

2. How the Founders Got It Done | Lesson Plan

Why was compromise necessary to keep the United States from breaking apart after the Revolutionary War?

Students will understand that the United States nearly fell apart after the Revolutionary War, and that the Constitution was created because compromise was necessary to replace a weak government with one strong enough to unite the states while still protecting freedom.

Learning Objectives:

- Explain why the Articles of Confederation failed to create a strong, unified national government.
- Analyze how different forms of government struggle to respond to crises without compromise or balanced power.
- Describe the stakes facing the Founders if the Constitutional Convention failed.
- Evaluate how compromise helped the delegates move forward instead of allowing the nation to break apart.
- Apply lessons from the Constitutional Convention by proposing changes that would strengthen a failing government system.

Key Vocabulary:

- **Articles of Confederation:** A form of national government created after the American Revolution that gave most power to the states and left the central government too weak to unite the country or solve major problems.
- **Constitutional Convention:** A formal meeting of delegates held in Philadelphia in 1787, where representatives from the states gathered to address the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation and create a new Constitution.
- **Compromise:** A method of decision-making in which opposing sides each give up part of what they want in order to reach an agreement that allows progress to continue.
- **Delegate:** A representative chosen by a group or state to speak, debate, and vote on its behalf at an official meeting or convention.
- **Unity:** A condition of political cooperation in which separate groups or states act together as one nation rather than pursuing only their own interests.

Educational Standards: CCRA.R.7, CCRA.W.2, CCRA.W.4, CCRA.W.9, CCRA.L.1, CCRA.L.2, CCRA.L.4, CCRA.SL.1, CCRA.SL.2

Academic Subject Areas: US Constitution, US History

What You'll Need

- Video: History in 5: *The Constitution Explained: How the Founders Got it Done* (Watch [Here](#))



Scan to watch episode:

- Worksheet: History in 5: *The Constitution Explained: How the Founders Got it Done* (Click [Here](#))
- Supplies: Paper, pencil, timer

Lesson Plan (45-55 minutes)

Warm Up: (6-7 minutes)

1. Briefly review *Lesson 1: What Is a Republic?* with students. Ask students to remember one problem their government system had and what the Founders hoped to accomplish by making America a republic.
2. Begin today's lesson with this prompt (display on the board or read aloud): If a government cannot solve problems or handle emergencies, what might happen to the country?
3. Call on 2-3 students. Write short responses on the board. (Key idea to surface: Good intentions are not enough—governments fail when their systems cannot handle disagreement, mistakes, or emergencies.)
4. Discuss the necessity of the government to have systems in place that can handle emergencies, protect human dignity, and support unity without falling apart.
5. Explain that today's lesson will examine a moment in American history when leaders faced this exact problem—and had to decide whether the country would break apart or find a way forward.

Government Scenario: Crisis Activity (10-12 minutes)

1. Place students back into their Lesson 1 groups.
2. Assign each group a crisis scenario from the **Government Crisis Scenarios** (last page of the lesson plan), ensuring the scenario matches their assigned government system.
3. After students read their crisis, distribute the worksheet (one per student) and direct them to complete the "**Crisis! Can Your Government Handle It?**" section.
4. Teacher notes for this section: If students get stuck, help with these questions:
 - **Dictatorship:** Can anyone safely tell the ruler the plan isn't working?
 - **Absolute Monarchy:** What rule decides who becomes king if the king is gone?
 - **Oligarchy:** Who benefits from the decision—and who has no voice?
 - **Theocracy:** What happens if people disagree with religious leaders?
 - **Communist Government:** How can the system correct mistakes if people can't speak openly?
 - **Direct Democracy:** What happens when everyone votes, but time runs out?
5. Share Out and Class Comparison: Ask groups to share their crisis briefly and explain what about their government system made it difficult to find a solution for their crisis.
6. Save the other elements of the worksheet until after students have watched the video and received direct instruction.

Founders Purpose: Why did the Articles of Confederation fail? (5-7 minutes)

1. Direct Instruction: Explain why the Constitutional Convention of 1787 was necessary.

- After the Revolutionary War, America tried its first national government, called the Articles of Confederation.
- Under the Articles, the national government was too weak to solve major problems, and many Americans began to feel that the states were not truly united as one nation.
- Congress could not collect taxes, which made it difficult to pay war debts or fund national needs like maintaining roads or providing security.
- States started acting like separate countries. They set their own trade rules, printed their own money, and sometimes treated other states as rivals instead of partners.
- These problems became especially clear during Shays' Rebellion (1786–1787). Struggling farmers in Massachusetts—many of whom had fought in the Revolutionary War—faced heavy debts and the loss of their farms. They shut down courts to stop foreclosures. The national government was powerless to respond, and order had to be restored by the state.
- Leaders feared that if these problems continued, the young republic might collapse, break apart, or be taken over by a strong ruler promising order.
- As a result, leaders met in Philadelphia in 1787 to fix the system—to design a government strong enough to function, but limited enough to protect freedom.

