

The period focused on in this set will be the post-revolutionary war period (or the Confederation Period). This period in my mind takes place from September of 1783 when the Revolutionary War concludes to the start of the Constitutional Convention in 1787. I envision this era as taking place within this time frame as certain themes and issues dominated this period. The end of the revolution is my starting point as priorities shift from battle to governing and the constitutional convention is the end of this period for me as it starts the beginning of the end of the Articles of Confederation and its growing pains. I elect this as my ending rather than the ratification of the constitution since the era was defined by trying to make the Articles work and ratification occurs after the collective acknowledgement that they have failed. This era had new and unique challenges arise. Most importantly, there was a sense that while America is now fully independent, it is very much an experiment and understanding what America should be is the great issue of this period. That is why in my sources there are perspectives that see the American government as being too tyrannical (with Shay's Rebellion) but also too weak (with Hamilton's letter). I believe understanding this issue is a big idea that is vital for further understanding American history as one of our nation's enduring challenges is "how do we make this republic work for everyone". This is an idea that is relevant as we grapple with issues of inequality as well as the exclusion of certain groups that begin before this period and continued well after. This set will flesh out this challenge and how people at this time reacted to it.

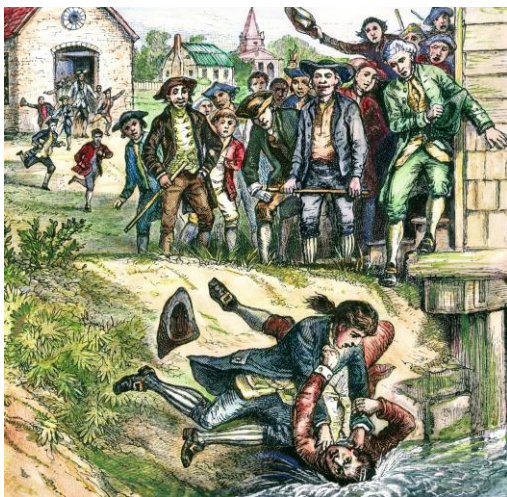
Primary Source: <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/alexander-hamilton-to-james-duane/>
https://learn.susd12.org/pluginfile.php/322353/mod_resource/content/1/SourceAHamiltonletter.pdf
(Excerpt version)

Much of the issues of this period of time are the result of or were perpetuated by the weakness of the Articles of Confederation, and I believe a letter between Alexander Hamilton and a friend discussing the Articles themselves really fleshes out how people felt about the Articles at the time. It does so in a way that my Crash Course Video and even my primary visual cannot as it is actual correspondence at the time. Immediately I see a challenge in the language that is a given as the English they used back then is different from the one we use currently. The best way to help make this reading more digestible is to have it be an in class reading where I am available to aid the students in their reading but also having minor objectives when reading such as "finding words you don't know" can help in this goal as well. I believe the core message of the letter will be understood by the students, it's presented relatively early in the letter, and it's reaffirmed several times by Hamilton so missing it is particularly difficult. Hamilton's broader point is that the Articles are far too ineffective to govern properly and each of his points reiterates this. However, what I fear my students may miss is the perspective of Alexander Hamilton, depending on when this letter is taught and what information preceded it, there is a chance that the students may not know that Hamilton was a staunch critic of decentralized government rather than just this particular form of it. This is important to note as he and his thoughts reflect a significant development in American history with the formation of the political cleavage revolving around the size of the federal government. As the teacher it is vital that I point out the position and perspective Hamilton has before my students read the text as it will be reflected by leaders throughout the remainder of American history and is at least in some part responsible for events that transpire later on. The length of the text is also a matter of concern as well as being very long even for the most advanced

of students and so this text would be subject to edits and the extractions of excerpts rather than being read in its entirety. However, the systematic way in which Hamilton lists his grievances with the Confederation of States, can lend itself to an activity in which students read excerpts of this letter in groups and as a class we discern it without the students bearing the full burden of reading such a long source. However, for the challenges this source may have, I believe that many of them can be remedied easily if I do decide to use this document. Moreover, it serves as another piece in describing some bigger themes and ideas that will be influential in American society. The concern over the size and power of the central government in Hamilton's correspondence is vital as it points to a debate and challenge that continues to plague the US. Furthermore, the tacit admission that the US is enduring an identity crisis is more material to develop and hint towards these enduring themes. As the teacher, it will be my job to point these out as the students may not be able to identify them as identification can only come if you are aware of the bend of American history and as students of US history, that most certainly will not be the case.

