

## Ratification Debates - Lesson Plan

### Overview:

The purpose of this activity is for students to read and evaluate the arguments of major figures both for and against ratification of the constitution.

It also brings the content to life if you use the activity as a simulation with groups focusing on a different state and simulating their own “meeting” or debate as they evaluate the different viewpoints expressed in the quotes.

Here is how I intended this resource to be used, although you could assign it as independent work and students can complete it at their own pace, or you can adapt it any way you’d like.

### Lesson Sequence:

#### Group Activity / Simulation

	Instructions	Approximate Pacing
1	Assign groups of 3 or 4 students a. Best to assign mixed level groups so that stronger readers can help other members of the group comprehend the quotations	~5 minutes
2	Each group will get a different state (Virginia, New York, or Massachusetts)  Explain to the class that “there are currently 7 states who have ratified the constitution. If we get 2 more states, then the constitution will be passed!	
3	Distribute the readings to each group with their assigned state	
4	Distribute the worksheet to each student	
5	Instruct students to read the first page introduction of their document and then proceed to read the quotes of the debaters on the second page. Encourage students to discuss the viewpoints and work together to interpret the arguments being made by each individual.	
6	Students read and interpret quotes in their groups and complete the worksheet	~15-20 minutes
7	Once most groups have finished, bring the class back together. Tell them “the debates have finished, make sure everyone has cast their vote for ratification”  Request that each group have a representative speak for them, to summarize the reasons for and against ratification in their state, and to report on the majority of votes in their group (state). Student can stand in front of class or speak from their desk.	~7-15 minutes (depending on number of groups)
8	Tally up the votes, for each state. If 2 out of the 3 states vote for ratification, announce that the constitution has been ratified! If not, announce that there is still more debate that needs to take place!	~3-10 minutes
9	Close out the lesson. If extra time, ask students to share their reasons for voting for or against the constitution and facilitate discussion	

# Virginia

- ❖ **Argument for ratification:** The new federal government would be better able to provide for the common defense and promote commerce than the existing Articles of Confederation.
- ❖ **Key figures:** James Madison and George Washington argued in favor of ratification, while Patrick Henry opposed it.



Virginia was one of the most important states in the ratification process, as it was home to some of the most prominent Founding Fathers, including George Washington, James Madison, and Patrick Henry. There was a great deal of debate in Virginia over whether to ratify the Constitution, and it ultimately became the 10th state to do so.









In Virginia, the debate over ratification was intense, and the arguments for and against the Constitution were complex. Many supporters of the Constitution believed that a strong central government was necessary to protect the country from external threats and maintain law and order within its borders. Some opponents of the Constitution, however, feared that a strong central

government would become too powerful and infringe on the rights of the people. Other opponents argued that the Constitution did not contain sufficient protections for individual liberties, and that a Bill of Rights was necessary to prevent the government from overstepping its bounds. One of the most influential voices in the Virginia ratification debate was Patrick Henry, who spoke out passionately against the Constitution and argued that it threatened the liberties of the people.

In addition to Patrick Henry, one of the most influential voices in the Virginia ratification debate was James Madison, who is often called the "Father of the Constitution." Madison argued that the proposed Constitution created a careful balance of power between the federal government and the states, and that it provided strong protections for individual liberties. He was a strong supporter of ratification and played a key role in drafting the Constitution.



**Instructions:** Read each argument for and against ratification. As you read, underline or highlight the main arguments each speaker is making. Then, summarize each reason on the chart in your worksheet

 <b>Arguments For Ratification</b>	 <b>Arguments Against Ratification</b>
 <p>1. "It has been urged and echoed, that the power 'to lay and collect taxes, duties, imposts, and excises, to pay the debts, and provide for the common defense and general welfare of the United States,' amounts to an unlimited commission to exercise every power which may be alleged to be necessary for the common defense or general welfare...[but] the power is not absolute; it is limited and defined... It is therefore of necessity left to the discretion of the national legislature, to pronounce, upon the objects, which concern the general welfare, and for which, under that description, an appropriation of money is requisite and proper."</p> <p>- <i>James Madison</i></p>	 <p>1. "There is no declaration of rights, and the laws of the general government being paramount to the laws and constitutions of the several States, the Declarations of Rights in the separate States are no security. Nor are the people secured even in the enjoyment of the benefit of the common law, which stands here upon no other foundation than its having been adopted by the respective acts forming the constitutions of the several States."</p> <p>- <i>George Mason</i></p>
 <p>2. "The Constitution secures to us the blessings of liberty. I have examined it with particular attention, and I declare that it is in my opinion, most admirably calculated for this end. Sir, the only question is, Shall it be adopted, or rejected? If it be not adopted, the present distracted and dangerous state of things will continue. We can only say, that we could not agree. The Union will be dissolved. This is my deliberate opinion."</p> <p>- <i>George Wythe</i></p>	 <p>2. "I had rather liberty be endangered ten thousand ways than give up that great principle of self-preservation, which every nation on earth hath a right to possess, and which is essential to the preservation of freedom, without which virtue can not exist, nor happiness be enjoyed."</p> <p>- <i>Richard Henry Lee</i></p>
 <p>3. "An efficient government is essential to the existence of the Union. To contemplate the possibility of such a government being destroyed for want of energy, would be to contemplate the destruction of the Union itself. Can any man who entertains a just idea of the ruinous consequences of such a event, hesitate to support an efficient government?"</p> <p>- <i>John Marshall</i></p>	 <p>3. "I smell a rat in Philadelphia, tending toward the monarchy...I have the highest veneration for those gentlemen, but, sir, give me leave to demand, What right had they to say, We, the People? My political curiosity, exclusive of my anxious solicitude for the public welfare, leads me to ask, Who authorized them to speak the language of We, the People, instead of We, the States?"</p> <p>- <i>Patrick Henry</i></p>

