

A Second Convention: Arguments for and against the calling of a Second Constitutional Convention

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Duration:
1-2 Days

Rationale:

Many students, reading only an introductory government text on the Constitutional Convention, would be lead to believe there was little to no dissent to the work done in Philadelphia in 1787. In many of these texts, it is as if Shay's Rebellion took place, and everyone rushed to Philadelphia to create a stronger national government; after which Washington is elected the first President and the citizens are all happy.

Students need a fuller appreciation of the dissent present to the Constitution and examine how radical another convention could have turned out. They should then evaluate the issues raised by the Anti-Federalists and discuss how valid they were.

Goals:

Students will familiarize themselves with arguments for and against the calling of a second Constitutional Convention.

Students will engage with primary resources texts and look for evidence from which inferences can be made.

Students will be able to use the lessons learned as an introduction to the Anti-Federalist core beliefs. Students will be able to evaluate the concerns specifically of the Anti-Federalists.

Materials:

Copies of multiple readings as cited in the procedure. All documents available at the Center for the Study of the American Constitution under "Themes in Ratification."

Procedure:

1. For homework, a night or two before the day of the lesson, students should be assigned to read:

Virginia Calls a Second Constitutional Convention 30 October–20 November 1788.

Students should read this in order to gain a background in a calling for a Second Convention.

2. Give students 5 minutes of free write time to jot down significant themes from the reading. As a class, develop 5-10 generalizations from what they wrote and get these on the board. When done, explain that they will be reading an assortment of other primary resource documents and will be looking for evidence to support the generalizations on the board.

3. Break class into groups of 3-4 students each. Distribute each group 2-3 of the following documents listed below. Students should be allowed to highlight or underline evidence they find while working in groups.

Documents:

An American, Boston Independent Chronicle, 30 November 1787 (excerpts)¹

George Washington to the Marquis de Lafayette Mount Vernon, 7 February 1788 (excerpt)

James Madison to Edmund Randolph Orange, 10 April 1788 (excerpts)

Richard Henry Lee to Samuel Adams New York, 5 October 1787 (excerpts)

An Old Whig VII, Philadelphia Independent Gazetteer, 28 November 1787

*Many other primary resource documents could be used; search the Center for the Study of the American Constitution website for more.

4. After approximately 30 minutes of time have students share some of the evidence they have found.
5. To begin the second day of the lesson, review the objectives and the generalizations created
6. Instruct students to use all the documents they have, and then create an outline. Each generalization should be written down leaving space for quotes (the evidence) they have found. Then students will organize the quotes (the evidence) to support each generalization. This will produce a nice summary of the issues and concerns raised with the possible calling of a Second Convention.
7. As another assessment, one could have students write an essay using the generalizations and evidence.