

Instructions to the Delegates at the Philadelphia Convention of 1787: A Scripted Lesson

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Primary Sources Used to Support the Lesson:

Proceedings and Report of the Commissioners at Annapolis, Maryland, 11-14 September 1786
Virginia Act Authorizing the Election of Delegates, 23 November 1786
New Jersey Resolution Authorizing and Empowering the Delegates, 24 November 1786
Pennsylvania Act Electing and Empowering Delegates, 30 December 1786
Act Authorizing the Election of Delegates (North Carolina), 6 January 1787
Delaware Act Electing and Empowering Delegates, 3 February 1787
Act Electing and Empowering Delegates (Georgia), 10 February 1787
Confederation Congress Calls the Constitutional Convention, 21 February 1787
James Madison Notes of Debates in Congress, 21 February 1787
House Substitute of 7 March for the Resolution of 22 February (Massachusetts)
Assembly and Senate Authorize Election of Delegates (New York), 26-28 February 1787
Act Authorizing Election of the Delegates, (South Carolina), 8 March 1787
Connecticut Act Electing and Empowering Delegates, 17 May 1787
Maryland Act Electing and Empowering Delegates, 26 May 1787
Act Electing and Empowering Delegates (New Hampshire), 27 June 1787
Rhode Island's Reasons for Refusal to Appoint Delegates, 15 September 1787
Protest of the Newport and Providence Deputies, 15 September 1787

Cast (In order of appearance)

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| 1. Narrator | 7. Delaware | 13. South Carolina |
| 2. Annapolis Delegate | 8. Georgia | 14. Connecticut |
| 3. Virginia | 9. Confederation Congress | 15. Maryland |
| 4. New Jersey | 10. James Madison | 16. New Hampshire |
| 5. Pennsylvania | 11. New York | 17. Rhode Island |
| 6. North Carolina | 12. Massachusetts | |

Lesson Objectives:

- Students will identify the charges given to delegates selected to attend the 1787 Constitutional Convention
- Students will explain the original purpose of the Constitutional Convention
- Students will identify differences in perspective
- Students will predict the response when the outcome of the convention does not follow the original instructions given

Procedures:

- 1) The day before the script is used, assign the roles. Ensure that students read over the roles and familiarize themselves with any complicated words.
- 2) Teacher preparation for lesson:
 - a. Before class, arrange the room with labels: “Will attend the convention” “Will not attend convention” on either wall. Create nametags for the characters to wear.
- 3) On day of presentation, follow this lesson sequence:
 - a. Connection: Have a student volunteer who is also an athlete give an example about how they have developed as an athlete. Ask them to contrast their ability to play their sport the first time they played with their ability to play now. Use their story to highlight the idea that the first time we try something we often are imperfect.
 - b. Vocabulary: Share definitions for these key content vocabulary terms. Have students draw an image or find an image that explains these terms.
 - i. Exigencies
 - ii. Union
 - iii. Legislature
 - iv. Amendment
 - c. Read the play out loud. During the play, as characters (states) show support or opposition, have them move to the side of the room that matches their character’s opinion.
 - d. Main Idea: Have students write down their answer to this big question: **What was the original purpose of the Philadelphia Convention of 1787?**
 - i. Encourage them to use text evidence to support their answer.
 - e. Discussion:
 - i. How important would cooperation be in this meeting? What evidence of cooperation was in the play (or the original primary sources)?
 - ii. Describe the perceived urgency. What quotations from the play or from the original sources support this urgency?
 - iii. Ultimately, did the delegates follow the directions they were originally given? What reaction do you think they were met with upon release of their final document?

Extending the lesson:

- Complete more detailed research on the time frame of arrivals (and departures) at the convention. When was quorum reached? How would delayed arrivals impact the debates, discussions, compromises, and outcomes?
- Enter the text of the original documents into a program like wordle.net, worditout.com, or tagxedo.com. Programs like these make words appear larger the more times the word appears in the text. What conclusions can be drawn about the biggest words generated? Was this an accurate representation of the instructions provided? What major ideas are missing as big words in this exercise?

