

Document Based Essay

Grade 7

“The Constitution”

Directions:

The following question is based on the accompanying documents (1-5). This question is designed to test your ability to work with historic documents. As you analyze the documents, take into account both the sources of the document and the author’s point of view.

Historical Context:

For a time, America was governed as a Confederation. In 1787, a group of individuals met in Philadelphia to discuss modifying that Confederation. This Convention finally produced the system of government we use today.

Task:

Using information from the documents and your knowledge of social studies, answer the questions that follow each document in Part A. Your answers to the questions will help you write the Part B essay in which you will be asked to.

- ✓ Discuss the process of writing the United States Constitution at the Philadelphia Convention.
- ✓ Explain the principles of government found in the Constitution.
- ✓ Describe the opinions in support of and opposed to the ratification of the Constitution.

Part A Short Answer:

Examine the documents that follow closely and then answer the questions that follow. Carefully read and analyze each document. Answer each question on the separate answer sheet using evidence from the document and your knowledge of Social Studies.

Part B Essay Answer:

Answer the question in a well-organized essay that uses your answers from Part A. Use evidence from the Documents and your knowledge of Social Studies to support the ideas in your essay. You should use definitions, examples, evidence, and other specific examples to fully develop the Topic.

Document #1



Washington at the Philadelphia Convention, 1787
(Francher, *Out of Many*, 1997)

- 1 A) Describe the events depicted in the Picture and the role of George Washington in these events.
- 1 B) What other individuals were also important at the Philadelphia Convention?

Document #2

“Resolution 4, first clause: ...that the members of the first branch [House of Representatives] of the national legislature ought to be elected by the people of the several states” (being taken up).

Mr. Sherman [of Connecticut] opposed the election by the people, insisting that it ought to be by the state legislatures. The people, he said, immediately should have as little to do as may be about the government. They want information and are constantly liable to be misled.

Mr. Gerry [of Massachusetts]. The evils we experience flow from the excess of democracy. The people do not want virtue, but are the dupes of pretended patriots. In Massachusetts, it has been fully confirmed by experience that they are daily misled into the most baneful measures and opinions by the false reports circulated by designing men, and which no one on the spot can refute. . . . He had, he said, been too republican heretofore: he was still, however, republican, but had been taught by experience the danger of the leveling spirit.

Mr. Mason [of Virginia] argued strongly for an election of the larger branch by the people. It was to be the grand depository of the democratic principle of the government. It was, so to speak, to be our House of Commons.

Madison's Diary of Debates in the Constitutional Convention, 1787.

- 2 A) **What body of Representation is being talked about in this quote?**

- 2 B) **What was the debate over Representation at the Constitutional Convention and how was it settled?**

Document #3

“Mr. President, I confess that there are several parts of this Constitution which I do not at present approve, but I am not sure I shall never approve of them. For, having lived long, I have experienced many instances of being obliged, by better information or fuller consideration, to change opinions... which I once thought right... I agree to this Constitution, with all its faults, if they are such; because I think a general government necessary for us.... I doubt, too, whether any other convention we can obtain may be able to make a better constitution. For when you assemble a number of men... you inevitably assemble with those men all their prejudices, their passions, their errors of opinion, their local interests, and their selfish views. From such an assembly can a perfect production be expected? It astonishes me, sir, to find this system approaching so near to perfection as it does... Thus I consent, sir, to this Constitution, because I expect no better, and because I am not sure that it is not the best....”

Benjamin Franklin, Pennsylvania delegate , Philadelphia, September 17, 1787

- 3 A) How does Benjamin Franklin feel about the Constitution?
- 3 B) Explain why the new nation accepted the Constitution, even though it was not perfect.

Document #4

"I have the highest veneration for those gentlemen [who attended the Philadelphia Constitutional Convention]; but, sir, give me leave to demand, What right they had to say, We, the people ?

Who authorized them to speak the language of, We the people, instead of We, the States ?... The people gave them no power to use their name.... I wish to hear the real, actual, existing danger, which should lead us to take those steps, so dangerous in my conception...

