

LESSON I

WHY IS DELAWARE CALLED “THE FIRST STATE”

Standards: Civics Standard One: Students will examine the structure and purposes of governments with specific emphasis on constitutional democracy [Government].

History Standard One: Students will employ chronological concepts in analyzing historical phenomena.

History Standard Two: Students will gather, examine, and analyze historical data.

History Standard Four: Students will develop historical knowledge of major events and phenomena in world, United States, and Delaware history.

Objectives:

- 1) The students will understand why Delaware is called the First State.
- 2) The students will learn about the background leading to Delaware's ratification of the United States Constitution.
- 3) The students will complete a worksheet on the United States Constitution.
- 4) The students will work in groups to choose an individual in today's world that would have the greatest influence on their thinking.

Materials:

- 1) *Lesson I, Delaware Public Archives, Ratification Document* [back to back] with *Lesson I, Delaware Public Archives, Petition to the General Assembly, Series Number 1111.2*
- 2) Constitution Worksheet

Procedures: DAY ONE

- 1) Divide the class into pairs. Think-pair-share: Why is Delaware called “The First State”?
- 2) Explain to students that the American colonies declared their independence from England in 1776 with the Declaration of Independence. Ask: What kind of government did the colonies create? (They created a federal system of government with the states holding the majority of the power.)
- 3) Explain that in 1777 the colonies set up the Articles of Confederation. The colonies were in the middle of a war to free themselves from a nation that had a strong central government (all the power was held by the

English Parliament and the King). Ask: What kind of government did the colonies want now? (A weak central government with the power held by each individual state. The states would be "on their own.")

4) Pass out the document used in this lesson. Inform the students that the petition to the General Assembly of Delaware (the State Legislature) was written in 1786 - three years after the end of the American Revolution. Give the students several minutes to read and familiarize themselves with the document. Read the letter aloud. Ask: Are the Articles of Confederation working in Delaware? (No.) What are some of the problems presented in the petition? (Scarcity of cash, debts from the war, increased taxes, colonists sold their property for very little then became homeless and destitute) Were other colonies having similar problems? (Yes)

5) Delaware was suffering because of this new form of government. Some of the problems included:

a. **Economic.** Much of the land in Delaware had been farmed for many years and was losing its fertility - thus producing lower crop yields. In addition, deflation (falling prices) was driving many farmers and merchants toward economic disaster. Many people were deeply in debt. Ask: What is a debtor? (Someone who owes money.) What is a creditor? (Someone who loans money to another person with the understanding that it will be paid back.) Delawareans started writing to the General Assembly begging for some type of help.

b. **Economic.** Delaware did not have a large seaport where it could carry out trade with other countries or colonies. Many of the goods bought by Delawareans came from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania - the closest large seaport. These goods were taxed by the State of Pennsylvania. Ask: How did the people selling the goods make up the money they lost because of the Pennsylvania tax? (They charged the people of Delaware higher prices for their goods.)

c. **Military.** Delaware had too much coastline and not enough men to militarily defend against an attack from a foreign power.

6) Think-pair-share: Was Delaware being pushed around because of its small size? How could the situation be fixed? (Look for various answers for both questions.)

Solution: A strong national government. Many Delawareans felt a strong national government would help to eliminate these problems. They believed it would change the economic conditions under which they were suffering. They hoped a strong national government would regulate the prices Delawareans had to pay for goods from other states. In addition, a strong national government could provide men and military supplies to help defend the Delaware coastline.

- 7) Explain to students that an agreement was made between all the states to send representatives to a "convention" to revise the Articles of Confederation. This convention was held in Philadelphia during the summer of 1787. Delaware was represented by George Read, Richard Bassett, John Dickinson, Jacob Broom, and Gunning Bedford, Jr. Most Delawareans wanted small states such as Delaware to have equal representation in the revised government. Without this guarantee, larger states would dominate the government and the country.
- 8) Continue explaining that once the Convention started, the delegates chose to discard the Articles of Confederation in favor of creating a stronger national government. Completed in the fall of 1787, the Constitution was sent out to every state for approval. Ask: Would the various state legislative bodies be in favor of this new form of government? (No, because it may limit or restrict their own power.) To counter this problem, the Convention delegates decided to hold special elections to choose citizens for a convention where they could vote for or against adopting the new Constitution. In this way, the Constitution would be decided upon by ordinary citizens. New Castle, Kent, and Sussex County each selected ten citizens. The group met in Dover at Battell's Tavern from December 3 through December 7, 1787.
- 9) Pass out the worksheet for United States Constitution Article I, Section 8. Review the worksheet with the students. There may be some parts of the Constitution that are difficult for students at this level to comprehend. Instruct the students to complete the worksheet. This should end the activities for day one. Collect the worksheet and the petition/ratification document at the end of the period.

