

Alexander Hamilton and His Opponents Discuss the Executive Branch: A Script and Lesson Plan

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Target Classes for this Lesson:

This lesson could be used with an AP US Government, AP Comparative Government, Civics, AP US History or US History class, but could be used in other courses as well.

Primary Sources Used in this Lesson Include:

Sketches of Members of the Constitutional Convention by William Perce, 1787
Alexander Hamilton: Notes of the Continental Congress, 18 June 1787
Gouverneur Morris: Notes of the Continental Congress, July 1787
Alexander Hamilton to George Washington, 3 July 1787
Caesar No. II, New York Daily Advertiser, 17 October 1787
Publius: The Federalist Papers, Number 57, 19 February 1788
Publius: The Federalist Papers, Number 67, 11 March 1788
Publius: The Federalist Papers, Number 69, 14 March 1788
Publius: The Federalist Papers, Number 70, 15 March 1788
Publius: The Federalist Papers, Number 71, 18 March 1788
Alexander Hamilton Speech in New York Convention, 21 June 1788
George Washington to John Adams, 25 September 1798
Gouverneur Statement at Hamilton's Funeral, 14 July 1804
Gouverneur Morris to Aaron Ogden, 28 December 1805
James Madison Speech at the Virginia Convention, 2 December 1829

Cast

Alexander Hamilton
Moderator
Gouverneur Morris
Gen. George Washington
William Pierce
James Madison

Lesson Objectives:

- Students will be able to understand and explain Alexander Hamilton's speech from during the Constitutional Convention as well as understand and explain the views of those who disagreed with Hamilton's views on the Executive Branch of government in the U.S.
- Students will be able to understand the plusses and minuses of a monarchical system of government in the U.S.

Lesson Plan for this Script (3-4 day lesson)

This lesson should take place within a unit of study of our Founding Fathers and the formation of our Constitution.

I would have my students research Alexander Hamilton and his views on what an executive branch should look like. I would also have them read “The Federalist Papers, Numbers 67, 69, 70 and 71” in small groups and summarize Hamilton’s views on the executive from those documents, which I would have them discuss the next day. I would also have them think about why some may have disagreed with Hamilton on his views during the Convention and why, which I would also have them discuss the next day.

On the second day, I would have them sit either in groups who agree with Hamilton’s ideas and those who do not. I would have each group list their top 5 arguments for their side.

Then, I would ask for volunteers from each side to read the script and act out the arguments (with powdered wigs of course!) Students would take notes during the reading as well.

On the third day, I would have them write down where they felt the opposition made good points and where their argument fell short and discuss as a class. Then, I would ask them to find elements of Hamilton’s ideas in our executive today and ask what they think Hamilton would think of the Presidency today (and those running for the office today) and back up their answers with primary sources.

Questions could also be raised by looking at our more powerful presidents. Was Hamilton right? Do we need more powerful presidents with more executive power at certain times in our history? Why? Why not?

SCRIPT

(Intro Music – “Proud to be an American” – Opening Shot of a man in a powdered wig behind an antique desk.)

Moderator – Good evening and welcome to tonight’s episode of, “What’s Going on in Philly?” The daily show committed to peeking through the silence and closed shutters in The State House in Philadelphia and telling you, the viewers, what our new Constitution is shaping up to look like. Tonight, we turn to the Executive Branch of our new government, which the delegates have been getting into some pretty heated debate as of late. I am anxious to hear what the delegates have to say on this issue. We have some great guests and several reporters from several newspapers here tonight. First, let’s welcome our guest; Alexander Hamilton of New York.

Alexander Hamilton – It is a pleasure to be here to educate your viewers on my views and . . .

Moderator (cutting Hamilton off) I’m sorry Colonel Hamilton. You will have your time to speak after we introduce the other delegates.

Alexander Hamilton – Very good.

Moderator – Our next guest is also a delegate from New York, Governor Morris

Gouverneur Morris – I’m not the governor of New York. My name is Gouverneur.

Moderator – Your name is Gouverneur?

Gouverneur Morris – Yes.

Moderator – My apologies Mr. Morris. Our next guest needs no introduction. His Excellency, General George Washington. General Washington, thank you so much for being here tonight. May I shake your hand sir?

George Washington – No.

Moderator – OK. We also have James Madison of Virginia here.

James Madison – It is an honor to be here.

Moderator – And William Pierce of Georgia.

William Pierce – Good evening and thank you for having me.

Moderator – My pleasure. Now then gentlemen, there has been some debate recently Mr. Hamilton over a six hour speech that you made regarding our new Executive branch of Government that has raised some eyebrows. Can you elaborate on that please?

Alexander Hamilton – Sir, I am more concerned with an effective Constitution than the supposed repugnancy of the people towards it. We will need a strong leader to avoid anarchy, which has been a fear of mine for my entire life. A government cannot exist in a state of anarchy and effectively rule anyone. I have always been . . .

Moderator – Do you propose a monarchy sir? As we have just gotten out of our relationship with King George, I can't imagine that.

