

# LESSON- REACTIONS TO THE CONSTITUTION AND CONVENTION

## Primary Sources

### William Pierce Oration, Savannah, 4 July 1788

Our Union, every day weakening, would before this have fallen into ruin, had not that wisdom which has guarded us in all extremes pointed to the propriety of consolidating our interests, and uniting our views under the direction of a general government. The different states appear by their Deputies at Philadelphia, to undertake the momentous task. At the head of this great Council presides the immortal Washington, and with him many of those illustrious characters whose signatures grace the scroll of Independence.

### President of the Constitutional Convention (George Washington) to the President of Congress, 17 September 1787

After four months deliberation the great work is produced. It rises to view like a pyramid, whose broad foundation is the people,—whose summit is their happiness. Let us examine the inscription which relates the story of its birth:—“In all our deliberations” (say the framers) “we kept steadily in view, that which appeared to us the greatest interest of every true American, the consolidation of our Union, in which is involved our prosperity, felicity, safety,—perhaps our national existence. This important consideration, seriously and deeply impressed on our minds, led each state in the Convention to be less rigid on points of inferior magnitude than might have been otherwise expected,—and the Constitution which is here presented is the result of a spirit of amity, and of that mutual deference and concession which the peculiarity of our political situation rendered indispensable . . . In contemplating our success in this great undertaking, we should congratulate ourselves that no mischievous or ambitious character should have shaken or disturbed the public mind during the deliberations of the Convention;—and that no popular leader since should have started up to give us law, and take advantage of our divisions.

### Luther Martin: To the Citizens of the United States, Baltimore, 30 March 1788

As far as I have expressed my opinions of the views of the framers of the constitution, I have followed the fullest conviction of my mind, founded on my own observations made on their conduct while in convention, and confirmed by the conduct of the friends of the system since that time.—They were my sentiments while there; I at that time expressed them freely, and then found many who perfectly corresponded with me in sentiment, although some of them may not now choose to avow it, or, no doubt from a conviction of their error, may now advocate the system they there condemned and opposed. But as to myself, so far from having any reason to change the opinion I there formed, every circumstance which has since taken place has confirmed it.

The conduct adopted by the convention, rendered the dissemination of these sheets the more necessary: Could there possibly be a greater indignity and insult offered to the majesty of the free States, and the free citizens of America, than for the very men who were entrusted with powers for the preservation and security of their rights, and for the establishment of a permanent system to promote their happiness, to make use of that power to destroy both the one and the other?—For this purpose, in time of profound peace, to shut themselves up in mystery and darkness; to keep all their deliberations an absolute secret from their constituents, who were to be affected thereby; to prevent the publication of their journals; to deprive the free citizens of America of every means of information: to attempt to pass upon them, as meeting with their unanimous approbation, that which did not in reality meet with the perfect approbation of perhaps one individual in the convention; to give you no other alternative but to accept of it as proposed, without alteration, or to reject it entirely, while at the same time some of them were resounding, from one end of the continent to the other, the necessity of its acceptance, and that none but the enemies of their country would reject it—And to abuse your confidence in them, by endeavouring to hurry you into a hasty adoption, under that delusion, before you could obtain information, and be able to form a proper judgement for yourselves.

Such a conduct in any other country, or even in this, at any other time, would have drawn down upon them the indignation and resentment of those who were thus attempted to be abused and enslaved.

To counteract the views of ambition and interest has been my aim—To this I devoted every effort while in convention—The same motives have directed my conduct since—Should my exertions in the smallest degree assist in effecting the rejection of this detestable system of slavery, I shall enjoy the highest possible gratification, that of rendering my country an essential benefit.