DAY TWO

- 10) Reform the groups from yesterday. Pass out the petition/ratification document (two per group). Instruct the students to read and review the ratification side of the document. After several minutes of review read the document aloud. Discuss the following questions as a class:

1. What does this document tell us about the Constitution? (It was approved [ratified] by the delegates.)
2. Count the number of names for each county. How many delegates from each county signed? (10 from each county, 30 total)
3. Did all the delegates sign their names to ratify the Constitution? (Yes, the vote was unanimous.)
4. What is the date the ratification document was signed? (December 7, 1787)
5. Delaware became the first state because it was the first former colony to approve of the new Constitution. What do we call that day? (Delaware Day)
6. What symbol in Delaware carries that date? (The Delaware Flag. If a flag is not available use the overhead from the Delaware Flag lesson.)

11) Ask: Why did all the delegates vote to ratify the Constitution? (It addressed the economic and military problems that Delaware faced at the time.)

12) However, nine states needed to ratify the Constitution before it could be put into effect. Many people opposed the Constitution - including a number of prominent Americans who were heroes of the American Revolution. Among those against the new form of government were John Hancock, Patrick Henry, and Samuel Adams. Ask: Why were they against it? Some of the reasons included:

1. Individual states were not allowed to print money
2. Powerful, centralized government
3. Constitution did not have a Bill of Rights
4. Constitution did not mention God

13) Explain that many Americans supported the Constitution because George Washington, the most famous hero of the American Revolution, served as the presiding officer at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia. Instruct the groups to discuss and choose a famous living American who would have the most influence in persuading people to think a certain way. Once all the groups have decided upon an individual, they need to present their person to the class and give reasons why they chose that individual.

- 14) Write the names on the board. After all the groups have presented their individual, take a class vote to see if there is one individual among those chosen that students can agree upon.
- 15) Conclude the activity with each student completing an acrostic summary. Have students write the word “DELAWARE” down the left side of a piece of paper. Next to each letter, students will write a word or phrase that starts with that letter and describes what they learned about in this lesson. For example, D might be *Delegates attended a convention in Philadelphia during the summer of 1787*; E might be *Everyone was in favor of the Constitution except Patrick Henry, John Hancock, and Samuel Adams, etc.* Encourage students to include as much information as they can to summarize their learning.

DOCUMENT TRANSCRIPTIONS

Ratification Document

We the Deputies of the People of Delaware State in convention met having taken into our serious consideration the Federal Constitution proposed and agreed upon by the Deputies of the United States in a General Convention held at the City of Philadelphia on the seventeenth day of September in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty seven, Have approved, assented to, ratified, and confirmed and by these Presents, Do, in virtue of the Power and Authority to us given for the purpose for and in behalf of ourselves and our Constituents, fully, freely, and entirely approve of, assent to, ratify, and confirm the said Constitution. Done in Convention at Dover this seventh day of December in the year aforesaid and in the year of the Independence of the United States of America the twelfth. In Testimony whereof we have hereunto subscribed our Names

Sussex County

John Ingram
John Jones
William Moore
William Hall
Thomas Laws
Isaac Cooper
Woodman Stockley
John Laws
Thomas Evans
Israel Holland

Kent County

Nicholas Ridgely
Richard Smith
George Truitt
Richard Bassett
James Sykes
Allen McLane
Daniel Cummins, Sr.
Joseph Barker
Edward White
George Manlove

New Castle County

James Latimer, President
James Black
John James
Gunning Bedford, Sr.
Kensey Johns
Thomas Watson
Solomon Maxwell
Nicholas Way
Thomas Duff
Gunning Bedford, Jr.

Petition to the General Assembly

To the Honorable the Representatives of the Freeman of The Delaware State in General Assembly met.

The Petition of divers Inhabitants of Sussex County

Humbly Sheweth

That the sufferings of your Constituents in general thro the State and in this County in particular, for several years past, from the Scarcity of Cash, the number of Debts both Public & Private necessarily contracted during the late War and the consequent increase of Taxes, have reduced many of the Good People of this County to the lowest State of Misery and want.

That so far from any prospect of Relief We find the Evil rapidly increasing, becoming more dreadful in its appearance and more destructive in its effects. Our property is sold, and many of the virtuous but poor inhabitants of the County with large and helpless families, are turned out of Doors by their merciless and unfeeling creditors who frequently purchase their property at a third, fourth or fifth part of its real value.

Knowing that your Honors were intimately acquainted with our declining and ruinous circumstances, We have for several months looked up to our Representatives in Assembly with confidence of support and Relief. Unwilling to dictate to your Honors; We have for a long time remained in silent expectation; but necessity has at length conditioned us to petition and beseech your Honors, in the most pressing and urgent manner, to grant your distressed Constituents the only relief which now remains and which alone can save the State from Ruin, Anarchy & Destruction.

That we allude to the Emission of a paper currency must evidently appear to your Honors. We trust to an Assembly of your Wisdom and Integrity it will be unnecessary to point out the particular mode of emitting it. We suppose with deference to the Judgment of our worthy Representatives that the usual method by Loan will appear both convenient and practicable.

