

# The Constitutional Convention

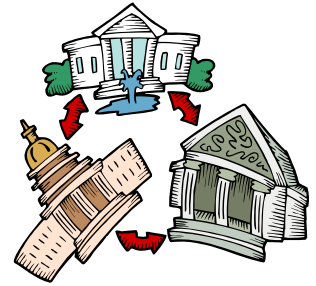
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During the American Revolution, the Founding Fathers met to develop a government that would take over as soon as the British left. By 1777 they had created the Articles of Confederation. This was the original plan for the government of the United States – but it only created a loose **alliance**, or group, of separate state powers. After ten years, the Founding Fathers realized that the Articles of Confederation were too weak to work! They didn't give the government the right to collect taxes or regulate trade. The Founders decided they needed to change the Articles of Confederation to produce a stronger central government. They met once again and quickly decided they would need an entirely new document to do the job.

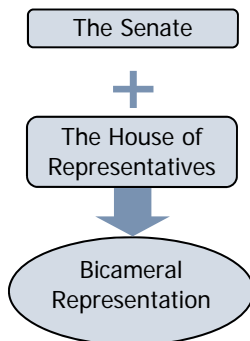
## Where Do We Start?

The Founding Fathers wanted a government that had greater authority with the states. They assembled in Philadelphia on May 14, 1787 to work out how this new government would work. They agreed on a **federalist** government, where a central power would oversee *and* share authority with the states. To make sure the federal government did not gain too much power – they created three branches to provide for checks and balances. The legislative would make the laws, the judiciary would interpret the laws, and the executive would enforce the laws. This solved many problems, but one large issue remained- how would the states be represented in this new federal government?



## Moving Forward

At first, the bigger states wanted the population of a state to determine the amount of representation. But the smaller states called foul! The bigger states would end up deciding the laws for everyone. The smaller states suggested that each state have an equal number of representatives. But that would end up giving smaller states too much power. Finally delegates from Connecticut submitted a solution – why not have two houses make up the legislative branch? The Senate would have an equal number of representatives from each state. Representation in the House of Representatives would be based on the state's population. This model is called **bicameral representation** and helped the delegates find a compromise.



## Wrapping Up

Between May and September, the delegates compromised on many issues in order to unite and build a strong national government. They decided the office of the executive would consist of one person and that the national government would have the power to tax and regulate trade between the states. These decisions determined that the new federal government would have more authority than before. There were still several delegates that disagreed with the way the federal and state governments would share power. These delegates' concerns would be addressed when the Bill of Rights was added to the Constitution in 1789.



Independence Hall,  
Philadelphia

## Looking Ahead

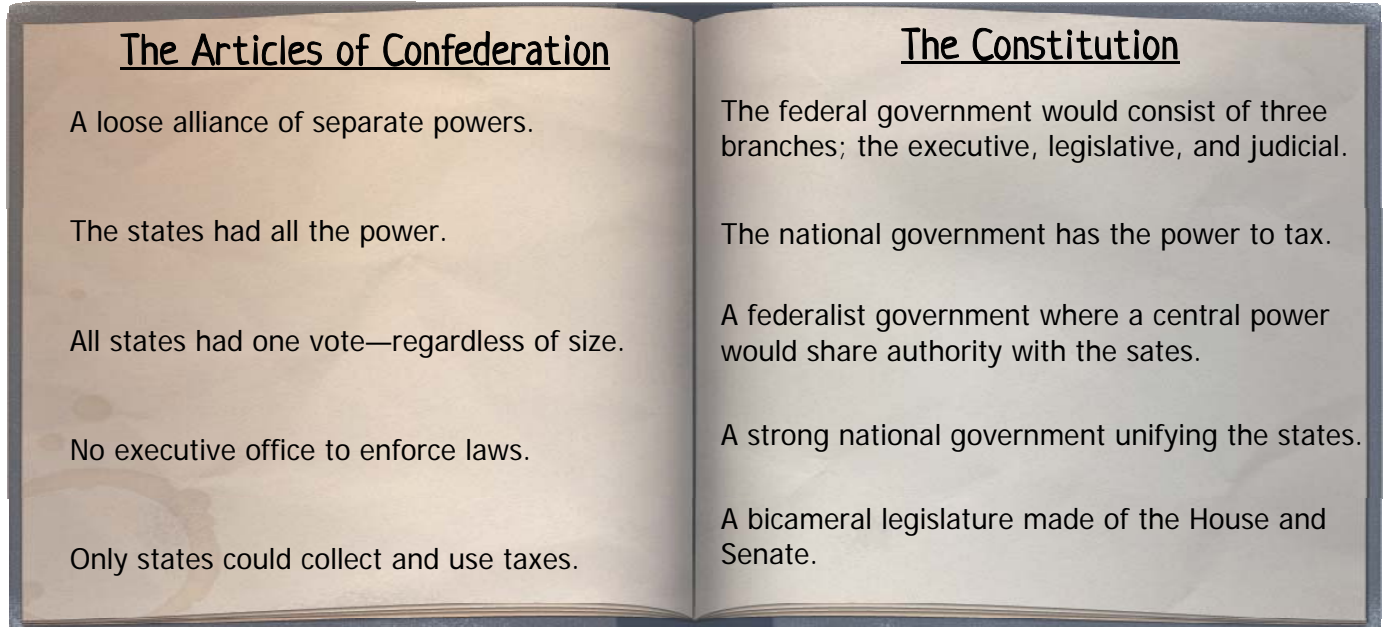
Once the new Constitution was signed, many saw a bright future ahead for the United States. The document guarantees a government with three branches based on a system of checks and balances. The delegates of the Convention successfully created a government that addressed the needs of small and large states alike, while providing for a federal government that would tie them together.



