



Grade 5 Lesson Plan #7: The Great Debate— Federalists vs. Anti-Federalists

Teacher Notes

This lesson builds directly on Lesson 6, where students examined how delegates at the Constitutional Convention resolved major conflicts through compromise in order to create the Constitution. However, creating the Constitution was only the first step. The states still had to decide whether they would ratify the new system of government. During the ratification process, two major groups emerged:

- Federalists, who supported ratifying the Constitution and believed the country needed a stronger national government.
- Anti-Federalists, who opposed ratification because they feared the Constitution gave too much power to the national government and did not adequately protect individual rights.

Students analyze arguments from both sides of the ratification debate and examine how Americans disagreed about the balance between government power and individual liberty. Students identify Federalist arguments supporting ratification and Anti-Federalist arguments opposing ratification and explain why these arguments were important during the ratification debate. Federalist arguments in support of ratification were often expressed in essays known as the Federalist Papers, written by leaders such as James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay. Anti-Federalist arguments were expressed in speeches, essays, and debates in state ratifying conventions. The lesson emphasizes constitutional reasoning and evidence-based argument rather than memorization of isolated historical facts.

Materials:

Highlighters or pencils for text coding

Text

- Handout #1: Federalists vs. Anti-Federalists: The Big Debate Over the Constitution

Handouts

- Handout #2: Shaping Your Written Response
- Handout #3: Directed Note-Taking Graphic Organizer
- Handout #4: Video Notes and Debate Organizer

Preparation:

Number paragraphs in the Lesson 7 reading text.

Review previously taught vocabulary (Ratify, Compromise, Popular Sovereignty, Checks and Balances)

Prepare vocabulary cards for the Linear Array activity.

Prepare argument cards for the Evidence Sorting Activity.

Prepare Linear Array terms (Conflict → Faction → Debate → Compromise → Ratify)

Be prepared to connect this lesson to:

- Lesson 4 (Weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation)
- Lesson 5 (Objectives of the Constitutional Convention)
- Lesson 6 (Compromises at the Convention)

Standards Alignment

Florida Grade 5 Civics Literacy Standard **SS.5.CG.1.2**: Students explain how and why the U.S. government was created by the Constitution and how debate and compromise shaped the final system of government. **Clarification 4**: Students will identify Federalist and Anti-Federalist arguments supporting and opposing ratification of the U.S. Constitution.

Essential Question

How did Federalist and Anti-Federalist arguments shape the debate over ratifying the Constitution?

Opening (20–25 minutes, Handout #2)

Review and Hook (5 minutes)

Teacher Prompt:

"Last lesson we learned how delegates at the Constitutional Convention made compromises in order to create the Constitution."

"However, writing the Constitution was only the first step. The states still had to decide whether they would ratify the new government."

"The Constitution was created through compromise at the Constitutional Convention. It was accepted through debate during the ratification process."

Explain:

"Some Americans believed the Constitution created a stronger government that could solve national problems. Others worried that the government might become too powerful and threaten people's freedoms."

"This disagreement led to one of the most important debates in American history."

Hook Question:

Imagine your school is writing a new rule book.

Would you rather:

- have one principal make the rules for every classroom to keep things consistent?

or

- allow each teacher to decide rules for their own classroom based on their students?

Which do you think is more important:

- a strong central authority

or

- local control?

Explain your reasoning to your partner.

Vocabulary Instruction (10–12 minutes)

Step 1: Review Previously Taught Terms

The following terms were introduced in earlier lessons:

- Ratify
- Compromise
- Popular Sovereignty
- Checks and Balances

Teacher Note: Do not fully reteach these. Ask students to recall definitions and provide examples from earlier lessons. Suggested prompt: “Where have we seen this word before? What problem was it connected to?”

Step 2: New/Reinforced Terms

- **Federalism** – A system in which power is shared between the national government and the states.
- **Tyranny** – When a government becomes too powerful and acts unfairly.
- **Faction** – A group of people with shared interests that may compete for influence.
- **Sovereignty** – The authority of a government to rule itself.

Teacher Prompt:

Why might people worry about tyranny if a government becomes too powerful?

