



Grade 5 Lesson Plan #5: The Constitutional Convention— Building a Stronger America

Teacher Notes

This lesson builds directly on Lessons 3 and 4. Students analyze how leaders at the 1787 Constitutional Convention responded to the failures of the Articles of Confederation by designing a new system of government. Rather than focusing on memorizing historical details, students examine the objectives that guided the delegates' decisions and evaluate how those objectives helped create a constitution that has lasted over time.

Key Conceptual Clarification for Teachers:

Delegates at the Constitutional Convention were responding to two competing problems:

- a national government that was too weak to act effectively, and
- fear of creating a government that was too strong and could abuse its power.

The Constitution was designed to balance these concerns.

Materials:

Highlighters or pencils for text coding

Text: Handout 1: The 1787 Constitutional Convention: Building a Stronger America

Handouts:

- Handout 2: Shaping Your Written Response
- Handout 3: Directed Note-Taking Graphic Organizer

Preparation:

Number paragraphs in the Lesson 5 reading text.

Review the vocabulary and objectives.

Review the four objectives used for note-taking and debate.

Be prepared to connect this lesson to:

- Lesson 3 (fear of abuse of power)
- Lesson 4 (weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation)

Standards Alignment:

Florida Grade 5 Civics Literacy Standard—**SS.5.CG.1.2**: Explain how and why the U.S. government was created by the U.S. Constitution. *Clarification 1*: Students will explain the goals of the 1787 Constitutional Convention.

Reading/Writing: Students will read an explanatory historical text about the Constitutional Convention and analyze how the objectives of this convention were important in helping the U.S. Constitution last over time. Through reading, text coding, discussion, and writing, students will:

- Identify the objectives that guided the delegates of the Constitutional Convention.
 - Explain how the objectives of the Constitutional Convention shaped the U. S. Constitution by solving problems.
 - Describe which objective of the Constitutional Convention they think was most important in helping the U. S. Constitution last over time.
 - Cite textual evidence using paragraph numbers.
 - Produce a written response connecting historical events to civic principles.
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Essential Question

What were the objectives of the Constitutional Convention, and how did they help the U. S. Constitution last over time?

Opening (15 minutes, Handout #2)

Review and Hook (5 minutes)

- **Recall:** Review the essential question from Lesson 4: “Why did the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation lead to the creation of the U.S. Constitution? Briefly revisit how students examined the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation and determined which were most likely to cause the drafting of the U. S. Constitution.
- **Connect:** Ask “When something doesn’t work, people usually have two choices: fix it, or replace it with something new. Which do you think is more common?”

Allow a few student responses (broken toys, auto mechanic shops). Explain: “In 1787, American leaders faced this choice about the Articles of Confederation.”

Hook Question:

If a system isn’t working, when does it make more sense to replace it instead of fixing it?

Students turn and talk, then write one sentence.

Review and complete the PREDICT section of Handout 2. Leaders met at the Constitutional Convention to revise the Articles of Confederation—but ended up creating a new Constitution.

Predictive Question:

Why do you think the delegates decided that fixing the Articles was not enough?

(Optional sentence frame: *I think the delegates decided to replace the Articles because...*)

Vocabulary Instruction (10 minutes)

Direct Instruction: Introduce key terms using context and student-friendly definitions connected to the Lesson 5 text (*The Constitutional Convention: Building a Stronger America*)

- **Delegates:** People chosen to speak and make decisions for others.
- **Objective:** A goal or purpose.
- **Compromise:** An agreement where everyone gives up something.
- **Ratification:** The process of officially approving a plan or law.
- **Checks and balances:** A system where parts of government watch and limit each other.

Teacher Note: The terms **sovereignty** (Lesson 4) and **consent** (Lesson 3) were taught previously and may be briefly reviewed as needed.

