

Have Plans Changed?

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In this lesson, students will compare and contrast the introduction to the Articles of Confederation and the Preamble to the United States Constitution to uncover change over time from 1777-1787 and at least one important principle in the new Constitution.

Concepts Addressed: Change over time (DE History Standard 1 for grades 6-12; DE History Standard 2 for grades 4-5). Popular sovereignty (DE Civics Standard 2 for grades 6-8).

Vocabulary: perpetual, union, tranquility, posterity, welfare.

Procedures

1. Distribute copies of Documents 1 and 2 (below). Ask students to read the excerpts from the two documents.

Document 1: Articles of Confederation

1777

“To all to whom these Presents shall come, we the undersigned Delegates of the States affixed to our Names send greeting.

Articles of Confederation and perpetual Union between the states of New Hampshire, Massachusetts-bay Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia.”

Document 2: Constitution of the United States

1787

“We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”

2. Have students complete **Handout 1: Venn Diagram** by listing the similarities and differences between the two documents.
3. Discuss:
 - a. What are the significant differences between the two documents? (Possible responses...
 - i. Articles based on principle of state sovereignty; Constitution based on idea of popular sovereignty.
 - ii. Articles explicitly note that the Union was meant to be permanent; the Constitution does not state this explicitly.
 - iii. Constitution lists purposes of government, Articles do not).
 - b. In what ways might the documents be used to show significant *changes over time* in the ways that Americans thought about plans of government? [H1] (see responses to prompt a above. Insightful students might also detect signals hinting at the transition from a confederate system to a more national or federal one. Antifederalists were quick to allege that “consolidation” was underway.)
 - c. Explain how the Articles and Constitution are similar or different in terms of how long they were intended to last? [Articles make specific use of the term “perpetual”]
 - d. Might it make a difference is there is no assertion of perpetuity in a plan for government? [possible answers - some might argue that the government can be dissolved, states can withdraw secede, may be more reluctance to change the original plan]
 - e. What do you think the Framers had in mind when they listed “a more perfect Union” as a goal? (open to interpretation but does this relate to hopes for a more enduring government?).
 - f. Should any government exist forever? (opinion)
 - g. Introduce the term “popular sovereignty.” Ask if anyone knows what it means [ultimate political authority rests with the people]. Then ask, “to what extent has this country honored its commitment to the principle of popular sovereignty? Support you answer with evidence.” [have students consider apparently anti-democratic features of our past and current political system such as the original denial of the suffrage to certain groups, powers vested in the Supreme Court, electoral college, appointment of judges, presidential vetoes etc.]
 - h. Who were “We the People” in 1787? Who are “We the People” in 2007? Have “We” changed over time? (largely white male property owners of western European descent v ??? open to some interpretation here)
5. Ask students to list the purposes for which the Constitution was written. Have them scan newspapers to uncover examples of our government actually fulfilling those purposes.
6. Have students rewrite the Preamble in their own language so that it better represents their preferences, changed circumstances, as well as the purposes for which it was written.

Handout 1: Venn Diagram

Articles of Confederation v Preamble to the Constitution