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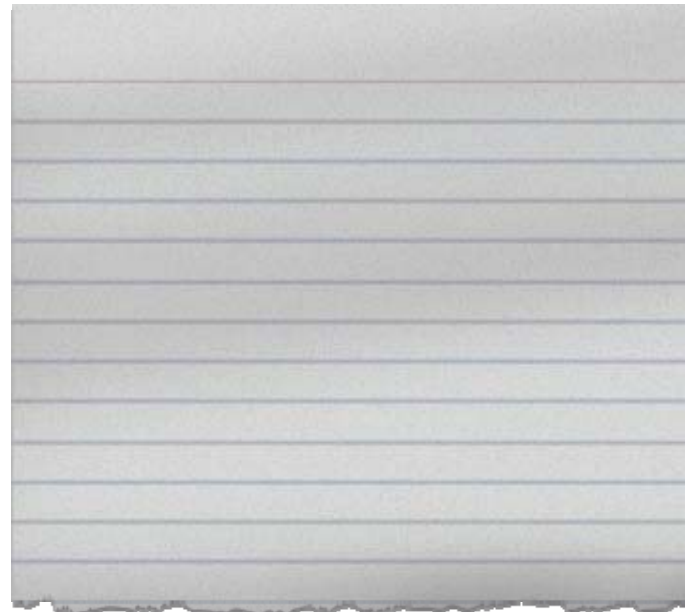
**Let's fix it!** The Founding Fathers gathered to fix the Articles of Confederation which left the United States weak and broke! Draw a line to match the weakness found in the Articles with the solutions proposed in the Constitution.



**Just Strong Enough.** The Founding Fathers wanted to build a stronger federal government but they made sure it would never become *too* powerful. Read each item and determine if it was meant to strengthen the central government (write the letter "S") or if it was meant to limit the central government, (write the letter "L").

- \_\_\_ 1. The Bill of Rights guarantee that the government will protect the rights of individuals and states.
- \_\_\_ 2. The federal government will be divided into three branches to provide checks and balances.
- \_\_\_ 3. A federal government guarantees that the central power will oversee and share power with the states.
- \_\_\_ 4. Bicameral representation will guarantee that neither the small states nor large states end up with too much power in the legislative branch.
- \_\_\_ 5. The federal government will have the power to coin money and regulate trade.
- \_\_\_ 6. The Executive office of the federal government will consist of one person, the president.

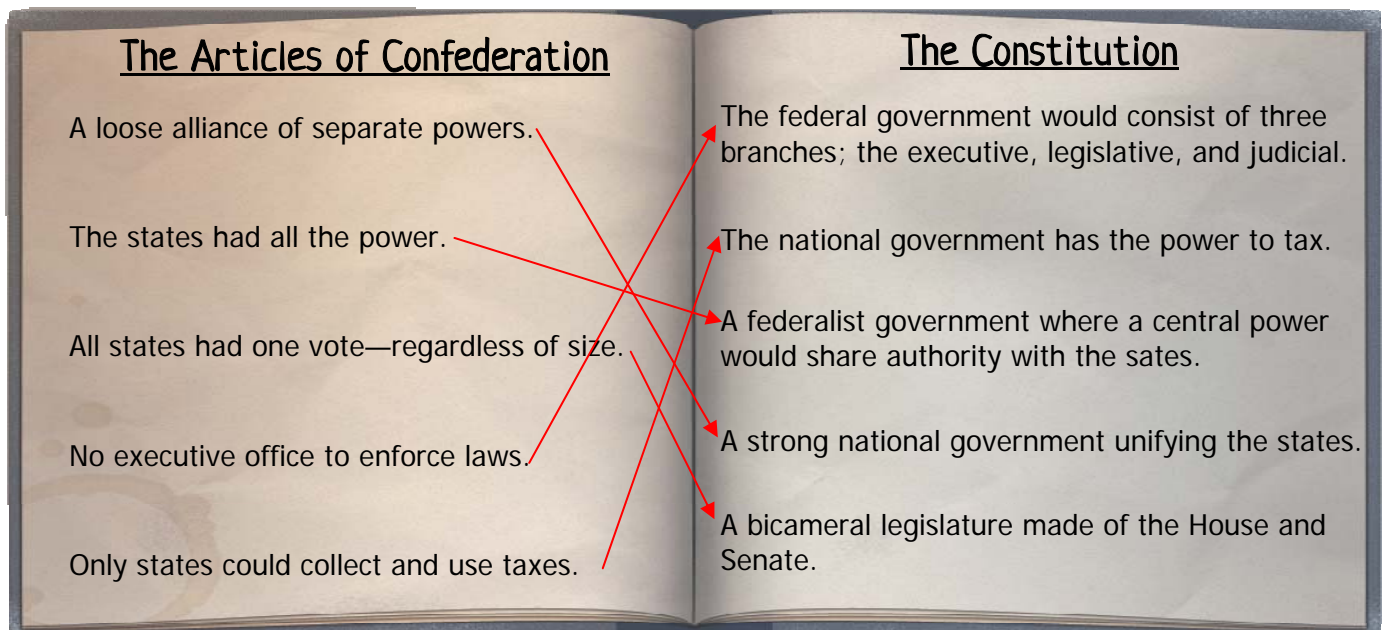
**What do you see?** Through out the Convention, Washington sat in a chair that had half of a sun carved into the back. At the signing of the Constitution, Benjamin Franklin said, "I have the happiness to know that it is a rising and not a setting sun." What do you think he meant by this?



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**\*\*TEACHER GUIDE\*\***

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