



*The Founding: From Colonies to the United States SS.7.CG.1.7*  
**Articles of Confederation**  
**VIDEO SCRIPT**



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## **ARTICLES OF CONFEDERATION**

1. After the colonists declared independence from Great Britain, they needed to create a system of government for their new and independent nation. The nation's first government was established through the Articles of Confederation.
2. The Articles of Confederation set up a confederal system. This means that government power was located with the states and there was little power in the central, or national, government. Because the Articles of Confederation created a system of government with little central power, each state operated almost as an independent country. Due to this government system, it became difficult for the national government to govern and many elements of the Articles of Confederation actually became weaknesses.
3. In this video we will uncover some of the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation and how these weaknesses led to the writing of the Constitution, our government today.
4. After watching this video, you will be able to:
  - ◆ Identify the weaknesses of the government under the Articles of Confederation (i.e., Congress had no power to tax, to regulate trade or to enforce its laws; the national government lacked a national court system [judicial branch] and central leadership [executive branch]; no national armed forces; and changes to the Articles required unanimous consent of the 13 states.
  - ◆ Understand the importance of Shays' Rebellion
  - ◆ Explain how the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation led to the writing of the U.S. Constitution.
5. Remember that the Articles of Confederation were our first form of government, ratified (or approved) during the American Revolution. Right after the Revolution, the United States was deeply in debt, owing a lot of money to a lot of people from the war. Under the Articles though, Congress did not have the power to raise money by taxing the states. Not being able to collect money from the states was a huge weakness, because that meant that Congress, and the United States, could not pay the bills, and Congress could not pay for an army and navy to defend the nation.
6. Another weakness with the Articles of Confederation was that Congress did not have the power to regulate, or control, trade. States could tax goods, or products, going from one state to the other. And Congress could not regulate states trading with other countries, even our enemies.
7. Let's Check In. Try to answer the following in your own words.
8. Summarize the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation you have learned so far.  
→ ANSWER TO QUESTION

10. So we've learned about some weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation. Before we begin with the other ones, let's recap what we've learned so far. The Articles of Confederation established the first government system for the United States. It gave most of the power to the states, and Congress lacked the power to collect taxes or regulate trade, and there was no military because Congress couldn't pay for it and it wasn't mentioned in the Articles.
11. Let's take a look at some of the other issues under the Articles of Confederation. Under the Articles, there was no mention of an executive or judicial branch. This meant that all the power of the national government was solely in the legislative branch, Congress.
12. This was a huge problem because that meant that Congress could not enforce any laws they passed since there was no central leadership or executive branch to make sure that laws were being enforced in each state. And since there was no central court system, or judicial branch, there was nobody to interpret laws or settle disputes between states, certainly real weaknesses.
13. You might be able to relate to another important weakness of the Articles of Confederation. Imagine trying to get all of your friends, who might not like each other, to do something. It isn't always easy, is it? Well, we had a similar problem under the Articles of Confederation.
14. Just like you might have a hard time to get all of your friends to agree to do something, it was very hard for all 13 states to agree to make changes, or amendments, to the Articles of Confederation. They had to be unanimous, or all agree, to make changes to make things better. And this was definitely a weakness.
15. Let's check in, try to answer the following in your own words:
  - ◆ Summarize the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation.
  - ANSWER TO QUESTION
15. Let's recap what we've learned so far. The Articles of Confederation had significant weaknesses. Congress had no power to tax or regulate trade. There was no military. The only branch of government was the legislative branch, Congress. No one could enforce or interpret the laws, and changing the Articles of Confederation required all 13 states.
16. With the Articles having all of these weaknesses, it was almost inevitable that the United States would have a big problem on its hands. And that big problem would rear its head with Shays's Rebellion. So what was Shays's Rebellion, and how did it ultimately lead to the writing of the US Constitution?
17. After the American Revolution, the economy of the United States was still struggling due to debt, which was the money owed from the Revolutionary War, and because states were arguing over boundary lines and taxes. States began to look for ways to pay for this debt. For example, the government of Massachusetts threatened to take land from farmers because they had not paid their taxes during the Revolutionary War, even though the government had previously told them they did not have to pay those taxes. You could say why that could be a problem. This effort, which was widely seen as unfair, led to Shay's Rebellion, the name given to an event in which 2000 Massachusetts farmers revolted in local courthouses to prevent the government from taking their farms.

18. The Massachusetts militia finally ended the rebellion, but the situation made it clear that the national government was too weak to maintain order in the new nation. Why goodness, it didn't even have an army to help in Massachusetts. Shays's Rebellion made leaders of the national government think about how to fix the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation.
19. In 1787, they called for a meeting of representatives from all 13 states in Philadelphia to decide what to do. This meeting would later be known as the Constitutional Convention, where the U. S. Constitution was written to replace the Articles of Confederation.
20. Let's check in. Try to answer the following question in your own words.
  - ◆ How did Shays's Rebellion help lead to the writing of the United States Constitution?
  - ANSWER TO QUESTION
21. Let's recap what we've learned so far, because we've talked a lot about Shays's Rebellion and the weaknesses of the Articles. After the revolution, the economy of the US struggled, because of massive national debt and states arguing over borders and taxes caused problems. Massachusetts tried to take land for back taxes from farmers, which led to Shays's Rebellion.
22. The national government was too weak to help put down the Rebellion. Leaders of the national government called for a meeting to fix the Articles of Confederation. This meeting would become known as the Constitutional Convention.
23. Well we've learned quite a lot about the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation. But that's not the government we have now, is it? The Constitutional Convention met and drafted the U.S. Constitution. This addressed the weaknesses in the Articles of Confederation and is the guiding document that we use for our government, even today!
24. Be sure to check out some of the other topic areas to learn more about the United States Constitution and how it forms our government and our rights.