What were the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation?

The Articles of Confederation left most of the power with the state government. There was very little federal, or national, government. This meant weaknesses such as no national court system or national army. There was also no national currency; each state could issue its own money.

What factors caused the writing of the Constitution?

Each state (except Rhode Island) sent delegates to the Constitutional Convention in 1787. The goal was to fix the Articles of Confederation. However, there were too many limitations to the federal government under the Articles. Therefore, they decided to create a new plan of government, our Constitution.

What is “separation of powers”? What does “checks and balances” mean?

“Separation of powers” divides the power of our government among three different branches – legislative, judicial, and executive. The system of “checks and balances” was designed to spread out the power between these three groups to make sure that no single group or person becomes too powerful.

Shay Rebellion

During the 1780s, many Americans were poor, yet they had to pay high state taxes. People often had to borrow money and go into debt. When they could not repay their debts, state courts took away their farms or sent the people to prison. In the summer of 1786, poor farmers in Massachusetts protested by refusing to let the courts meet. Armed with pitchforks and guns, they shut down the courthouse and destroyed debt records. In January 1787, a mob of farmers led by Daniel Shays tried to take over a Massachusetts arsenal, or weapons storehouse. Because there was no national army to defend the arsenal, the governor had to send the state militia to stop Shays. Shay’s Rebellion made some people think that the national government could not keep order or protect them.

Philadelphia Convention

In May 1787, the 55 delegates from 12 states assembled at the Pennsylvania State House. They chose George Washington to be president of the Constitutional Convention, as it later came to be known. At first, the delegates tried to improve the Articles of Confederation. They soon decided that the country needed a new constitution, or plan of government. One issue that the delegates discussed was the relationship between the states and the national government. Some delegates thought there should be a strong national government. Others believed that the states should have more power. The delegates finally agreed to strengthen the existing federal system.
The national and state governments would share power. The states would keep some powers, but the federal government would have power over matters that affected the nation as a whole. When it was finished, the Constitution became the supreme law of the land. It helped found the American republic. In a republic, the people choose representatives to run the government.

1. Name the two plans introduced at the Constitutional convention to determine how representation would occur in Congress.

**Virginia Plan**—Congress would have two parts or houses where the number of representatives for each house would be based on population

**New Jersey Plan**—Congress would have only one house in which each state would be equally represented

2. A compromise, or agreement where each side gave up something they wanted, occurred and became known as the **Connecticut Compromise or Great Compromise**.

3. The Connecticut Compromise was based on the idea of a two-house Congress. In one house, representation would be based on population. In the other house, each state would have equal representation.

4. Either house could present an idea for a new law, or a bill. However, both houses had to approve the bill before it became law. On July 16, 1787, the Great Compromise was approved by the Constitutional Convention.

5. The Three-Fifths Compromise allowed states with slaves to count three-fifths of the total number of slaves in each state to count towards the number of representatives.

6. Name the parts of the Constitution, or the written plan of government, and its purpose. The **Preamble**—written by Governor Morris it states the purpose for writing the Constitution and to create a fairer form of government

The **Legislative Branch**—explains the lawmaking branch and the powers given to Congress

The **Executive Branch**—names the President as the authority to carry out our nation’s laws and is commander and chief of the military.

The **Judicial Branch**—the court system, or Supreme Court, that decides whether laws are working fairly

**Amendments**—Allowed for changes to the Constitution. To change the Constitution, amendments, or changes, can be passed.

7. The Constitution divides the powers of the federal government among three branches—the legislative branch, the executive branch, and the judicial branch. They created this separation of powers to keep one branch from controlling the government.

8. The President can reject, or veto, a bill passed by Congress. Congress could then override this veto with a two-thirds vote.
9. If it is determined that the President does not perform his duties, or accused of a crime, the Congress could impeach the President.

10. The Supreme Court has the power to strike down any law that goes against the Constitution. Today there are nine judges, or justices, appointed by the President and could stay in office for life.