1. What are the weaknesses Hamilton sees in the government?
2. What is Hamilton's major concern about the way Congress is working with the state
3. Knowing what you know about Alexander Hamilton's background, why might he dislike what Congress is doing?
4. As we learned previously, there was debate about the size and scope of the government when the Articles of Confederation were being made. After reading this letter do you think the founders made the right choice? Please explain why?
5. How might the concerns over the size of the government affect the country later?

Primary Visual



For my visual I have chosen this image of Shay's rebellion, a major event of that era and something that embodies the general chaos and instability that the Articles of Confederacy failed to ward off. The thing that pops out is the two men fighting and chances are that is what will hook a student's attention as well. But it is what their fighting represents that interests me. First and foremost, its cause and how events played out gives insight into the general inability of the government at that time. Additionally, it reflects what occurred during the lead up to the revolutionary war and I hope as a teacher I can emphasize that America was very much still an

experiment at this time and concerns of tyranny were at the forefront of people's minds, particularly farmers who saw a government continually taking money and their livelihoods. This concern over tyranny is one that persists in American history as it is a forefront concern for the Confederate States one hundred years later (though in their case it was a belief that "tyranny" would be used to end slavery). This image also represents an overarching theme in American history and depending on the content that precedes this, it can be the first time we see this theme. Mainly, how as a nation do we get along even with those we fundamentally disagree with. The violence done by the debtor towards the tax collector embodies that dilemma. It is an idea worth considering as so much of our history hinges on this question from the Civil War to World War II and even now, one of the enduring themes of our history is learning to reconcile major differences. Displaying this piece and talking about that idea is important as civility in the face of major differences is foundational for good citizenship in our country. With all that being said, some of these ideas may not jump out at students immediately. The discussion of overarching themes is most certainly something that will need to be facilitated by me as that's a grander connection of ideas both present and future. Furthermore, if this image is not given enough prior context, then the subjects of this image may not be clear as there is no caption or title. That is a major cause for concern as students may extract very little at it without being given a lesson beforehand or insight. This poses an issue as a teacher as incorporating it individually into a lesson may be difficult. How I would question students about it would be to use this picture as a bell ringer to introduce the event. Anything else would make understanding and discussing the image far less engaging as students are already aware of what it is.

1. What is going on in this photo?
2. Who do you think the two men are?
3. What do you think the two men fighting symbolizes?
4. Why might the event this image is depicting be important?
5. What does it say about the state of the country?

Textbook Excerpt

Chapter 3, page 183 and excerpt from page 185 of *Discovering Our Past: The American Journey to World War 1* <https://www.pusd.us/Page/4091> (where the text was found)
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B0PW81FVjDR3WWpJRIQzVlhRVE0/view?resourcekey=0-9m3yRwZB3R9gOWfRdsOuAQ> (Link to chapter used)

(Page 183) The Confederation government had problems dealing with important issues. Congress was powerless to regulate trade, so each state passed laws taxing goods from its neighbors. New York taxed firewood from Connecticut and cabbage from New Jersey retaliated by charging New York for a lighthouse on the New Jersey side of the Hudson River. Congress had so little power that it could not deal with economic issues like trade.

(page 183) By 1781 the money printed during the Revolutionary War had fallen in value, so much that it was almost worthless. Unable to collect taxes, both the Congress and the states had printed their own money. The money constantly declined in purchasing power because people feared that it could not be redeemed in gold or silver; if a \$10 bill was worth \$3 when it came into their hands, it might be worth only \$2 or less when they spent it. The value of money

fell, while the price of food and other goods soared. In some towns, angry mobs seized overpriced sugar, tea, and bread from storekeepers.