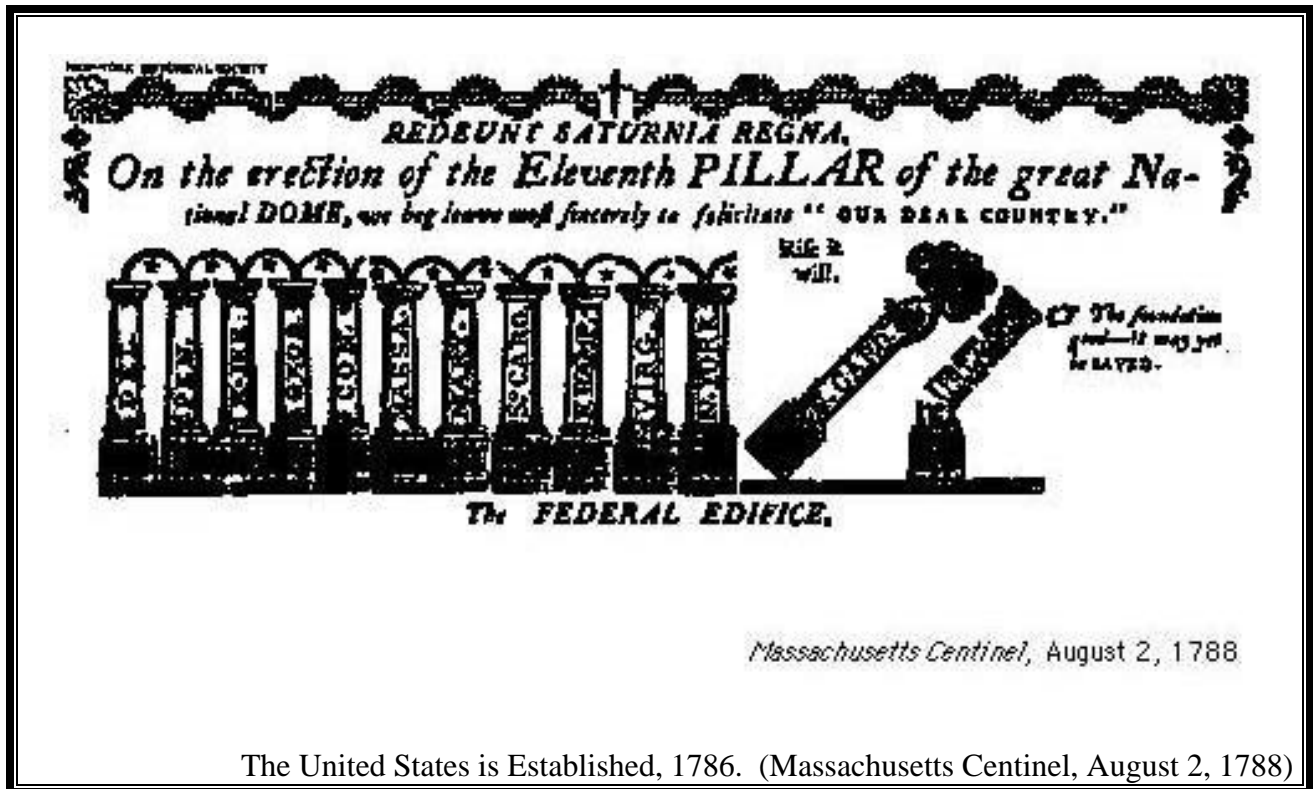
The federal Convention ought to have amended the old system; for this purpose they were solely delegated....

The principles of this system [the Constitution] are extremely pernicious, impolitic, and dangerous.... It is not a democracy, wherein the people retain all their rights securely.... The rights of conscience, trial by jury, liberty of the press, all your immunities and franchises, all pretensions to human rights and privileges, are rendered insecure, if not lost, by the change [of government].... Is this tame relinquishment of rights worthy of freemen? Is it worthy of that manly fortitude that ought to characterize republicans?"

Patrick Henry, 1788.

- 4 A) What does the authors of this quote feel toward the Constitution?
- 4 B) What is the role of the Federal Government in the United States Constitution?

Document #5



- 5 A) What process is this cartoon referring to?
- 5 B) What compromises were necessary for the Constitution to become the national government?