2. Watch the video to see why the Founders met in Philadelphia in 1787, what the stakes were, and how compromise helped them create a stronger government instead of letting the country fall apart. Ask students to watch for the following in the video:

- The problem the United States faced after independence (why the country wasn't working as one nation).
- What made the Constitutional Convention difficult (why agreement was hard).
- The stakes if the Convention failed (what could have happened to the new country).
- What helped the delegates succeed (shared goal, leadership, and willingness to compromise).
- Benjamin Franklin's turning-point suggestion and what happened after it.

Watch and Discuss: (10-15 minutes)

1. Watch ***History in 5: Constitution Explained: How the Founders Got it Done*** uninterrupted.
2. After the video, discuss the following questions to check for understanding and prepare students to complete the worksheet:
 - Why did the Founders believe the country could fall apart if nothing changed?
(Look for: states acting separately / weak national government / no unity.)
 - What was the shared goal that helped the delegates keep working together?
(Look for: create a unified nation / protect freedom for future generations.)
 - How many delegates attended the Convention, and how long did they meet?
(55 delegates; 113 days.)

- Why was agreement at the Convention so difficult? (*Look for: different state interests / deep disagreements / everyone wanted different rules.*)
- What does it mean to compromise—and why was compromise necessary in 1787? (*Look for: giving up part of what you want to keep unity and make progress.*)
- What were the “stakes” if the Convention failed? (*Look for: no country / sacrifice wasted / thirteen weak states / foreign danger.*)
- What subjects helped prepare the delegates to write the Constitution? (*History, science, philosophy, and the Bible/scripture.*)
- What did Benjamin Franklin suggest when everything was falling apart—and what happened after? (*Ask God for help; renewed spirit of compromise; they tried again and succeeded.*)

3. Prepare students for the remaining sections of the worksheet.
4. Allow time for students to complete the rest of the worksheet. Scaffold and differentiate as needed based on student needs.

Wrap Up: (5 minutes)

1. Have students complete an exit ticket or door check (spoken or written):
 - Why did the Founders meet in Philadelphia in 1787?
 - What helped the delegates move forward instead of letting the country break apart?
2. Success Criteria: A strong response should mention that the government under the Articles of Confederation was too weak to hold the states together, and that compromise helped the Founders create a stronger, unified government.
3. Let students know that they'll continue their civilization activity with the next lesson (**Lesson 3: Constitution Explained: What Does Congress Do?**)

Don't have time for a full lesson? Quick Activity (30 minutes)

Distribute one of the **Government Crises Scenarios** slips to each group of students and invite them to complete the **Crisis! Can Your Government Handle It?** section of the *How the Founders Got it Done Worksheet*. Then, watch the video "How the Founders Got it Done" and discuss it as a class.

Government Crises Scenarios

Note: Government systems were assigned in Lesson 1. Students should use their assigned government system for this lesson as well. Scenarios are broad and meant for analysis and discussion.

Dictatorship – A plant disease spreads through the fields, destroying much of the food supply. The ruler quickly orders that all remaining food be collected by the government and redistributed equally. At first, the plan seems organized. Soon, some towns receive too little food, others receive too much, and problems begin to grow. Some advisors believe the plan needs to change, but speaking against the ruler is risky.

Question: What makes this crisis hard to solve in your system, and what would have to change to prevent it from happening again?

Absolute Monarchy – The king dies unexpectedly without naming an heir. Several nobles claim the throne, each arguing that they have the right to rule. Supporters begin choosing sides, and disagreements spread across the kingdom. There is no written law explaining how the next ruler should be chosen.

Question: What makes this crisis hard to solve in your system, and what would have to change to prevent it from happening again?

Oligarchy – A long drought reduces food supplies. The ruling families meet to decide what to do with the grain they have stored. Some want to release it to the public, while others want to protect their wealth and keep it for their own households. Ordinary people are affected by the shortage but have no role in the decision.

Question: What makes this crisis hard to solve in your system, and what would have to change to prevent it from happening again?

Theocracy – A severe water shortage threatens crops and daily life. Religious leaders debate what to do. Some argue for building canals or rationing water. Others insist the drought is a punishment and demand stricter religious laws instead. Many citizens disagree with the decision being discussed but fear questioning religious authority.

Question: What makes this crisis hard to solve in your system, and what would have to change to prevent it from happening again?

Communist Government – Food and fuel shortages spread throughout the country. The government controls all supplies and announces that the situation is under control. Citizens see the shortages growing worse, but the media repeats the government's message, and public disagreement is not allowed.

Question: What makes this crisis hard to solve in your system, and what would have to change to prevent it from happening again?

Direct Democracy – A wheat shortage threatens famine. Citizens gather to vote on solutions: rationing food, raising taxes to import grain, or taking supplies from wealthy landowners. Each vote passes by a narrow margin, then is challenged and voted on again. As debates continue, no plan stays in place long enough to solve the problem.

Question: What makes this crisis hard to solve in your system, and what would have to change to prevent it from happening again?