(excerpt from 185) The weakness of the Confederation and its inability to deal with problems worried many leaders. Peace with the British may have been won, but peace within the new nation was hard to find. The states bickered and refused to support the new central government in almost every way. Each state was beginning to act as an independent country. Some Vermont leaders even considered becoming part of Great Britain again. Only 18 members representing 8 states voted on the Confederation's most important piece of legislation, the Northwest Ordinance.

For my textbook selection, I choose this small excerpt from the textbook *Discovering Our Past: The American Journey to World War 1*. The main feature of this excerpt that motivates me to include is that it covers other aspects of the era that are not already covered by my other resources such as the economic issues the new United States suffered from and the Articles inability to govern trade or other economic matters effectively. It is these points that make this an attractive source, and it is also what I believe, and 8th graders will extract from it with relative ease. Beyond the content, the vocabulary and organization used is relatively easy, ensuring that it will be accessible to all students of all levels. I could see myself using this text in the middle of a lesson, discussing some other economic issues beforehand and then instructing students to read a brief passage from their textbook as other teachers have done. While it goes far more in depth than the crash course video, I still have concerns with its overall broadness. It jumps between many different aspects of the era, and it leads to everything only being covered briefly and so this flaw has motivated me to have this resource be a supplement to students learning as opposed to the core of it. However, there are other concerns with the actual content. The core economic principles that underlie what is discussed, I believe, are concepts an 8th grader will be less likely to understand. As economics is typically not taught at this age, questions such as "why does our money become less valuable when we print more" or "what is purchasing power" are bound to be brought up. It is these unfamiliar concepts that make me believe that when this reading is used, it must be supplemented by a discussion or lecture as a student may not be able to extract as much as they could if not guided in some form. This text can also be used to grapple with more big ideas as we see the conflicting perspectives of people suffering from an economic crisis but also declining to give power to a government that could help solve this problem. Those two perspectives (or images) further illustrate the idea that the country is undergoing an identity crisis and that one of our long running issues is the matter of how the government should operate in our day-to-day lives. This point may be missed by students, but I believe with adequate discussion, it can be brought out and taught.

1. What important issues could the Confederation government not handle?
2. What did the states do in response to this? Name some examples.
3. In this passage, we see people being unable to buy food because their money was worthless but also, they did not want a strong government which would be able to handle this issue. What do these conflicting perspectives say about America at the time?

Video: [The Constitution, the Articles, and Federalism: Crash Course US History #8](#)

My video I use this video from Crash Course History up until four minutes and thirty seconds and it discusses the period after the Revolutionary War leading up to the Washington Presidency. Immediately I noticed that it is accessible in multiple regards with visuals and vocabulary being simple. It provides something of meaning to students of all levels of knowledge. Furthermore, this video is engaging in a way that is funny and interesting, making it easy to hook the attention of students. Content wise, it presents an overview of the entire era rather than focusing on just a singular part and this makes it more of a starting point for a unit rather something done as a second or third lesson. When viewing this video, I am confident that students will get the general points such as the Articles were our form of government before the constitution, and they were ineffective for all of the previously mentioned points. The way information is conveyed also leads towards some overarching issues or themes in American history with size of the government debate and the fundamental questioning of who we should be as a nation. Additionally, it attempts to provide a diverse view as it is not only critical of the Articles of Confederation, but it also notes the Articles accomplishments. Despite my praise, It is not a flawless document though; it is making a lot of assumptions about what the audience knows before viewing it. Prominent examples include the discussion of how this government operated with there being an assumption that you know how the current one works. Furthermore, despite my praise of accessible syntax, there are terms such as “super majority” that I do not believe an 8th grader would know as it is more likely to be learned in a yet to be taken government course and it is not something used in regular conversation especially between students. I believe at the surface level; an 8th grader will understand the Articles created a system where no laws were passed but they may not understand why that is the case. To further elaborate, a student may understand that little was done during this form of government but why is that the case? Why is it that the states could not agree? There are also broader themes in US history that I believe students won't see such as the issue of the size and role of the federal government. It is only tacitly implied, and it is very much something only discernable with previous education in history, but it is vital to elaborate on as the teacher as it is a core theme in future events such as the Civil War or Civil Rights Movement.