Paragraph	Word	How it Will be Taught	Student-Friendly Definition
4	Delegates	Context – The text defines the word directly with dashes: <i>Delegates—leaders chosen to represent their states...</i>	People chosen to speak and make decisions for others.
5	Objective	Context – The text introduces the term in a clear explanatory sentence: <i>The first objective was to create a stronger national government...</i> Word Parts: <i>ob-</i> = toward; <i>ject</i> = throw; <i>-ive</i> = having the quality of. Literal meaning: “to throw toward.” Students will connect this to aiming at a goal.	A goal or purpose.
6	Compromise	Context: The text defines the word directly with dashes: <i>“The delegates worked toward a compromise—an agreement where everyone gives up a little...”</i> Word Parts: <i>com-</i> = together; <i>promise</i> = promise. Literal meaning: “to promise together.” Students will connect this to meeting in the middle.	An agreement where everyone gives up something.
7	Checks and balances	Context: The text defines the concept through explanation: <i>This system of checks and balances helped make sure the new</i>	A system where parts of government watch and limit each other.

		<i>government would not act like King George III...</i>	
8	Ratification	Context: The text defines the word directly with dashes: <i>“Finally, the delegates wanted a Constitution that could be ratified—approved by the states...”</i>	The process of officially approving a plan or law.

Vocabulary Word Sort: Ideas and Systems

Goals: objective, compromise, consent

Tools: delegates, ratification, checks and balances, sovereignty

Discussion prompt:

Which words describe ideas the delegates cared about, and which describe systems they created to make those ideas work?

Reading and Text Coding (30 minutes)

Reading #1: Categorizing and Connecting (15 minutes)

Text Coding: Students read the text *“The 1787 Constitutional Convention: Building a Stronger America”* and use three codes to mark sections:

- **P: Problem** (failures under the Articles of Confederation)
- **O: Objective** (goals of the delegates)
- **S: Solution** (how the Constitution addressed problems)

Teacher Modeling: Model coding for paragraphs 1 and 2:

Mark **P** where the text explains weaknesses of the Articles, such as:

- Congress having no executive to enforce laws
- Congress lacking power to tax or regulate trade
- The difficulty of amending the Articles

Mark **O** where the text explains what the delegates wanted to accomplish, such as:

- Creating a stronger national government
- Protecting liberty while preventing abuse of power
- Balancing state sovereignty with national unity

Mark **S** where the text explains how the Constitution addressed these problems, such as:

- Creating an executive branch
- Giving Congress power to tax and regulate trade
- Establishing checks and balances
- Making amendment possible with three-fourths approval

Suggestion for teacher modeling: “Notice how the text first reminds us of the problems under the Articles. The delegates didn’t meet randomly—they met because something wasn’t working. Each objective they had connects directly to one of those problems. And each solution in the Constitution responds to a specific weakness.”

Independent Practice: Students continue coding the remaining paragraphs using **P / O / S**, citing paragraph numbers.

Encourage students to look for patterns:

- Do the objectives directly respond to earlier problems?
- Does each solution clearly connect to a weakness?
- Where does the text show balance between power and liberty?

Reading #2: Directed Note-Taking (15 minutes, Handout #3)

Guiding Question: What objectives guided the delegates at the Constitutional Convention, and how did those objectives shape the U.S. Constitution?

Handout 3 Graphic Organizer: Students use their coded text (P / O / S) to complete a chart showing the key objectives of the Constitutional Convention and how those objectives shaped the design of the U.S. Constitution.

Reminder for Students: In 1787, delegates met at the Constitutional Convention to improve the national government. They entered the convention with clear objectives:

- Create a stronger national government
- Balance power between states and the national government
- Prevent abuse of power
- Create a system that could be ratified and last

As you complete this chart:

- Use evidence from the text (with paragraph numbers).
- Explain why each objective mattered at the time.
- Identify how the Constitution addressed that objective.

You will use this chart to support your debate and final written response.

Objective of the Convention	Evidence (Paragraph #)	Why This Objective Mattered	How the Constitution Addressed It
Create a stronger national government (Sample row)	2, 4 (The text explains that Congress could not tax, regulate trade, or enforce laws under the Articles.)	Without enough national power, the government could not solve problems like debt, trade disputes, or foreign pressure. The country appeared weak and divided.	The Constitution gave Congress the power to tax, regulate interstate trade, raise an army, and enforce federal laws through an executive branch.
Balance power between states			
Prevent abuse of power			
Create a system that could be ratified and last			

Teacher Note:

These four objectives are directly supported by the text and reflect the major design priorities of the Constitutional Convention. Together, they help students see that the Constitution was intentionally structured to create strength, balance, protection, and durability.