Resting therefore in a firm Reliance that your Honors will grant the above mentioned or some other relief. We trust and Hope

BACKGROUND

With the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, the former American colonies had to address the monumental task of governing themselves. In 1777, the Continental Congress set up the Articles of the Confederation. (The Articles of Confederation did not go into effect until 1781). This new plan called for a weak federal system of government with the most important powers, including the control of the money, in the hands of the states. Although the Continental Congress, the lone federal governing body, could make decisions and ask for money, the individual states had the right to vote down the federal decision as well as refuse to send any money. In addition,

Congress had the power to declare war and make treaties but it lacked the authority to raise an army, levy taxes, or enforce its own laws.

Upon the conclusion of the American Revolution in 1783, the former colonies began to focus more on the government they had implemented. The Articles of Confederation system of government was not working well. The country suffered an economic depression after the war. Each state had a war debt but the weak national government did not have the power to help them. To make matters worse, the states were printing worthless paper money while imposing heavy taxes at the same time.

In Delaware, the people were suffering under the burden of these problems and other factors as well. Much of the land in the state had been farmed for many years and was losing its fertility - thus producing lower crop yields. Many Delawareans were in debt. In addition, states such as Pennsylvania were charging high prices to Delawareans for goods that came through the Philadelphia seaport. Delaware could not challenge this business practice because it lacked a major seaport. Concerning military matters, Delaware was extremely vulnerable under the Articles of Confederation. With each state responsible for defending their own territory, Delaware had too few men to defend its long coastline. Because of these numerous problems following the war, a decision was made for representatives of each state to gather in Annapolis, Maryland to discuss amending the Articles of Confederation. This meeting, although poorly attended, determined that a stronger central government was needed for the country. Another meeting was called to be held in Philadelphia in May 1787. Known as the Constitutional Convention, the members attending were charged with revising the Articles of the Confederation. Delaware sent five delegates to the Convention. These men were John Dickinson, George Read, Richard Bassett, Jacob Broom, and Gunning Bedford, Junior. George Washington was unanimously elected as President of the Convention. Although the original objective of this convention was to revise the Articles of Confederation the delegates chose to create a new system of government. The Delaware delegation demanded that they have an equal representation in any type of new government that was established. Without it, Delaware would be dominated by larger states such as Virginia and Pennsylvania. The Constitution was completed in September 1787. To have this new system of government implemented, nine states would have to ratify it. Knowing that this new Constitution would not be able to work unless it had the approval of ordinary citizens, the delegates insisted that the Constitution be voted upon by citizens elected to special state conventions. A number of delegates hoped that many people would support the Constitution because George Washington, the most respected man in America at the time, had served as President of the Convention and strongly endorsed the document. In Delaware each county held an election to choose ten men for these special conventions. Only white, property owning males were allowed to participate in this process. Those elected to serve met during the week of December 3, 1787. Held at Battell's Tavern in Dover, the meeting concluded with all the delegates voting in favor of the new Constitution. On December 7, the delegates signed the ratification document - thus making Delaware the first state. However, a total of nine states had to ratify the Constitution before it could be put into effect. This did not occur until the spring of 1789.

DOCUMENTS USED IN THIS LESSON

Ratification Document

With the official proceedings of the December 3 - December 7, 1787 Convention lost, this document serves as the lone surviving piece of manuscript from those days of decision-making. The original document has suffered from years of light damage and is now encased at the Archives. This reproduction has sections that reflect the difficulty in trying to copy the document.

Petition to the General Assembly

This petition is part of the Legislative Papers (Series Number 1111.2). Although the document is undated, it is believed to have been sent by a group of Sussex County citizens to the State General Assembly between May and June of 1786. There are numerous petitions in the Legislative Papers Collection that echo the same sentiments addressed in this document.

DELAWARE AND THE U.S. CONSTITUTION(ANSWER SHEET)

Read the numbered parts of the United States Constitution that helped Delaware and list them as either military or economic help.

Military Help: 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 **Economic Help:** 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

ARTICLE I**Section. 8.**

1. The Congress shall have Power To lay and collect Taxes, Duties, Imposts and Excises, to pay the Debts and provide for the common Defence and general Welfare of the United States; but all Duties, Imposts, and Excises shall be uniform throughout the United States;
2. To borrow Money on the credit of the United States;
3. To regulate Commerce with foreign Nations, and among the several States, and with Indian Tribes;
4. To coin Money, regulate the Value thereof, and of foreign Coin, and fix the Standard of Weights and Measures;
5. To provide for the **Punishment** of counterfeiting the Securities and current Coin of the United States;
6. To declare War, grant Letters of Marque and Reprisal, and make Rules concerning Captures on Land and Water;
7. To raise and support Armies, but no Appropriation of Money to that Use shall be for a longer Term than two Years;
8. To provide and maintain a Navy;
9. To make Rules for the Government and Regulation of the land and naval Forces;
10. To provide for calling forth the Militia to execute the Laws of the Union, suppress Insurrections and repel Invasions;

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