1. What was the first government set up by the Continental Congress called?
2. How was the government set up and why was it set up like this?
3. What was the problem with this form of government and why do you think these were problems?
4. At around 2:10, John Green said the Articles helped win the war and this was good except if you were a slave or Native American. What do you think this says about how those people were treated and who was really a citizen?

Field Trip: <https://www.amrevmuseum.org/exhibits/a-new-nation>

For a field trip, I chose the Museum of the American Revolution located in Philadelphia Pennsylvania. This museum has multiple exhibits documenting the events leading up to the American Revolution, the war itself and for our purposes, one that discusses the America that was born from the revolution. This exhibit in particular takes a more bottom-up approach to viewing the era, not focusing on the era defining events or even the Articles that molded the era but rather there's a focus on people. The focus is placed on those outside of the powerful

during this era such as women, Indigenous people, enslaved peoples and veterans. Their images and stories line the walls of the exhibit as students are able to learn about people who lived through the events they learned about in the classroom. Furthermore, their testimonies point to the fact that not everyone was equal (or even had rights) in this new country and that this struggle would be a prevailing theme throughout the rest of this country's history. It also serves as a good wrap up for the entire revolutionary era with students being able to see everything, they learned leading up to and after the war. This experience would naturally come at the end of learning about this era as students would be able to get the most out of this experience when they have a firm understanding of the era. It is with how information is presented that I expect students to see that despite winning the war, America was still a country that was deeply flawed with freedom only being given to a select few. There are some concerns I have about the exhibit. It leans heavily into the belief that students already understand what is to come after this era with references to the Civil War. Students are aware of the Civil War and what caused it but connecting the issues presented is a difficult task as students have yet to study the era in depth. There is also the concern that I have with students connecting what they see to what they learned in the classroom. The exhibit notes that veterans of the war were not compensated for their work and I have full faith that students will absorb this knowledge. However, will they be able to connect that to the weaknesses of the Articles government or even the attitudes of a large portion of the populations that believed that was an overreaching government? A visit to this exhibit offers a form of learning that is significantly more interactive for students and presents perspectives that are often neglected by traditional sources for this era. These perspectives along with the deeper exploration of topics and ideas already presented in class help contribute to the big ideas of this resource set.

1. Think about one of the veterans you saw in the "A New Nation" exhibit, what was their story?
2. What did the exhibit say about women, African Americans, Indigenous peoples during this period?
3. What does their treatment (and that of veterans) say about American society and/or the government?

Interactive Website: <https://www.commonlit.org/en/texts/articles-of-confederation>

This website offers an interactive version of the Articles of Confederation. It is a very accessible website with definitions being built into the text of the document and there being a translate feature for students who English may not be their primary language along with a feature to have the text be read to you (though you must make an account for it). These features serve to make it accessible but to also alleviate some of the challenges 8th graders might have when reading a text with such complicated and difficult vocabulary and subject matter. Just as helpful are the questions that are embedded in the text. I feel like these questions help the student pause for a moment and evaluate what they just read but they also get to the heart of some of the features of the Articles. This will be a difficult read for students, but I do believe they will extract the basic ideas of this document such as its intent, the privileges and powers of the