Extended Text Discussion (20 minutes, Handout #3)

Partner Share and Preparation (5 minutes)

- **Question:** “Which objective of the Constitutional Convention do you think played the largest role in helping the U.S. Constitution last over time, and why?”
- **Task (Handout #3):** Partners select one objective and identify **two pieces** of evidence from the text (with paragraph numbers) showing why they believe this objective played a major role in creating a durable system of government.

Remind students:

All objectives were important. Your task is to defend which one you believe had the greatest long-term impact—using evidence.

Whole-Class Discussion: The Foundation (15 minutes)

- **Focus:** Pairs present their arguments, explaining which objective they believe played the largest role in helping the Constitution endure and why.
 - **Teacher Facilitation:**
 - **Presentations:** Groups argue for their chosen objective, citing paragraph numbers.
 - **Teacher prompts:** “Why do you believe this objective mattered most?” “How does your objective connect to the others?” “Would the Constitution have lasted if this objective were missing?” “How did compromise influence this objective?”
 - **Synthesis:** Guide students to recognize that the Constitution lasted not because of one objective alone, but because the delegates worked to strengthen national power, balance authority, prevent abuse, and create a system that could be ratified. These objectives worked together. The debate helps us understand which design feature students believe had the strongest long-term impact.
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Final Written Response and Closure (15 minutes)

Handout #2: Final Written Response (12 minutes)

Writing Prompt: Which objective of the Constitutional Convention do you think played the largest role in helping the U.S. Constitution last over time?

Instructions:

Write a well-developed paragraph that:

- Clearly states which objective they believe was most influential.
- Acknowledges that other objectives were also important.
- Uses at least TWO pieces of textual evidence (with paragraph numbers).
- Explains how the Constitution addressed the objective.
- Explains how this contributed to long-term durability.

Closure (3 minutes)

Turn-and-Talk:

“Why was compromise necessary for the Constitution to succeed?”

Optional follow-up prompt if needed:

“How did compromise help the Constitution balance strength and fairness?”

Exit Ticket:

“Write one sentence explaining how one objective of the Constitutional Convention helped the Constitution last over time.”

Handout #1

The 1787 Constitutional Convention: Building a Stronger America

When something is broken, you have two choices: you can try to fix it, or you can replace it with something new. After the colonies won their independence in the Revolutionary War, the new states formed an agreement called the Articles of Confederation. It allowed each state to keep most of its own power while still working together when needed, especially when it came to foreign affairs. Over time, however, the founders realized the Articles were too weak to solve national problems or keep the states united. You could say, they were broken.

In 1787, leaders from 12 states (Rhode Island didn't come) met in Philadelphia at the Constitutional Convention to address these issues. Congress had convened the group "for the sole and express purpose of revising the Articles of Confederation." But once the delegates began discussing solutions, they quickly realized that simple changes would not be enough. They began creating a new plan for government. Let's explore the Constitutional Convention, using new words like delegates, compromise, and ratification to understand why it was so important.

Under the Articles, the national government was too weak. It couldn't collect taxes, so it had no money to pay debts or keep an army. It couldn't regulate trade, so states fought over business rules. Changing the Articles was nearly impossible because all 13 states had to agree to amend them. Events like Shays' Rebellion in 1786, where farmers in Massachusetts fought to stop debt collection, showed that the government couldn't protect citizens' rights or keep order.

Delegates—leaders chosen to represent their states, like George Washington and Alexander Hamilton—knew a stronger system was needed. They began by debating amendments to the Articles, but by the end of the first week, *The Virginia Plan* was introduced. Written by James Madison, this was a proposal for a whole new government with a stronger Congress, an executive, and a system of courts.