11. On September 17, 1787, the Constitution was approved, or ratified the delegates of the Constitutional Convention. In 2004, Congress passed a law declaring every September 17 as Constitution Day.

12. After the Constitutional Convention, the Constitution had to be approved by each state before it became law.

13. Citizens who wanted the Constitution were called Federalists. Federalists wanted a strong national government.

14. Citizens who disagreed with the Federalists became known as Anti-Federalists.

15. The first ten amendments added in 1791 to the Constitution were called the Bill of Rights.

16. Tell the purpose of the first ten amendments was to protect the basic rights of the people. Amendment 1—Freedom of religion, speech, press, peaceable assembly, and petition for redress of grievances
Amendment 2—protects the right of individual people to own guns
Amendment 3—The federal government cannot force people to house soldiers in their homes in time of peace.
Amendment 4—Protects people’s privacy and safety for search and seizures Amendment
Amendment 5—protects the rights of an accused person
Amendment 6—protects the rights of a person accused of a crime to a public trial by an impartial jury. This is called due process of law.
Amendment 7—protects the rights of a jury trial in civil cases
Amendment 8—Protects convicted criminals from being punished in cruel and unusual ways
Amendment 9—protects the rights of the people Amendment 10—Protects powers of the states and the people

17. In 1789, George Washington became the first President of the United States.

18. In 1789, John Adams, became the first Vice President of the United States.

19. Working with Congress, Washington set up a State Department, a Treasury Department, and a War Department that would become known as the Cabinet. The Cabinet members advise the President.
20 Congress decided to build the nation’s capital on land chosen by George Washington beside the Potomac River.

21. Benjamin Banneker, a free African American, helped measure the land, known as the District of Columbia (D.C.) where the nation’s capital was built.

22. On March 4, 1797, John Adams became the second president. The day he took office was important because it was the first time the United States had changed leaders. It was a peaceful change.

23. Each branch of government—Executive Branch, Judicial Branch, Legislative Branch-- is given different powers by the Constitution in a way that allows each branch to watch over the others. This system where each branch of government can limit the power of the other two branches is called **checks and balances**.

24. Tell how each branch of government can check the powers of the others.

Executive Branch (President)—can veto a bill passed by Congress and nominates Supreme Court justices Legislative Branch (Congress—House of Representatives and Senate)—can check the President’s power by voting to override the veto or refusing to give money for programs and approves appointments of Supreme Court justices Judicial Branch (Supreme Court and other Federal Courts)—can rule the President’s actions or laws passed by Congress unconstitutional. The system of checks and balances was developed to allow the nation to form a more perfect union.
What events led to the War of 1812?

Even though the United States was independent, they still had conflicts with Britain. When American Pioneers moved west, they settled on lands that belonged to the Native Americans. The British helped the Native Americans and encouraged them to fight the Americans. The British also captured American trading ships and sometimes forced American sailors to work on British Navy ships!
What happened during the War of 1812?

In June 1812, President James Madison asked Congress to declare war on the British. Britain had a strong Navy, and blocked many of the American ports. Still, the US won several important naval battles. The Battle of Lake Erie helped the US keep control of the Western lands. In the Battle of the Thames, US forces went up to Canada and defeated the British and their Native American Allies. Many of the Native American tribes then gave up their alliance with Britain. In August 1814, the British attacked Washington, DC. They burned down the White House and Congress. Then the British attacked Baltimore, but the Americans would not give up! This is when Francis Scott Key wrote the “Star Spangled Banner”, which later became our national anthem. Then, Andrew Jackson led the Americans in a victory in New Orleans. Neither side knew that a peace treaty had already been signed two weeks ago in Europe!

Name the first thirteen states that approved the Constitution. This will not be on the test. Students were asking for this list.

1. Delaware—1787
2. New Jersey—1787
3. Pennsylvania—1787
4. Georgia—1788
5. Connecticut—1788
6. Massachusetts—1788
7. Maryland—1788
8. South Carolina—1788
9. New Hampshire—1788
10. Virginia—1788
11. New York—1788
12. North Carolina—1789
13. Rhode Island—1790