Vocabulary Linear Array (5 minutes)

Purpose: Help students understand how political disagreement can lead to agreement in a democracy.

Create a continuum on the board:

Disapprove ←————→ **Approve**

Place the vocabulary terms along the line based on how close they are to agreement or approval.

- Conflict
- Faction
- Debate
- Compromise
- Ratify

Discuss:

Where would faction appear on this line?

Why is debate necessary before compromise?

Can something be ratified without debate first?

Key Idea: Democracies do not eliminate disagreement. They use debate and compromise to reach agreement.

Reading and Text Coding (30 minutes)

Reading #1: Categorizing and Connecting (15 minutes)

Text Coding: Students read the text “Federalists vs. Anti-Federalists: The Big Debate Over the Constitution” and use two codes to mark sections:

- **F:** Federalist argument supporting ratification of the Constitution
- **A:** Anti-Federalist argument opposing ratification of the Constitution

Teacher Modeling: Model coding for paragraph 1, marking:

- **F** where the text notes arguments supporting ratification
- **A** where the text notes argument opposing ratification

Independent Practice: Students continue coding the remaining paragraphs using **F / A**, citing paragraph numbers.

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

Guiding Question: What were the main arguments for and against ratifying the Constitution?

Handout #3 Graphic Organizer: Students record evidence using their coded text (F/A) and paragraph numbers and identify whether the argument reflects a Federalist or Anti-Federalist position.

Students classify evidence into four categories:

| Paragraph # | Evidence from Text | Category |
|-------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| | | National Stability |
| | | State Power |
| | | Individual Rights |
| | | Prevention of Tyranny |

Reminder for Students: Encourage students to connect arguments to larger concerns about government power and liberty.

Evidence Sorting Activity (5 minutes)

Students analyze several argument statements. For each statement students determine:

- whether the argument reflects a Federalist or Anti-Federalist position.
- which category the argument fits.

Argument Statements

1. The national government under the Articles of Confederation was too weak to solve problems between states. (Federalist — National Stability)
2. A powerful national government might ignore the needs of individual states. (Anti-Federalist — State Power)
3. The Constitution should clearly protect freedoms like speech and religion. (Anti-Federalist — Individual Rights)
4. The new government needed power to regulate trade and protect the country. (Federalist — National Stability)
5. Without limits, government leaders could become tyrannical. (Anti-Federalist — Prevention of Tyranny)

Discussion Prompt: Which concerns appear most often in these arguments?

Video Segment (10 minutes)

Video: [Federalism — National Constitution Center](#)

Teacher Note: Watch this short video explaining federalism and how power is divided between national and state governments.

Students complete Handout #4.

Questions:

1. How does federalism divide power between the national government and the states?
2. Why did Federalists believe sharing power between national and state governments would strengthen the country?

Students add new evidence to their notes.

Extended Text Discussion (20 minutes, Handout #4)

Partner Share and Preparation (5 minutes)

- *Question:* “Which argument was more important during the ratification debate: the Federalists' argument that the country needed a stronger national government OR the Anti-Federalists' argument that the Constitution gave too much power to the national government?”
- *Task (Handout #4):* Students prepare arguments using textual evidence and identify the category of each argument. **Required:** Two pieces of evidence with paragraph numbers.

Whole-Class Discussion: Nation vs. State (15 minutes)

- **Focus:** Groups present their arguments, explaining which argument they feel was most important during the ratification debate.
- **Teacher prompts:**
 - Why did Federalists believe a stronger national government was necessary?
 - Why were Anti-Federalists concerned about government power?
 - Earlier compromises at the Constitutional Convention—such as the Great Compromise and the Three-Fifths Compromise—showed how deeply divided the states were. Those divisions continued to shape the debate over whether the Constitution should be ratified.
 - Guide students to recognize that Americans disagreed about how to balance national power and individual liberty.

Final Written Response and Closure (15 minutes, Handout #2)

Writing Prompt: Which argument was more convincing during the ratification debate: the Federalists' support for a stronger national government OR the Anti-Federalists' concern about too much government power?

