



Oakland Unified School District

INSTRUCTIONAL SERVICES

History/Social Studies

314 East 10th Street, Oakland, CA 94606-2296

Phone: (510) 879-8253 - Fax: (510) 879-8607

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To: 8th grade World

History teachers

From: Stan Pesick and Shelly Weintraub

Re: Preparing students for this fall's 8th grade assessment pilot

Below is information to help you prepare students to write thoughtfully about this fall's 8th grade assessment topic. But, before going into detail we want to note that understanding the reasons behind the drafting of the Constitution and its ratification process requires students to study and absorb a number of abstract ideas and concepts. This can be a challenging topic for many students, and a challenge for teachers who want to engage students and make this topic come alive in the classroom. With that in mind we offer this series of activities that lead up to the assessment question below. We recognize, though, that you may have other strategies, materials, and lessons that might also help prepare students to write to the question. We encourage you to use all or part of the materials we have provided (the enclosed CD can be used to pull out or modify individual activities from the assessment package), but to also develop and use other lessons and materials to help your students better understand the issues, ideas, and events at the center of this topic and question.

The Question

In 1787 there was a huge debate across the new nation: should a new constitution be ratified? People took three different positions on this question. One group, the Federalists, said yes, "ratify the constitution." A second group, Anti-Federalists said, "Ratify the Constitution, but only after a Bill of Rights is added." A third group, also Anti-federalists, said no, "Do not ratify the Constitution."

Which of these three positions do you most agree with? Why?

I. Reading and Understanding the Prompt

This prompt asks students to write a persuasive essay about the Federalist - Anti-Federalist debate over ratification of the Constitution of 1787. The assessment uses primary and secondary sources that provide students information about each of the three possible positions they can choose to support. The work leading up to the writing prompt has students work with primary source documents and historians statements as a portion of the information and evidence they can use to support their thesis. There are multiple points, as students work with the sources, where the Federalist and Ant-Federalist positions are identified and explained.



II. What students need to understand about the topic's historical context(s):

In order to thoughtfully frame an introduction and thesis students will need to understand

The historical context that gave rise to the question of ratification.

- This would include understanding the type of governmental structure outlined in the Articles of Confederation, the reasons why some people at that time attacked the Articles and called for a constitutional convention, the type of governmental structure outlined in the Constitution, and the arguments of the Federalists and Anti-Federalist in support of their position.

Underlying beliefs and fears that gave rise to the different positions on ratification.

- For the Federalists this includes their beliefs that the national government needed more power in order to deal with the problems they saw resulting from the weak national government set up by the Articles of Confederation. This would include the national government's inability to tax, to regulate both domestic and foreign trade, and the inability of the national government to raise an army. It would also include understanding the fear of some Federalists that the state governments were too much in the hands of the common citizen. That the minority, men of property, required a stronger government to insure that there were no more "Shay's Rebellions." Finally, it would include understanding why the framers of the Constitution, set up a system of checks and balances. As Madison wrote, "Ambition must be made to counteract ambition...If men were angels, no government would be necessary..." The historian Richard Hofstadter, in analyzing this quote, suggests that not only did the framers not trust unchecked political power to the common man, they also did not trust to give unchecked political power to the men of their social and economic class.
- For the Anti-Federalists this includes their fear that the Constitution created a government with too much power, and too distant from their local concerns; that the states would no longer be the center of political power in the nation. It would also include the fear that that a strong national government would lead to some of the same problems they had faced with England - unwanted taxes and a powerful central government that was able to take away individual liberties. Arguing for the inclusion of a Bill of Rights before ratification votes was a position for most Anti-Federalists. For other Anti-Federalists this was not enough to alleviate their fears that under the Constitution, the states - which in their argument were more easily influenced by the common man - would lose power to a central government in the hands of a wealthy elite.



III. Writing the Essay

- The final assignment is designed to prepare students to write, by providing the opportunity to develop a thesis statement that states the position they will argue in regards to the debate over ratification.
- The students are also asked to identify, before they start to write, the information and evidence they will use to support their argument and the information and evidence they will use to counter the opposing side. Additionally, the students are directed back to the assignment on comparing and contrasting the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution (part IV) to remind them of academic language they can use when comparing and contrasting.
- This is not designed for students to go through multiple drafts. The sample papers to be scored should be first drafts of the student work.

IV. Textbook (United States History - Independence to 1914) pages and sections connected to this prompt.

Chapter 4 – “Forming a Government”

- Section 1 - the Articles of Confederation
- Section 2 - the New Nation Faces Challenges
- Section 3 - Creating the Constitution
- Section 4 - Ratifying the Constitution

V. Time and Pacing

The hope is that students have ample time to thoughtfully complete this work, but that this time will not be a burden for teachers working their way through the 8th grade curriculum. We anticipate that this may take two weeks to complete if you decide to use all the instructional materials included in the students work packet.