# New York

- ❖ **Argument for ratification:** The new federal government would provide better protection for individual liberties than the existing Articles of Confederation.
- ❖ **Key figures:** Alexander Hamilton and John Jay argued in favor of ratification, while Governor George Clinton opposed it.



The ratification debates in New York were some of the most contentious in the country. The state was divided between Federalists, who supported the Constitution, and Anti-Federalists, who opposed it. The Anti-Federalists argued that the Constitution gave too much power to the federal government and threatened individual liberties, while the Federalists argued that a stronger federal government



was necessary to ensure national unity and economic prosperity.

The debate centered on the lack of a bill of rights in the Constitution, which the Anti-Federalists saw as a crucial protection against government overreach. In the end, the Federalists were able to secure ratification by a narrow margin, but only after agreeing to support the addition of a bill of rights to the Constitution. The ratification of New York was seen as critical to the success of the new government, as it was the largest state in the Union at the time.



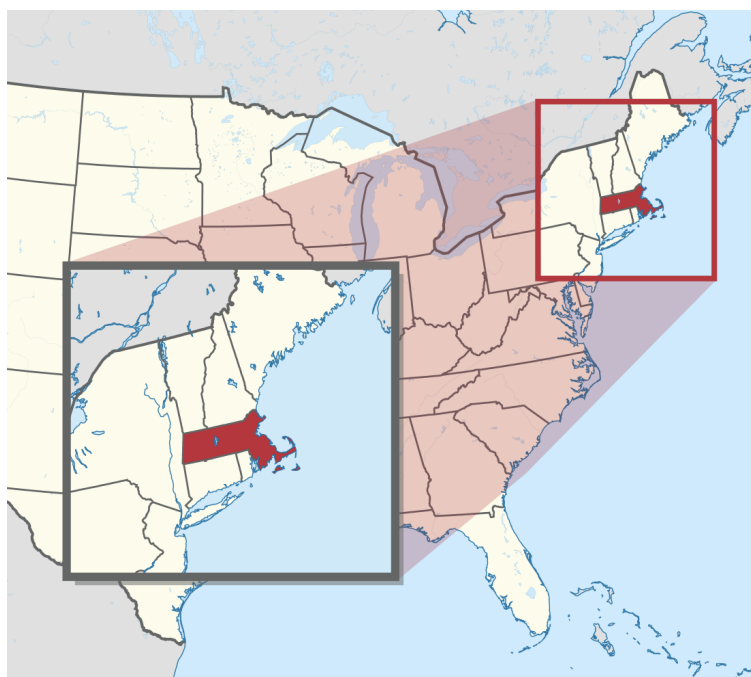


**Instructions:** Read each argument for and against ratification. As you read, underline or highlight the main arguments each speaker is making. Then, summarize each reason on the chart in your worksheet

 <b>Arguments For Ratification</b>	 <b>Arguments Against Ratification</b>
<div data-bbox="118 331 228 441"></div> <p>1. "The true principle of government is this — make the system compleat in its structure; give a perfect proportion and balance to its parts; and the powers you give to be exercised, will, since they are derived from a virtuous source, be invariably directed to the public good."</p> <p>- <i>Alexander Hamilton</i></p> <div data-bbox="118 804 215 913"></div> <p>2. "Nothing is more certain than the indispensable necessity of government, and it is equally undeniable, that whenever and however it is instituted, the people must cede to it some of their natural rights in order to vest it with requisite powers."</p> <p>- <i>John Jay</i></p> <div data-bbox="118 1283 207 1377"></div> <p>3. "I verily believe that if the great mass of the people were now possessed of the spirit and sentiments which they will have if the government is adopted, there would be little danger of an abuse of power by that government. But if every Man in this State possessed such information and abilities as I believe scarce any Man has, I would still say, adopt the Government, because I know of no better, and that there is a moral certainty that we shall never have any other that can be obtained by the means pointed out in the Constitution."</p> <p>- <i>Gouverneur Morris</i></p>	<div data-bbox="841 344 930 464"></div> <p>1. I am convinced that this Government is so constituted, that the representatives will generally be composed of the first class in the community... In every society, men of this class will command a superior degree of respect--and if the government is so constituted as to admit but few to exercise the powers of it, it will, according to the natural course of things, be in their hands. Men in the middling class, who are qualified as representatives, will not be so anxious to be chosen as those of the first. When the number is so small the office will be highly elevated and distinguished--the stile in which the members live will probably be high--circumstances of this kind, will render the place of a representative not a desirable one to sensible, substantial men, who have been used to walk in the plain and frugal paths of life.</p> <p>- <i>Melancton Smith</i></p> <div data-bbox="841 1123 930 1224"></div> <p>2. "A consolidated government is a tyranny; and such a one was never so well calculated to produce miserable, and to prevent the happy consequences of society. In despotic governments, as well as in all the monarchies of Europe, standing armies are kept up to execute the commands of the prince or the magistrate; but such a thing is unknown in America."</p> <p>- <i>Governor George Clinton</i></p> <div data-bbox="834 1560 915 1650"></div> <p>3. "The powers given to the general government by this Constitution, are very extensive, and indefinite indeed; and all powers not given by it, remain with the people, or the individual states... Congress under this Constitution will not be restrained from prohibiting the introduction of every article of commerce whatsoever, from one state to another, even to the necessaries of life."</p> <p>- <i>Robert Yates</i></p>

