**Articles of Confederation**

Foundations of America

From: UCI History Project

**History Standards: 8.2.2**  
Analyze the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution and the success of each in implementing the ideals of the Declaration of Independence.  
  
**CCSS Standards: Reading, Grades 6-8**1. Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

2. Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.

**Guiding Question:**  
What is a central, or national, government?

Why is a centralized government important for the founding of America?

**Overview of Lesson:**Students should be familiar with the American colony and the initial moves towards independence, including the Declaration of Independence.

Below is an excerpt from a textbook. Have students read through the bold headings, and ask them what those headings can tell us about the reading. What do we expect? Are there any words that we don’t know (look them up!)?

Students will complete the first paragraph and accompanying questions as a whole class. Thereafter, they may work in small groups or partnerships to complete the remainder of the reading.

Once students have completed the reading, have them answer the three final questions individually.

**Articles of Confederation**

**What is a central, or national, government?**

**Why is a centralized government important for the founding of America?**

Today we will attempt to answer these questions by reading and analyzing a portion of the textbook. Part of Chapter 3 called “Forming a New Government” from pages 180 and 181 are copied below. We will be reading this excerpt as a class and in groups. Today we have a several goals to accomplish:

* We will learn important vocabulary terms using the context clues in the text.
* We will learn about the Articles of Confederation.
* We will be able to answer the questions above and consider the events that led up to the drafting of the constitution.

To do this, read the passages below and answer the questions on a separate sheet of paper. But first, look at the questions above. Discuss your ideas and thoughts about these two questions with a partner.

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| **Text Passage from *American Journey*** | **Questions about the text** |
| **A Confederation of States**  At the same time that Jefferson was drafting the Declaration of Independence, members of the Continental Congress were developing a plan for the new government. In 1777 the Congress detailed these plans in a document called the Articles of Confederation, the first constitution of the United States of America.  A confederation is a voluntary association of independent states. In a **confederation** (kuhn.feh.duh.ray.shuhn), the member states agree to let the central government undertake a limited number of activities, such as forming an army.  The Articles set up a one-house legislature called the Congress. Although the states could send between two and seven delegates to the congress, each state, no matter what the size, had only one vote. The issue of **sovereignty** (sah.vuhrn.tee), or supreme power, was an important part of the Articles of Confederation.  *“Each state retains its sovereignty, freedom and independence, and every power, jurisdiction and right, which is not by this Confederation expressly delegated to the United States in Congress assembled.”*  ~Article II  Articles of Confederation | 1. What was the Continental Congress? Can you remember some important members of this group?  2. What laws do you think were included in the Articles of Confederation? What types of laws do you think are most important for a government to have to function properly?  3. What is a confederation? How do the context clues provide the reader with an understanding of the term?  4. Why did the states agree to form a confederation?  5. What is sovereignty? How do the context clues provide the reader with an understanding of the term?  6. How is sovereignty defined in this quote?  7. What are some examples of state sovereignty?  8. People also have sovereignty, what things in your life do you have sovereignty over? |
| **The Powers of Congress**  Congress had several powers under the Articles of Confederation. Congress had the **authority** to conduct foreign affairs, maintain armed forces, borrow money, and issue currency. These powers of Congress were quite limited, though.  As a result of their negative experiences with the British government, the 13 states refused to give the Congress two important powers. It had now power to enforce its laws and no power to tax. The Articles allowed the Congress to ask the states for money but not to demand it. The Congress could not, in fact, require the states to do anything. Without money or real power over the states, the Confederation Congress commanded so little respect that its members often did not bother to attend sessions. | 9. Look at the title of this subheading, what ideas do you think will be covered in this text section?  10. The text discusses the powers of Congress and the limits on this power. What does it mean that the powers were limited?  11. What were the negative experiences that the states had with Britain? Provide specific examples.  12. How are our laws enforced today? Why is this important for the functioning of government?  13. Why is the power to tax important? What types of things does our government do with tax money it collects?  14. What are the weaknesses of the Articles?  15. If you were a member of Congress, what solutions would you propose to have a more effective government? |
| **Weakness of the Articles**  By 1781 all 13 states had **ratified** (ra.tuh.fyd), or approved, the Articles of Confederation. Within the next few years, however, it became clear that the articles had some serious flaws.  To begin with, the Congress could not pass a law unless nine states voted in favor of it. Any attempt to amend, or change, the Articles required a unanimous vote of all 13 states. These strict voting requirements made it difficult for Congress to accomplish much.  Even when the congress managed to pass laws, it cold not enforce them. Unlike the state constitutions, the Articles did not provide for a chief executive or for courts. If a state decided to ignore the law, the Congress could do nothing. | 16. Using the context clues, define the term ratified in your own words.  17. Why would these voting requirements make governing difficult?  What solutions can you suggest to change the Articles so that governing would be more efficient, or easy?  18. By writing the text in this way, the author is suggesting some strategies for governing that were not part of the Articles of Confederation. What are these? Why are they important for governing a nation? |
| After reading these sections, answer the questions below:   * What were the Articles of Confederation? * What were the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation? * Why is a centralized government important for the founding of America? | |