

Lesson 7: The Great Debate— Federalists vs. Anti-Federalists

Teacher Version

Essential Question

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

Lesson Bridge

Review Lesson 6:

- Delegates at the Constitutional Convention resolved major conflicts through compromise in order to create the Constitution.
- Delegates had different ideas about representation and power.

Bridge Question:

- Creating the Constitution was only the first step. The states still had to decide whether they would ratify the new system of government. Today, we ask: What was the big debate over the constitution?

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?

Key Vocabulary

Step 1: Review Previously Taught Terms

The following terms were introduced in earlier lessons:

Compromise (Lesson 1)

Popular Sovereignty (Lesson 2)

Checks and Balances (Lesson 5)

Ratify (Lesson 5)

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?”

Key Vocabulary (continued)

Step 2: New/Reinforced Terms

Paragraph	Word	How it Will be Taught	Student-Friendly Definition
2	Federalism	Context: Introduced as the system Federalists supported to balance power between national and state governments	A system where power is shared between a national government and the states
3	Tyranny	Context: Taught through Anti-Federalist concerns about a powerful government becoming too strong	When a government has too much power and acts unfairly
4	Faction	Context: Explained through Federalist concerns about groups with competing interests influencing government	A group of people with shared interests that may compete for power
5	Sovereignty	Context: Introduced through Anti-Federalist arguments about protecting state power and local control	The power or authority of a state or group to govern itself

Vocabulary Activity

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?

Text Coding Guide

P = Federalist argument supporting ratification of the Constitution

A = Anti-Federalist argument opposing ratification of the Constitution

- Students read and code the text.
- Teacher models paragraph 1.
- Students complete remaining paragraphs.

Directed Note-Taking Graphic Organizer:

Students track how compromises shaped the Constitution

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

Reminder: 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

- The national government under the Articles of Confederation was too weak to solve problems between states. (**Federalist**—National Stability)
- A powerful national government might ignore the needs of individual states. (**Anti-Federalist**—State Power)
- The Constitution should clearly protect freedoms like speech and religion. (**Anti-Federalist**—Individual Rights)
- The new government needed power to regulate trade and protect the country. (**Federalist**—National Stability)
- 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:

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

Students add new evidence to their notes.

Partner Preparation

- **Prompt:** “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?”

Students prepare arguments using textual evidence and identify the category of each argument. Two pieces of evidence with paragraph numbers are required.

Group Discussion

Prompt: “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?”

Students defend their position using text evidence in a whole class discussion.

- **Focus:** Groups present their arguments, explaining which argument they feel was most important during the ratification debate.

Group Discussion (continued)

- *Teacher prompts:*

- Why did the 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 Writing Prompt

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?*

Students must:

- Identify both groups and their main goals.
- Use at least TWO pieces of textual evidence.
- Explain why one argument was more convincing during the ratification debate.

Closure

- ***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?”