

# THE ARTICLES *of* CONFEDERATION:

## WHY WEREN'T THEY ENOUGH?

*After* the American colonies gained independence from Great Britain, they needed their own government. Americans had felt mistreated by the British government. So, they did not want their new government to have too much power. Read about their first solution, the Articles of Confederation, and why it was replaced with our current constitution. Then answer the questions on page 2.

<p><b>The Articles of Confederation</b></p>	<p>American leaders wrote the <b>Articles of Confederation</b> to organize a government for the 13 states without giving that government too much power. The Articles were the original constitution of the United States from 1777 until 1789. A <b>constitution</b> is a written system of rules for how a government will be organized.</p>
<p><b>State powers</b></p>	<p>The Articles of Confederation gave most power to the state governments. Each of the 13 states had a lot of independence and power. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each state could tax or ban goods from other states.</li> <li>• Each state could print its own paper money.</li> <li>• Each state could ignore treaties that the national government signed.</li> </ul>
<p><b>National powers</b></p>	<p>Under the Articles of Confederation, there was no president serving as an executive enforcing national laws. There was also no judicial branch of national courts to interpret laws.</p> <p>Congress was the only branch of the national government. But Congress was much weaker than it is today. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Congress could not enforce national laws if a state disagreed with them.</li> <li>• Congress could not collect taxes.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Shays' Rebellion</b></p>	<p>The Articles of Confederation faced serious challenges. For example, in 1786, farmers in Massachusetts protested state taxes. More than 1,200 protesters gathered, led by an ex-soldier named Daniel Shays, and violence broke out.</p> <p>The farmers were quickly defeated. But only ten years after becoming independent, Americans were already fighting each other. American leaders worried that Shays' Rebellion was a sign the Articles of Confederation were not strong enough to hold the new country together.</p>
<p><b>The Constitutional Convention</b></p>	<p>Leaders from all 13 states agreed to meet in Philadelphia in 1787 to strengthen the national government. This meeting is known as the <b>Constitutional Convention</b>. Instead of strengthening the Articles, the Constitutional Convention created a totally new constitution.</p>
<p><b>The U.S. Constitution</b></p>	<p>The new constitution had a stronger national government, known as the <b>federal government</b>. The federal government had several new powers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It could raise taxes.</li> <li>• It could force states to follow national laws.</li> <li>• It could make rules about trade between states.</li> <li>• It could enforce treaties with foreign countries.</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>The U.S. still has this constitution today!</i></p>

# ✧ THE ARTICLES of CONFEDERATION ✧

**PART I** Answer the questions below.

1. Why were Americans afraid of creating a powerful government after gaining independence?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
2. What were the Articles of Confederation? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
3. Under the Articles of Confederation, which had more power, the national government or state governments? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**PART II** The features of the Articles of Confederation caused some problems for the United States. Draw a line to connect the dots between each feature and the problem it created.

FEATURE
Congress could not force states to follow national laws. ●
Congress could not collect taxes. ●
Each state could ignore treaties by the national government. ●
Each state could tax goods from other states. ●
Each state could print its own paper money. ●

PROBLEM
● The U.S. could not actually guarantee agreements with other countries.
● Money in one state was often not accepted in another state.
● It was expensive for people to trade with different states.
● National laws became meaningless because they were voluntary.
● Congress could not raise money to pay for the national army.

**PART III** Answer the questions below.

1. How did Shay's Rebellion affect people's view of the Articles of Confederation? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
2. What was the plan for the Constitutional Convention? What actually happened? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
3. How was the U.S. Constitution different from the Articles of Confederation? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_