acts and regulations shall have been committed or perpetrated; with liberty of commencing in the first instance all suits and prosecutions for that purpose in the superior Common Law Judiciary of such State, subject nevertheless, for the correction of all errors, both in law and fact, in rendering judgment, to an appeal to the Judiciary of the United States.
- 3. Resolved, that whenever requisitions shall be necessary, instead of the rule for making requisition mentioned in the Articles of Confederation, the United States in Congress be authorized to make such requisitions in proportion to the whole number of white and other free citizens and Inhabitants of every age, sex and condition, including those bound to servitude for a term of years, and three fifths of all other persons not comprehended in the foregoing description—(except Indians not paying Taxes); that if such requisitions be not complied with, in the time to be specified therein, to direct the collection thereof in the non-complying States and for that purpose to devise and pass Acts directing and authorizing the same; provided that none of the powers hereby vested in the United States in congress shall be exercised without the consent of at least \_\_\_\_ States, and in that proportion, if the number of confederated States should be hereafter increased or diminished.
- 4. Resolved, that the United States in Congress be authorized to elect a federal Executive to consist of 0000000 persons, to continue in office for the Term of 00000000 years; to receive punctually at stated times a fixed compensation for their services in which no increase or diminution shall be made so as to affect the persons composing the Executive at the time of such increase or diminution; to be paid out of the Federal Treasury; to be incapable of holding any other office or appointment during their time of service, and for \_\_\_\_ years thereafter; to be ineligible a second time, and removable by Congress on application by a majority of the Executives of the several States; that the Executive, besides their general authority to execute the federal Acts, ought to appoint all federal officers not other

wise provided for, and to direct all military operations; provided that none of the persons composing the federal Executive shall on any occasion take command of any troops so as personally to conduct any enterprise as General or in any other capacity.

- 5. Resolved, that a federal Judiciary be established, to consist of a supreme Tribunal, the Judges of which to be appointed by the Executive, and to hold their Offices during good behavior, to receive punctually at stated times a fixed compensation for their services, in which no increase or diminution shall be made so as to affect the persons actually in office at the time of such increase or diminution;—That the Judiciary so established shall have authority to hear and determine in the first instance on all impeachments of federal officers, and by way of appeal in the dernier resort in all cases touching the rights of Ambassadors, in all cases of captures from an enemy, in all cases of piracies and felonies on the high Seas, in all cases in which foreigners may be interested in the construction of any treaty or treaties, or which may arise on any of the Acts for regulation of trade, or the collection of the federal Revenue: that none of the Judiciary shall during the time they remain in Office be capable of receiving or holding any other Office or appointment during their time of service, or for \_\_\_\_\_ thereafter.
- 6. Resolved, that all Acts of the United States in Congress made by virtue and in pursuance of the powers hereby vested in them, and all Treaties made and ratified under the authority of the United States, shall be the supreme law of the respective States, as far as those Acts or Treaties shall relate to the said States or their Citizens, and that the Judiciary of the several States shall be bound thereby in their decisions, anything in the respective laws of the Individual States to the contrary notwithstanding; and that if any State, or any body of men in any State, shall oppose or prevent the carrying into execution such acts or treaties, the federal Executive shall be authorized to call forth the power of the Confederated States, or so much thereof as may be necessary to enforce and compel an obedience to such Acts, or an Observance of such Treaties.
- 7. Resolved, that provision be made for the admission of new States into the Union.
- 8. Resolved, that the Rule for naturalization ought to be the same in every State.
- 9. Resolved, that a Citizen of one State committing an offence in another State of the Union, shall be deemed guilty of the same offence, as if it had been committed by a Citizen of the State in which the Offence was committed.

## Cast of Characters

### Connecticut

#### **Oliver Ellsworth**

42 years old

Attorney

Supported equal votes for states

Supported 3/5 Compromise

Later supported the adoption of the Constitution

#### **Roger Sherman**

66 years old

Storeowner/attorney/politician

Member of Continental Congress

Presented the Great Compromise

### Virginia

#### **James Madison**

36 years old

Politician

Member of Continental Congress

Wrote Virginia Plan

Slaveholder

#### **George Washington**

55 years old

Surveyor

Commander-in-chief of Continental Army

Presided over Constitutional Convention

Slaveholder

#### **Edmund Randolph**

33 years old

Lawyer/Politician/Governor of Virginia

Presented Virginia Plan

Supported 3 branches of government, but did not want a single executive

#### **George Mason**

62 years old

Planter/politician

Frequent speaker at the Convention

Did not sign Constitution due to lack of bill of rights/also thought the upper house was too powerful.

## New Jersey

### **William Paterson**

42 years old

Lawyer/Attorney General for New Jersey

Co-authored and presented the New Jersey Plan

### **William Livingston**

64 years old

Lawyer/governor of New Jersey

Supported New Jersey Plan

## Pennsylvania

### **Benjamin Franklin**

81 years old

Printer/inventor/postmaster/politician

Diplomat

Anti-slavery

### **Gouverneur Morris**

35 years old

Lawyer/politician

Gave more speeches at Convention than anyone

Drafted Constitution

## Delaware

### **Gunning Bedford**

47 years old

Lawyer/politician

Supported small state rights

Helped write Great Compromise

Anti-slavery

### **John Dickinson**

55 years old

Lawyer/politician

Wrote *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania*

Supported small states/helped write Great Compromise

## Massachusetts

### **Elbridge Gerry**

43 years old

Merchant/politician

Knew Sam Adams and John Hancock

Refused to sign Constitution due to lack of a Bill of Rights

### **Rufus King**

32 years old

Lawyer/politician/Diplomat

Originally supported Articles of Confederation/changed mind and supported Madison

Anti-slavery

## New York

### **Alexander Hamilton**

30 years old

Merchant/politician/lawyer

Knew and supported Washington

Disagreed with other New York representatives/only one from NY to sign Constitution

### **John Lansing**

33 years old

Lawyer

Wanted Constitutional Convention to amend Articles of Confederation/did not believe the Convention had a right to create a new constitution

Left the Convention (along with fellow NY representative Robert Yates), stating that the convention did not have the right to create one United States government.

## South Carolina

### **Charles Pinckney**

30 years old

Lawyer/diplomat

Worked to ratify the Constitution

Pro-slavery

### **Pierce Butler**

63 years old

Planter

Loyalist during Revolution

Supported VA plan

Pro-slavery

**North Carolina**

**William Blount**

38 years old

Politician/speculator

Signed Constitution reluctantly

**William Richardson Davie**

31 years old

Lawyer

Supported Great Compromise

Supported counting slaves for representation

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

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **The Constitutional Convention**

1. Compare and contrast the Virginia and New Jersey Plans. Which states supported which plan and why?

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2. What was the Great Compromise?

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3. What was the 3/5 Compromise?

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