Script

Narrator: The Articles of Confederation were written in 1777, but in the years following the American Revolution, many leaders began to realize that the Articles of Confederation were in need of revision. The Article of Confederation provided a basic framework for the new American government, but their weaknesses led to a dramatic need for revision. Following the Annapolis convention, this need became more urgent.

Annapolis Delegate: This is true. This is of a nature so serious, as, in the view of those commissioners present in Annapolis, to render the situation of the United States delicate and critical, calling for an exertion of the united virtue and wisdom of all the members of the Confederacy.

Narrator: The states were charged to appoint commissioners to meet in Philadelphia on the second Monday in May the following year, to take into consideration the situation of the United States.

Annapolis Delegate: It was at that meeting that we would devise further provisions as shall appear necessary to render the constitution of the Federal Government adequate to the exigencies of the Union.

Virginia: My state of Virginia was the first to authorize the election of delegates to this upcoming convention. ...The Commissioners who assembled at Annapolis...represented the necessity of extending the revision of the Federal System to all its defects...and have recommended that Deputies for that purpose be appointed by the several Legislatures. We can no longer doubt that the crisis is arrived.

Narrator: Sir, what crisis are you referring to?

Virginia: The good people of America are to decide the solemn question, whether they will reap the just fruits of independence, which they have so gloriously acquired, and of that Union which they have cemented with so much of their common blood; or whither by giving way to unmanly jealousies and prejudices...they will renounce these blessings and furnish its enemies an eventual triumph over those by whose virtue and valor it has been accomplished.

Narrator: Virginia would be the first state to appoint delegates on November 23, 1786.

Virginia: Yes, seven Commissioners from Virginia were appointed and authorized to assemble in Convention in Philadelphia to devise and discuss alterations to the Federal Constitution.

New Jersey: My state quickly followed. We authorized four commissioners to act on the part of the state of New Jersey to join with other states of the Union at the city of Philadelphia. We would plan to meet the second Monday in May the following year. There, we would consider the state of the Union, devising such further provisions as shall appear necessary to render the Constitution of the federal government adequate to the exigencies thereof.

Narrator: The following month, Pennsylvania followed suit.

Pennsylvania: The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania took into serious consideration the discussions at hand. My state's General Assembly was fully convinced of the necessity of revising the Federal Constitution, for the purpose of making such alterations and amendments, as the exigencies of our public affairs require.

Narrator: Other states had commissioned delegates before you joined. Is that right?

Pennsylvania: Whereas the Legislature of the state of Virginia had already passed an act empowering certain commissioners, the Legislature of Pennsylvania is fully sensible to the important advantages which may be derived to the United states – and every of them – from co-operating with the commonwealth of Virginia, and other states of the confederation, in said design.

Narrator: Pennsylvania would go on to elect and empower seven men to represent its interests in this meeting.

Pennsylvania: These seven men were charged with devising, deliberating on, and discussing all such alterations and further provisions as may be necessary to render the federal constitution fully adequate to the exigencies of the Union.

Narrator: The following month, in January 1787, North Carolina agreed to join the meeting.

North Carolina: It was not possible in the infant state of our republics to devise a system, which in the course of time and experience would not manifest imperfections that it would be necessary to reform. The limited powers which by the articles of confederation are vested in the Congress of the United States have been found far inadequate to the enlarged purposed which they were intended to produce. This is a truly critical and alarming situation unless measures are taken to enlarge the powers of Congress that they may be enabled to avert the dangers, which threaten our existence as a free and independent people.

Narrator: With this opinion, North Carolina would appoint five Commissioners to meet in Philadelphia in May to confer with Deputies appointed from other states for these purposes.

Delaware: My state of Delaware was fully convinced of the necessity of revising the Federal Constitution. This state is willing and desirous of co-operating with the Commonwealth of Virginia, and other states in the Confederation, in so useful a design. Five men from Delaware will join the convention to devise, deliberate, and discuss such alterations and further provisions as may be necessary to render the Federal Constitution adequate.

