

The Meaning of the Federalist Papers

Interdisciplinary Subject: English Language Arts

Grade Level: 9-12

Duration: 80-100 minutes

Lesson Overview: This lesson explores the *Federalist Papers*. In Part I, students engage in a discussion about how they get information about current issues. Next, they read a short background of the *Federalist Papers* and work individually or in pairs to closely examine the text. In Part II, student pairs analyze excerpts from the *Federalist Papers* and relate these documents to what they have already learned. In Part III, students work in small groups to research a Federalist or Anti-Federalist and role-play this person in a classroom debate on the adoption of the Constitution. Finally, students write their own version of a modern "Federalist Paper."

Essential Question

How did the constitutional system described in the *Federalist Papers* contribute to our national ideas about equality?

Lesson Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Explain arguments for the necessity of a Constitution and a bill of rights.
- Define *democracy* and *republic* and explain James Madison's use of these terms.
- Describe the political philosophy underpinning the Constitution as specified in the *Federalist Papers* using primary source examples.
- Discuss and defend the ideas of leading Federalists and Anti-Federalists on several issues in a classroom role-play debate.

Materials Needed

Part I: Textual Analysis and Discussion

- Slide pack to facilitate discussions and group work
- Handout A: *Background to The Federalist Papers* (with questions for discussion and/or writing)

Part II: Primary Source Analysis and Discussion

- Handout B1: Excerpt of Text of "[Alexander Hamilton]. Number LXVIII." (Federalist No. 68)
- Handout B2: Excerpt of Text of "[James Madison]. Number XIV." (Federalist No. 14)
- Handout C1: Source Analysis Questions for "[Alexander Hamilton]. Number LXVIII."
- Handout C2: Source Analysis Questions for "[James Madison]. Number XIV."

Part III: Federalist vs. Anti-Federalist Debate

- Handout D: Short Biographies
- Handout E: Debate: Federalist vs. Anti-Federalist

Library of Congress Resources

Part I: Textual Analysis and Discussion

- [Front page of The Boston Gazette, Nov. 26, 1787 containing letter to the editor from "A Federalist" concerning constitutional convention]. Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2004679481/>
- "Title page of The Federalist, vol. 1." <https://www.loc.gov/item/2003654698/>
- "The Foundation of American Government / Hy. Hintermeister." <https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/Constitution.html>

Part II: Primary Source Analysis and Discussion

- "[Alexander Hamilton]. Number LXVIII." <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/creating-the-united-states/convention-and-ratification.html#obj16>
- "[James Madison]. Number XIV." <https://www.congress.gov/resources/display/content/The+Federalist+Papers#TheFederalistPapers-14>

Part III: Federalist vs. Anti-Federalist Debate

- Patrick Henry <https://www.loc.gov/resource/det.4a26886/>
- Alexander Hamilton <https://www.loc.gov/resource/det.4a26168/>
- George Mason <https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/mason.html>
- James Madison <https://www.loc.gov/item/2016712636/>
- Richard Henry Lee <https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/leeresolution.html>
- John Jay <https://www.loc.gov/item/today-in-history/december-12>

Standards

C3 Indicators

- D2.Civ.14.9-12. Analyze historical, contemporary, and emerging means of changing societies, promoting the common good, and protecting rights.
- D2.His.4.9-12. Analyze complex and interacting factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras.
- D2.His.16.9-12. Integrate evidence from multiple relevant historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument about the past.
- D4.1.9-12. Construct arguments using precise and knowledgeable claims, with evidence from multiple sources, while acknowledging counterclaims and evidentiary weaknesses.

Teacher's Guide

Preparation Tips

Prior to the lesson

Provide students with the following vocabulary terms to define.

amendment	Revolutionary War	delegates	constitution
independence	Philadelphia	separation of powers	government

Prior to Part I

- Review slide pack
- Copy Handout A – 1 per student

Prior to Part II

- Copy Handouts B1 and B2 – 1 per student for half the class
- Copy Handouts C1 and C2 – 1 per student for the other half of the class

Part III

- You might arrange time for students to do research in the library or in the computer lab.
- Copy Handout D – 1 per student
- Copy Handout E – 1 per student

Part I: Textual Analysis & Discussion

A. Focus Discussion

1. To help students understand that public issues are still debated in the media (as they were debated when the essays appearing in the *Federalist Papers* were written), engage students in a brief discussion about how we get information on political issues today.

NOTE: The following questions are listed on slide 1 of the slide pack for this lesson.

2. Questions to raise:

- What is meant by the term “political” or “public” issue?
ANSWER: *Students should be able to explain that governmental, social, and cultural topics can have national interest. For example, public figures might express political opinions on Twitter that become controversial and newsworthy.*
- What are some of the most hotly debated political issues today?
ANSWER: *Students should mention current issues. Accept reasonable responses.*
- How can you find out about these issues?
ANSWER: *From school, parents, friends, the media (television, radio, newspapers, and magazines), the Internet, and social media.*

B. Pre-Reading: The *Federalist Papers*

1. Link the previous focus activity to the *Federalist Papers* by explaining that even our Constitution was once an object of intense political debate. Give students the following background:

When delegates met in Philadelphia at the Constitutional Convention, they wrote a new Constitution that created a stronger government than what the country had before. People at the time debated whether the Constitution should be adopted. Much of this debate took place in the newspapers. Two delegates from the Continental Convention, Alexander Hamilton and James Madison, and diplomat John Jay wrote articles in New York newspapers favoring the Constitution. These articles were later published in book form and called the *Federalist Papers*.