# Massachusetts

- ❖ **Argument for ratification:** The new federal government would be better able to regulate commerce and provide for the common defense than the existing Articles of Confederation.
- ❖ **Key figures:** John Adams and James Bowdoin argued in favor of ratification, while Samuel Adams and Elbridge Gerry opposed it.



The ratification debates in Massachusetts were a pivotal moment in the early history of the United States. The state had a reputation for political and intellectual independence, and the debates were marked by intense and passionate argumentation on both sides. Supporters of ratification, known as Federalists, argued that the Constitution was necessary to provide stability and order to the fledgling country, and that it balanced power between the federal government and the states. They also promised that a Bill of Rights would be added to protect individual liberties.

Opponents of ratification, known as Anti-Federalists, were deeply skeptical of the

Constitution. They argued that it would create a central government that would be too powerful and would infringe upon the rights of the states and the people. They were particularly concerned that the Constitution lacked a Bill of Rights, and they feared that the federal government would abuse its power and suppress individual liberties.

The debates in Massachusetts were heated and intense, with both sides using newspapers, pamphlets, and public meetings to make their arguments. Ultimately, the Federalists were able to sway public opinion in favor of ratification, thanks in part to their promise to add a Bill of Rights. Massachusetts became the sixth state to ratify the Constitution on February 6, 1788, paving the way for its adoption and the creation of the United States as we know it today.





**Instructions:** Read each argument for and against ratification. As you read, underline or highlight the main arguments each speaker is making. Then, summarize each reason on the chart in your worksheet

 <b>Arguments For Ratification</b>	 <b>Arguments Against Ratification</b>
 <p>1. "[The Constitution] is calculated to restrain the selfish ambition of particular states... and to promote the general happiness of the whole... It is the great means of preserving peace and tranquility, promoting industry and agriculture, and of protecting the liberties and property of the people."</p> <p>- <i>John Adams</i></p>	 <p>1. "I cannot give my assent to it [the Constitution], for it is too imperfect for me to approve, and too dangerous for the nation to adopt. It vests in the general government a power which in my opinion is inconsistent with the end of its institution, viz., the liberty and safety of the people."</p> <p>- <i>Samuel Adams</i></p>
 <p>2. "The people... are certainly in a deplorable condition, [with] almost every species of property insecure, and the law itself set at defiance. It is hoped that the establishment of the proposed government will remedy these evils, and that it will finally prove a blessing to the community."</p> <p>- <i>James Bowdoin</i></p>	 <p>2. "I am apprehensive that the great parties which now divide the United States, will sink into insignificance when compared with those which will divide us under the new Constitution. This [Constitution] contains things that are as palpable attacks upon the rights of individuals and as dangerous to the liberties of the people, as the Stamp Act or any other act of tyranny that ever was framed."</p> <p>- <i>Eldridge Gerry</i></p>
 <p>3. "[The Constitution] is the result of much experience, and much investigation and discussion... It will secure to us a more perfect union, will establish justice, will promote the general welfare, will provide for the common defense, will secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity."</p> <p>- <i>Theophilus Parsons</i></p>	 <p>3. "Let us look at the Constitution; it is said to be formed by gentlemen of the greatest abilities and the purest virtue, yet among its framers there are men who are in debt, and they want a government to protect their creditors; there are men who have large quantities of land, and they want a government to protect their property; there are lawyers and men of learning, and they want a government to protect their profession. I am not of this class. I am a farmer; my property consists of a small farm; I have no creditors, and I owe no man. I therefore view the matter with the eye of a farmer, and in my humble opinion the Constitution is not calculated to benefit farmers like myself."</p> <p>- <i>Amos Singletary</i></p>

State you are debating in: \_\_\_\_\_

1. As you read the arguments made by leaders in your state's debate, list the reasons for and against ratification of the constitution:

 <b>Reasons to Support Ratification</b>	 <b>Reasons to Reject Ratification</b>
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
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2. Do you vote to ratify the constitution?

<input type="checkbox"/> YES!	<input type="checkbox"/> NO!
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3. Explain the reasons for your vote using complete sentences:

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