The first objective was to create a stronger national government—one that could truly unite the states. Under the Articles, the Congress had little authority, and there was no executive branch (like a president) to enforce laws or national courts to settle disputes. When states argued over land or trade, there was no reliable way to make fair decisions. The delegates wanted a government that could collect taxes, raise an army, and regulate trade so the country could function smoothly, and citizens could enjoy greater stability and opportunity.

Another objective was to balance power between the national government and the states. The delegates believed in popular sovereignty—the idea that the government's authority comes from the people. They wanted a system where states still make their own laws, but the national

government had enough power to act when the whole country needed it. Large states like Virginia supported a stronger national government, while smaller states like New Jersey feared it would take away their voice. The delegates worked toward a compromise—an agreement where everyone gives up a little to get something better—so all states would agree to the new government.

A third objective was to make a government that balanced power and prevented abuse. The delegates wanted different parts of the government—like Congress, the president, and courts—to check each other so no single part could become too powerful. For example, if Congress passed a law that wasn't fair, the president could veto it, or courts could interpret the law and decide how it should be applied. This system of checks and balances helped make sure the new government would not act like King George III, who had ignored the colonists' rights.

Finally, the delegates wanted a Constitution that could be ratified—approved by the states—and last for a long time. Unlike the Articles, which needed all 13 states to agree to changes, they wanted a system where amending the rules was easier but still careful. They decided that nine states needed to ratify the new Constitution for it to become the law, and future changes would require three-fourths of the states. This made the government flexible but stable, so citizens could solve problems and keep the country running smoothly.

Writing a new Constitution was not easy. Delegates at the convention, like James Madison, who wrote many ideas for the Constitution, and George Washington, who led the meetings, argued a lot to find compromises. By September 1787, they finished the Constitution, which created a stronger government with a Congress to make laws, a president to enforce them, and courts to keep things fair. It wasn't perfect—some delegates worried it gave the national government too much power—but it was a huge step toward a united country.

For fifth graders like you, the Constitutional Convention shows how important it is to work together, to debate ideas, and to compromise for a common good. Today, you practice similar skills when you vote for class leaders, share your ideas, or cooperate and solve problems with friends and classmates. The Constitution, with its structure and separated powers, helps protect your unalienable rights. As a citizen, you're part of this big plan to keep America strong and free. How will you help make sure our government stays fair for everyone?

Handout #2

Shaping Your Written Response

PREDICT—

In this lesson, you will learn that delegates at the Constitutional Convention had specific objectives. They wanted to design a government that could solve national problems, protect rights, and last over time.

Before writing, think:

If a government is too weak, it cannot solve problems. If a government is too strong, it can abuse power. How might delegates try to balance these concerns when creating a new Constitution?

Predict:

Which objective of the Constitutional Convention do you think played the largest role in helping the U.S. Constitution last over time—and why?

Use the sentence frame to help you:

I predict that the objective that helped the Constitution last was

_____ because _____.

Write your prediction below:

FINAL WRITTEN RESPONSE —

Writing Prompt

Which objective of the Constitutional Convention do you think played the largest role in helping the U.S. Constitution last over time?

Instructions

Write a well-developed paragraph that:

- Identifies ONE objective of the Constitutional Convention (Create a stronger national government, balance power between states and the national government, prevent abuse of power, or create a system that could be ratified and last).
- Explains why you think this objective played the largest role in helping the Constitution last.

Handout #3

Directed Note-Taking Graphic Organizer

Directions: Use your coded text to complete this chart showing how the objectives of the Constitutional Convention shaped the design of the U.S. Constitution. Record evidence from each paragraph of the text to complete the chart.

Remember: In 1787, delegates met at the Constitutional Convention with clear goals. They wanted to strengthen the national government, balance power, prevent abuse of authority, and create a system that could be ratified and last. These objectives guided the design of the Constitution. You will use this chart to support your debate and final written response.

Objective of the Convention	Evidence (Paragraph #)	Why This Objective Mattered	How the Constitution Addressed It
Create a stronger national government			
Balance power between states and the national government			
Prevent abuse of power			
Create a system that could be ratified and last			