**6 Who Should Have the Power: The People, the States, or the National Government?**

After declaring independence and winning the Revolutionary War, the newly formed United States faced a major challenge: how to build a government strong enough to hold the country together, but not so powerful that it threatened their newfound liberty. The Constitution, written in 1787, was designed to replace the weak Articles of Confederation; however, not everyone agreed with the new plan.

**Federalists** supported the Constitution. They believed a stronger national government was necessary to maintain order, protect the country, and promote economic growth. Leaders like **Alexander Hamilton**, **James Madison**, and **John Jay** argued in favor of the Constitution through essays known as the *Federalist Papers*.

**Anti-Federalists** opposed the Constitution because they feared it would give too much power to the federal government and didn’t do enough to protect individual rights. They worried about the lack of a bill of rights and preferred stronger state governments. Thinkers like **Patrick Henry**, **George Mason**, and **Thomas Jefferson** raised concerns about tyranny and elite control.

This debate shaped the founding of the U.S. and led directly to the addition of the **Bill of Rights**, the first ten amendments to the Constitution.

**Key Terms and Definitions**

| **Term** | **Definition** |
| --- | --- |
| **Federalists** | Supporters of the Constitution who favored a strong central government. |
| **Anti-Federalists** | Opponents of the Constitution who wanted more power for the states and a bill of rights. |
| **The Federalist Papers** | A series of essays defending the Constitution, written by Hamilton, Madison, and Jay under the pseudonym *Publius* |
| **Bill of Rights** | The first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution, guaranteeing individual freedoms. |
| **Ratification** | The formal approval of the Constitution by the states. |

**Active Learning Exercise: Founding Factions – A Constitutional Roleplay**

**Orienting Question:**

*What kind of government protects liberty best, one with a strong central authority, or one that keeps power close to the people?*

**Objective:**

Students will engage in a historical role play to understand the competing viewpoints in the ratification debate.

**Instructions:**

1. **Assign Students Roles:**
   * Half the class will be **Federalists**, the other half **Anti-Federalists**.
   * Optionally, assign specific historical figures (Hamilton, Madison, Henry, Mason, etc.).
2. **Preparation (10–15 minutes):**
   * Provide brief position summaries or quote cards (you can create or ask me to provide them).
   * Students review the Constitution’s structure and prepare their arguments.
     + Federalists argue that the Constitution creates a balanced, effective government.
     + Anti-Federalists argue it lacks safeguards for individual freedoms and centralizes power dangerously.
3. **Debate Setup (15–20 minutes):**
   * Hold a town hall-style debate or mock convention.
   * Suggested questions:
     + Does the Constitution do enough to protect liberty?
     + Should there be a bill of rights?
     + Who should have more power: the states or the national government?
   * Encourage each side to reference specific fears or hopes tied to their views.
4. **Wrap-Up Reflection:**
   * Ask students to write a short response: *“If you lived in 1788, would you have supported the Constitution as written or demanded changes? Why?”*

**Review Questions**

1. What were the main concerns of the Anti-Federalists?
2. How did the Federalists defend the need for a strong central government?
3. What was the purpose of the Federalist Papers?
4. Why was the Bill of Rights added to the Constitution?
5. How do these early debates still shape American politics today?

**Bios:**

**Alexander Hamilton (Federalist)**

**Quote:**  
*"A government ought to contain in itself every power requisite to the full accomplishment of the objects committed to its care..."*  
(*Federalist No. 23*)

**Guiding Question:**  
Why did Hamilton believe the national government needed broad powers?

**James Madison (Federalist)**

**Quote:**  
*"If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary."*  
(*Federalist No. 51*)

**Guiding Question:**  
What does this quote say about Madison’s view of human nature and government?

**John Jay (Federalist)**

**Quote:**  
*"The people of America have been pleased to designate me to discuss the importance of unity... It is not mere opinion, but the experience of ages, that a strong union is our best safeguard."*  
(*Federalist No. 2*)

**Guiding Question:**  
Why did Jay emphasize unity under one national government?

**Patrick Henry (Anti-Federalist)**

**Quote:**  
*"The Constitution is said to have beautiful features; but... they appear to me horribly frightful... Your President may become a king!"*

**Guiding Question:**  
What fears does Henry express about the new Constitution?

**George Mason (Anti-Federalist)**

**Quote:**  
*"There is no declaration of rights... the laws of the general government are to be paramount to the laws and constitutions of the several states."*

**Guiding Question:**  
Why was Mason concerned about the lack of a Bill of Rights?

**Thomas Jefferson (Sympathetic to Anti-Federalists)**

**Quote:**  
*"A bill of rights is what the people are entitled to against every government on earth."*

**Guiding Question:**  
Why did Jefferson believe a bill of rights was essential in any Constitution?