But should the system be adopted, I shall even then enjoy the highest possible consolation which a good citizen can enjoy in the public calamity, that of having conscientiously discharged my duty to my country, by endeavouring to avert it.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Of the two documents, which one makes a stronger case to either support or oppose the Constitution? Why do you think one makes a stronger case for their point of view?
- What is the point of view of each of these authors? How do you think their geographic location impacts their feelings about the ratification of the Constitution?
- To what extent do you feel that Martin and Pierce represent the American people in these documents? Do you think they represented the majority of Americans or the minority of Americans perspective on the ratification of the Constitution?
- Were there any flaws or strengths that they both discussed in these documents? If so, what are they and why would they both talk about them? If not, why do you think there were no issues they agreed upon?
- To what extent do you agree with Martin's document? What do you disagree with?
- To what extent do you agree with Pierce's document? What do you disagree with?

## EXERCISES:

### I. Point of View

Pre-Reading Activity:

- a. Using reliable sources, research William Pierce and Luther Martin. Complete the chart below

	Original Colony?	Colony in 1788?	Role in American Revolution?	Role in Constitutional Convention?	Support or Oppose Constitution?
William Pierce					
Luther Martin					

Post Reading Activity: form your own argument

- b. Write a letter refuting either one of the documents
- c. Use information you found in both the Pierce and Martin documents to strengthen your case

### II. Citing Evidence

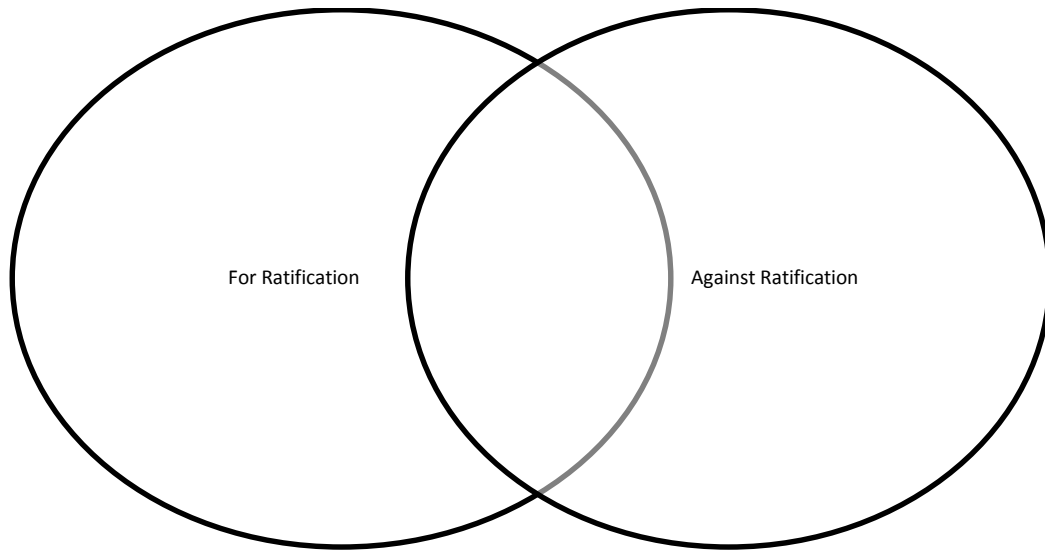
- a. Partner students to complete this activity
- b. Have one person in each group read only ONE of the documents.
- c. As they read their document, have them with a yellow highlighter, highlight phrases and/or sentences that prove if the author SUPPORTED or was OPPOSED to the Constitution.
- d. Once both are finished, as a group, complete the chart below.

Reasons to Support the Constitution	Reasons to be Opposed to the Constitution

### III. Compare and Contrast

Create a Venn Diagram

After reading both documents, what are their differences and similarities? Complete the Venn diagram, using quotes from the text, to support your ideas.



## **VOCABULARY:**

### **Pierce Document**

1. Propriety- appropriate to the situation
2. Consolidating- to bring together
3. Illustrious-highly distinguished
4. Inscription- to mark with words
5. Deliberations- careful consideration
6. Prosperity- to be successful in financial respects
7. Felicity- the state of being happy

### **Martin Document**

1. Conviction- a fixed, firm belief in something
2. Sentiments-an attitude towards something, an opinion
3. Rendered- to do; to perform
4. Dissemination- to scatter, spread widely
5. Constituents- a group that authorizes another to act on their behalf
6. Approbation- approval
7. Detestable- to hate, intensely dislike