Instructions:

Write a well-developed paragraph that:

- identifies both groups and their main goals.
- uses two pieces of textual evidence (with paragraph numbers).
- explains why one argument was more convincing during the ratification debate.

Sentence Starters:

The Federalists believed...

The Anti-Federalists argued...

For example, paragraph ___ explains...

This argument was important because...

Closure (5 minutes)

Display the unit progression:

Weak Government → Convention → Compromise → Debate → Ratification

Explain: The Constitution was created through compromise at the Constitutional Convention, but it was accepted through debate during ratification. Federalists and Anti-Federalists disagreed about how much power the national government should have.

Turn-and-Talk: Why are disagreements sometimes important when a country is making important decisions?

Exit Ticket: "Why did some Americans support ratifying the Constitution while others opposed it?"

Handout # 1—Federalists vs. Anti-Federalists: The Big Debate Over the Constitution

At the Constitutional Convention in 1787, the delegates drafted a new form of government, but this was only the first step to forming a “more perfect union.” The Constitution was drafted, but it would not go into place until nine states ratified it. That’s when the debate moved from the convention hall in Philadelphia to newspapers, town meetings, and state houses. Two main camps formed in support of (Federalists) and against (Anti-Federalists) the ratification of the Constitution. Their arguments—reasons for or against something—shaped how American’s thought about government and citizens’ rights. Let’s explore what the Federalists and Anti-Federalists believed, using new words like federalism, tyranny, and faction to see how their debate shaped America’s views on government.

Who Were the Federalists?

The Federalists were people who supported the Constitution. Leaders like James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay wrote essays called *The Federalist Papers* to explain why the Constitution was great. They believed in federalism, a system where power is shared between a strong national government and the states. They wanted to fix the problems of the Articles of Confederation, such as the lack of a strong national government, and create a system that balanced power between states and citizens.

Federalist Arguments

1. **Stronger National Government:** The Federalists argued that the Articles of Confederation made the national government too weak. It couldn’t tax, regulate trade, or keep order. The Constitution created a stronger Congress to make laws, an executive (president) to enforce them, and courts to settle disputes. This would protect citizens’ rights by keeping the country safe and united.
2. **Checks and Balances:** Federalists said the Constitution’s checks and balances would prevent tyranny—when one leader or group gets too much power, like King George III. For example, the president could veto bad laws, Congress could override the veto, and courts could check both. This ensured no one could take away unalienable rights.
3. **Representation for All:** The Federalists supported the Great Compromise, which created a bicameral Congress with a House (based on population) and a Senate (equal for each state). They argued this gave every citizen fair representation through popular sovereignty—power from the people’s consent.
4. **Handling Factions:** Federalists, especially Madison, worried about factions—groups with different interests that could cause fights, like farmers versus merchants. The

Federalists said a strong national government could control factions by balancing everyone's needs, protecting the pursuit of happiness for all citizens.

Who Were the Anti-Federalists?

The Anti-Federalists were people who opposed the Constitution, fearing it gave the national government too much power. Leaders like Patrick Henry and George Mason didn't write as many essays, but their arguments were strong in state debates. They wanted to protect state sovereignty—the power of states to govern themselves—and worried about losing individual freedoms.

Anti-Federalist Arguments

1. **Too Much National Power:** Anti-Federalists argued the Constitution made the national government so strong it could act like a king, leading to tyranny. For example, they feared the president or Congress could ignore state laws or tax citizens unfairly, threatening their liberty.
2. **No Bill of Rights:** The Constitution didn't list specific protections for unalienable rights, like freedom of speech or religion. Anti-Federalists said this was dangerous because the government could take these rights away without clear rules. They wanted a Bill of Rights to keep citizens safe.
3. **Weak State Sovereignty:** Anti-Federalists accepted that there was some role for national government but wanted states to remain the primary source of authority, as in the Articles of Confederation. They argued that states knew their citizens' needs better, like local farmers or shopkeepers, and should keep sovereignty to protect their pursuit of happiness.
4. **Fear of Factions:** Like Federalists, Anti-Federalists worried about factions, but they thought a strong national government would amplify the power of rich or organized groups (like merchants) over regular people. They believed smaller state governments could better protect everyone's rights equally.