Alexander Hamilton – What I proposed was an elective monarchy of a lifelong governor. But it was voted down by my fellow delegates. We need strong leadership and we have seen the chaos that weak government has given us in the past decade. If we fail to create a strong government, I fear we will lose the golden opportunity of rescuing the American Empire from disunion, anarchy and misery.

Moderator – General Washington, what is your opinion of Col. Hamilton's view on strong government?

George Washington – Colonel Hamilton possesses intuitively great judgement in all matters and his qualities are those essential to great military character. He is only thinking of what is best for our nation.

William Pierce – Mr. Hamilton's vanity is at work here. It shadows his normally clear and strong judgement. He presumes to know what is best for everyone.

Alexander Hamilton – (rising) Watch your words sir! As a man of the South, your vanity is well . . .

George Washington – Hamilton, sit down!

Moderator – Mr. Madison, what are your thoughts on what Col. Hamilton said? Is he correct in saying that we need a strong, monarch-like government or could there be another solution here? There has also been criticism of the delegates not listening to the people here.

James Madison – Well . . .

Moderator – Could you stand up sir, so people can see you?

James Madison – I am standing.

Moderator – (embarrassed) Oh. Yes you are. Go on please . . .

James Madison – We need a strong central government, which at the same time bows to the will of the people. In this democratic republic, the people will choose their representatives in Congress and in the Executive, so the will of the people will remain sovereign.

Moderator – Will there be too much power in the new central government?

James Madison – The essence of all government is power; and power lodged in any human's hands will ever be liable to abuse. But, this new Constitution will prevent power from overtaking our government by dividing it among the three branches equally. There is no need to fear an over-powerful executive.

Alexander Hamilton – Agreed, Mr. Madison, but we also cannot put too much trust in the people. I am not attached to the “majesty of the multitude” in all cases. I consider the average citizen very ill qualified to judge for themselves what government type will best suit their peculiar situations, as well as understanding the Science of government, which is not easily understood.

Gouverneur Morris – (at Hamilton) Sir, your “hobby” of monarchical government will not work here. And, your discussion of it will remain on your historical record as a dark stain.

Moderator – Mr. Morris, you disagree with Hamilton's views here? What do you think should be the role of our Executive branch in our new government?

Gouverneur Morris – I believe that Hamilton dislikes this current Constitution. He feels through his study of history that democracies end in tyranny and that our country needs a monarch to rule over the unformed masses of America. Our executive, or magistrate, needs to be a voice of our people and not our king. In our new nation, the magistrate is not the king, but the prime minister. Here, the PEOPLE are the king!

Alexander Hamilton – You have a far higher view of the people than I do sir.

Gouverneur Morris – I do sir. I do indeed.

Moderator – Col. Hamilton, what form of government do you believe would be the best for our new nation?

Alexander Hamilton – I am NOT a monarchist and I wish nothing but success for our new nation. However, I have no scruple in declaring that the British Government is the best in the World and I wonder if anything short of it will do here in America. After my recent speech in Philadelphia, not one delegate has rose up to refute me.

James Madison – We did not want extended discussion and debate on this issue. We were too afraid that your words would alienate the smaller states, who are already afraid of monarchical-type powers in the new government. You would have scared them out of Philadelphia with this sentiment. We need a representative democracy.

Alexander Hamilton – Mr. Madison, it has been observed that a pure democracy if it were practicable would be the most perfect government. Experience has proved that no position is more false than this. The ancient democracies in which the people themselves deliberated never possessed one good feature of government. Their very character was tyranny; their figure deformity. We would be . . .

George Washington – (Interrupting) All this squabbling will be a victory for our enemies if we show we cannot even govern ourselves. The new federal Constitution will balance powers in a way that will benefit the people and the government.

Alexander Hamilton- I worry that our new Constitution will not last. It does not contain the sufficient means or strength to preserve itself. We will lose this form of government as we lost the last one, due to a government which is too weak to govern.

Gouverneur Morris – No sir. I disagree. Through trust in protecting Providence of the Almighty and through the good sense of generations of Americans, we will be successful.

James Madison – Agreed.

George Washington – Agreed.

Alexander Hamilton – Gentlemen, I was one of the first to suggest our present convention and who offered General Washington a seat at this convention to guide us. I have resolved to help to write a new Constitution. I have labored through Annapolis and beyond to do so. I want what is best for the American people in this generation and all the generations to come and I feel my opinions are the best way to do so. I know I may be stubborn, but as an orator, scholar and patriot, I have no equal. And for the love of my country, there is no equal as well. If I could just have a few more hours to explain . . .

(Groans from other delegates)

Moderator – (Interrupting) Well gentlemen, thank you all for being with us tonight and I'm sure you have given our viewers a lot to think about regarding the role of the executive in our new Constitution. I am sure that more consensus and compromise will occur as we form the rest of the document and an easy ratification will take place after. Thank you all for being with us. Good night.