states and by extension the citizens of the states. It is with these considerations that I would use this document after the video as that lays the foundation and this is a natural next step as we begin to understand this era as the Articles have a strong influence on what occurs later in the period. That is not to say that this is a perfect document though. Despite the measures it takes to make itself a more digestible reading, there are still phrases or words embedded in the document that will be challenging for an 8th grader to understand with much of Article 6 being a prime example of this. Furthermore, while the students may understand the government the Articles set up, they will most certainly not know the implications in practice as they're understanding of the states, their interests and the nature of American society are still very much developing. This further supports the idea that while students may read this on their own (such as for homework), it very much will need to be reviewed and explained by me whenever we are in class again. Another issue with this document is that it is quite long, and this poses issues regarding how long students can remain engaged with the text or remain focused on it. It does not have the luxury of being able to be edited as the Articles are all one continuous body of thoughts and ideas. I envision solutions to this issue taking the form of having students read part of it and then I read (or explain the rest). Despite its flaws, I believe this is a strong document, it is further experience with a primary source in the form of an interactive text that is accessible and keeps students engaged. While it will surely provide a challenge for students, it is incumbent on me as the teacher to guide them through those challenges.

1. What do the first three articles lay out?
2. Who is responsible for forming an army?
3. How would you describe this type of government? Is it a strong central government or is it more centralized and why?
4. Why do you think the government was formed this way?

At Home Activity: <https://edtechbooks.org/democracy/confederation> (under suggested learning activities)

Express Your View: How are the debates over the Articles of Confederation continuing to affect your life and the lives of people in your community today?

This resource essentially takes the ideas and concepts we have been working on throughout this unit (i.e., the Confederation Period) and applies it to the world the students are living in. I like this activity as it is open in how it can be tackled as a student may not know how debates such as the size of the government may affect them directly. Being able to look at their lives within the larger context of their community allows them more options in this learning activity. If I were to provide additional instructions on top of the one already provided it would be adding in the help of a parent as they are more knowledgeable in how the government may affect them, their families and their child. Additionally, with many students having access to the internet, this activity could be expanded so that they can look for issues or topics that are relevant on social media or through news websites. It is with those things in mind that I am comfortable that a student will be able to see how multiple layers of government affect their

lives and how each of these levels have their own unique powers and responsibilities. Just as important, I believe students will begin to grasp why there is still such debate about the size and role of government as they see both the benefits and downsides of both large and small government. This is one of the big ideas that I believe is foundational to understanding American history as it is a debate that permeates our history from the Civil War to Civil rights and even to today. Despite its utility and ability to apply knowledge from the classroom to real life, I do have a variety of concerns with this activity. There is the concern regarding accessibility, a parent (or guardian) may not be available to participate in this activity and this leaves the student finding and understanding complex topics on their own. Secondly, there is also the matter of identifying the level of government referenced in a news article or talked about by a parent. Such an activity like this would be incumbent on a student knowing how to distinguish between federal and state level departments or by understanding the functions of each level of government. Being able to see the work of all these levels is important to me as a teacher because I believe it shows the compromise our founders made when making our system. That is hopefully why a parent is available to help them but as discussed before, that may not always be the case.

1. What are some ways that debates from this period still affect you?
2. Why do you think these debates are still happening?
3. What does the fact that these issues still exist suggest to you?

This set offers resources that span the entire period from the establishment of the Articles to the events that triggered their downfall. It is partially this reason that I believe that these are an excellent group of texts for students to have at their disposal as they learn about the beginning of our nation. As they explore this period, they will be exposed to some of our nation's most enduring questions such as the enduring debate around the size of our government with its effects still being seen in their day-to-day lives. This is such a vital focus as it is a broad cleavage that many of America's fiercest debates and events will rest upon in the future. In many ways it will define much of American history going forward and so it is vital to understand it as we proceed. Along with this topic, students will learn about the voices least heard throughout history with their voices serving as a reminder to students that an enduring challenge in studying history is one regarding the perspectives they are exposed to. Throughout this set, we see or hear the perspectives of those without power from women to enslaved peoples to indigenous people and it is from these perspectives that we gain a deeper understanding of the inherent flaw of our country going forward. My hope in exposing students to this aspect of studying history is that it would aid them in critically analyzing future resources and the perspectives they present. I hope they approach all future readings or assignments with an acknowledgement that the identity of the author (or subject of study) is vital in the view of history students are seeing. The overall goal of this set is to prepare students to further explore American history and analyze the resources that will be presented to them during those experiences. By presenting resources that expose these big ideas, I believe this set succeeds in preparing students to further study history.