How the Debate Ended

The Federalists and Anti-Federalists argued in state conventions from 1787 to 1788. To win over Anti-Federalists, Federalists promised to add a Bill of Rights after ratification. This compromise convinced enough states to ratify the Constitution by 1788, and the Bill of Rights was added in 1791, protecting freedoms like speech and religion. The debate showed how federalism balanced national and state power, ensuring citizens' unalienable rights were safe.

For fifth graders like you, this debate teaches that listening to different ideas makes a stronger country. The Federalists' push for a strong government and the Anti-Federalists' demand for a Bill of Rights gave us a Constitution that protects your right to speak freely (liberty), live safely (life), and chase your dreams (pursuit of happiness).

Handout #2: Shaping Your Written Response

Writing Prompt

Which argument was more convincing during the ratification debate: the Federalists' support for a stronger national government OR the Anti-Federalists' concern about too much government power?

Your Task:

Write a well-developed paragraph that:

- identifies both groups and their main ideas,
 - uses two pieces of evidence from the text (include paragraph numbers), and
 - explains why one argument was more convincing.
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Step 1: Plan Your Response

Which side do you think made the stronger argument?

Federalists Anti-Federalists

Step 2: Gather Your Evidence

Reason 1: _____

Evidence (Paragraph #): _____

Reason 2: _____

Evidence (Paragraph #): _____

Step 3: Write Your Paragraph

Use the space below to write your response.

Sentence Starters (Optional)

The Federalists believed...

The Anti-Federalists argued...

For example, paragraph ___ explains...

This argument was more convincing because...

Handout #3: Directed Note-Taking Graphic Organizer

Guiding Question: What were the main arguments for and against ratifying the Constitution?

Directions: As you read, record evidence from the text.

- Consider whether each example is a **Federalist (F)** or **Anti-Federalist (A)** argument
- Include the **paragraph number**
- Place each argument in the correct category

Notes Organizer

| Paragraph # | Evidence from Text | Category |
|-------------|--------------------|------------------------------|
| | | National Stability |
| | | State Power |
| | | Individual Rights |
| | | Prevention of Tyranny |

Categories (What Do They Mean?)

National Stability: Arguments about keeping the country safe, organized, and united

State Power: Arguments about the role and authority of individual states

Individual Rights: Arguments about protecting people's freedoms

Prevention of Tyranny: Arguments about limiting government power

Think About It:

Which category appears most often in your notes?

Why do you think that concern was so important during the ratification debate?

Handout #4: Video Notes and Debate Organizer

Part 1: Video Notes

Video: Federalism — National Constitution Center

Directions

As you watch the video, answer the questions below.

1. How does federalism divide power between the national government and the states?

2. Why did Federalists believe sharing power between national and state governments would strengthen the country?

Part 2: Evidence Sorting

Directions

Read each statement below.

- Decide whether it is a **Federalist (F)** or **Anti-Federalist (A)** argument
- Identify the **category** that best matches the argument

| Statement | F or A | Category |
|--|--------|-----------------------|
| The national government under the Articles of Confederation was too weak to solve problems between states. | | National Stability |
| A powerful national government might ignore the needs of individual states. | | State Power |
| The Constitution should clearly protect freedoms like speech and religion. | | Individual Rights |
| The new government needed power to regulate trade and protect the country. | | National Stability |
| Without limits, government leaders could become tyrannical. | | Prevention of Tyranny |

Part 3: Debate Preparation

Debate Question

Which argument was more important during the ratification debate:

- the Federalists' argument that the country needed a stronger national government

OR

- the Anti-Federalists' argument that the Constitution gave too much power to the national government?

Directions

Use your notes and evidence to prepare your argument.

You must include **two pieces of evidence** with paragraph numbers.

Your Argument

Which side are you choosing?

Federalists

Anti-Federalists

Reason 1: _____

Evidence (Paragraph #): _____

Category: _____

Reason 2: _____

Evidence (Paragraph #): _____

Category: _____

Be Ready to Explain

Why is your argument stronger?