Georgia: My state of Georgia also appointed deputies for the purpose of revising the Federal Constitution. Six men from Georgia were commissioned in February of 1787.

Narrator: The Confederation Congress in February of 1787, and agreed that a meeting was critical.

Confederation Congress: Delegates in Congress have suggested a convention...and such convention appears to be the most probably mean of establishing in these states a firm national government. In the opinion of Congress, it is expedient that on the second Monday in May next a convention of delegates who shall have been appointed by several states be held in Philadelphia.

Narrator: Sir, what will the purpose of this convention be?

Confederation Congress: The sole and express purpose shall be revising the Articles of Confederation and reporting to Congress and the several legislatures such alterations and provisions therein as shall when agreed to in Congress and confirmed by the states render the federal constitution adequate to the exigencies of government and the preservation of the Union.

James Madison: I attended the Confederation Congress that day. At that point, the report of the Convention at Annapolis in September 1786 had long been under consideration of a committee of the Congress. The opinion held at Annapolis was that the Confederation needed amendments and that the proposed convention was the most eligible means of effecting them.

Narrator: Mr. Madison, would you say the need for this meeting has become urgent?

James Madison: All agreed and owned that the federal government in its existing shape was inefficient and could not last long.

Narrator: Between February and March, New York, Massachusetts, and South Carolina all appointed commissioners to attend the convention.

New York: New York appointed three delegates for the sole and express purpose of revising the Articles of Confederation.

Massachusetts: My state of Massachusetts selected five men to represent our interests. These delegates were instructed not to support any alterations or additions that may be proposed to be made in the present Articles of Confederation which may appear to them not to consist with the true republican Spirit and Genius of the said confederation.

South Carolina: The powers at present vested in the United States in Congress assembled, by the Articles of Confederation and perpetual union of the said states, are found by experience greatly inadequate to the weighty purposes they were originally intended to answer.

Narrator: South Carolina, would you argue that the revisions should expand the powers of the government?

South Carolina: It is become absolutely necessary to the welfare of the confederate states that other and more ample powers in certain cases should be vested in and exercised by the said United States in Congress assembled, and also that the Articles of Confederation and perpetual union of the United States should be revised, in order to remedy defects, which at their original formation in the time of war and general tumult could not be foreseen nor sufficiently provided against. This state is and ever hath been ready and willing to co-operate with the other states in Union.

Narrator: The date of the Philadelphia convention approached. Even into May 1787 – after the designated starting date of the convention - states were still electing and empowering delegates.

Connecticut: Three men from Connecticut are requested to proceed to the City of Pennsylvania for the sole and express purpose of revising the Articles of Confederation. They should proceed without delay.

Maryland: The state of Maryland selected five men to attend the convention on May 26, 1787.

New Hampshire: And New Hampshire became the twelfth state to elect and empower delegates in June 1787. My state sent four men to confer with the deputies appointed from other states for similar purposes; and with them discuss and decide upon the most effectual means to remedy the defects of our federal union.

Narrator: One state chose not to send delegates to the convention.

Rhode Island: The state of Rhode Island boycotted the convention. The Articles of Confederation should be observed by every State and the Union shall be perpetual; nor shall any alteration at any time be made in any of them unless such alteration be agreed to in a Congress of the United States and be afterwards confirmed by the Legislatures of every State...We could not consistently appoint Delegates in a Convention, which might be the means of dissolving the Congress of the Union and having a congress without a Confederation.

Narrator: Even without Rhode Island, the convention proceeded. Many delegates were optimistic about the potential of these revisions to the Articles of Confederation.

South Carolina: Devising and adopting such measures as will most effectually ensure the peace and general welfare of the confederacy.

Virginia: The hope of the Commonwealth of Virginia is that these revisions will render the United States as happy in peace as they have been glorious in war.