2. Note that, as people do today in letters to the editor, in the “Comments” sections of web-based publications, and through various social media, individual citizens weighed in on the debate as well.
3. Display slide 2 of the slide pack, which shows the front page of a Boston newspaper dated November 26, 1787 – about a month after the first of what would become the *Federalist Papers* was published in a New York newspaper. Though the text itself is too small to read, students should be able to see that the letter is signed “A Federalist.”
4. Tell students that they are going to read more background about the *Federalist Papers*. As they read, they need to look for:
 - Reasons why the *Federalist Papers* were written.
 - Two key ideas about our Constitution and government that the *Federalist Papers* explain.

NOTE: These questions are listed on slide 2 of the slide pack for this lesson.

5. Distribute **Handout A: Background to the *Federalist Papers*** to each student and have them read it either individually or in pairs. Explain that, after they read, they will examine and discuss the key ideas in the *Federalist Papers* to learn why this document is considered so important. (Students may read Handout A for homework.)
6. Have students prepare written answers to the **Writing & Discussion Questions on Handout A**, either to check for understanding in a class discussion, or for homework.
 1. What were the Articles of Confederation? Why did they fail? How did their failure lead to the writing of the Constitution?
 2. Who were the authors of the *Federalist Papers* and how was their work published?
 3. Briefly describe the three basic ideas behind the Constitution expressed in the *Federalist Papers*.
 4. What were the arguments for and against a republic?
 5. Why did the Anti-Federalists oppose the Constitution? Why did the Federalists oppose a bill of rights? Do you agree with either position? Explain.

NOTE: A Teacher Guide with answers to these questions is provided as Appendix 1 (page 8 of this document).

C. Closure

1. Have each student complete a 3-2-1 inquiry exit slip.
 - Students should use the following prompts:
 - *Three I learned about The Federalist Papers:*
 - *Two things I found interesting or surprising:*
 - *One thing I still have a question about:*
 - The surprising things may overlap with the three things a student learned.

Part II: Primary Source Analysis and Discussion

This part of the lesson focuses on two excerpts from the *Federalist Papers* (Handouts B1 and B2).

The purpose of the activity is to give students an opportunity to read documents that include arguments for and against the Constitution during the time when it was proposed. This activity will allow students to read primary texts closely, make important connections to the previous background material, and develop ideas emphasized in earlier discussions.

A. Introduction

Explain to students they will now explore primary sources concerning the Constitution, specifically excerpts from two of the *Federalist Papers*.

Tell students that they will work in groups to explore the documents that address arguments in support of or opposed to the adoption of the Constitution.

B. Groups Analyze Primary Sources

1. Divide the class into pairs or small groups. Distribute **Handouts B1** (Hamilton) to half the class and **B2** (Madison) to the other half of the class.

2. Next, give students the appropriate **Source Analysis Questions (Handout C1: Hamilton, Handout C2: Madison)**.

3. Groups should now closely examine their texts, complete the handout, and be prepared to contribute to the class discussion that will follow.

C. Large-Group Discussion and Debrief

1. Once students have completed the Source Analysis Questions, lead a class discussion that reinforces ideas explored both in the primary texts and throughout the entire lesson.

2. Begin the discussion by giving groups an opportunity to communicate the main ideas in the two readings. Then focus on the following considerations:

- How do the ideas in the source you examined help you to understand democracy?
- What do you think is the most important idea from either the Federalists (like Hamilton and Madison) or the Anti-Federalists (whose objections are addressed in these texts)? Explain.

NOTE: These questions are listed on slide 3 of the slide pack for this lesson.

3. Finally, debrief the lesson using the questions below. (If you have time constraints here, consider assigning written responses to these questions as a homework assignment or as an assessment activity).

Questions to raise:

- **What were the arguments for and against putting a bill of rights in the Constitution?**

ANSWER: The Constitution did not include a bill of rights. The Anti-Federalists demanded a bill of rights to protect the newly won rights of Americans. The Federalists said a bill of rights was not necessary because the new government had limited power and did not have the authority to violate anyone's rights.

- **How did a bill of rights get added to the Constitution?**

ANSWER: Two states, Virginia and New York, refused to ratify the Constitution until they were promised that a bill of rights would be added to it. In the first Congress, James Madison saw to it that this promise was kept. He wrote proposed amendments and pushed them through Congress. Ten amendments were ratified by the states and they are known as the Bill of Rights.

- **What three main ways did the Constitution set up a strong government that preserved freedom, as described in the *Federalist Papers*?**

ANSWER: The three main ways are:

- 1. It set up a federal form of government. It listed the powers of the national government and reserved all other powers to the states. This put a check on the power of the national government.*
- 2. It also checked the power of the national government by separating its powers. It divided the government into three branches, each with a separate function. The legislature makes the laws, the executive enforces them, and the judicial branch interprets them.*
- 3. It set up a republican form of government, a representative government accountable to the people.*

- **In what ways do you think the constitutional system described in the *Federalist Papers* contributed to our national ideas about equality?**

ANSWER: *Accept reasoned responses, but answers could include:*

- *Federalism ensured an equal balance of power between the state governments and the national government.*
- *The system of separation of powers ensured three co-equal branches of government (co-equal means equal to each other in power).*
- *The republican form of democracy ensured that citizens would be able to elect their representatives under NOTE: These questions are listed on slides 5-6 of the slide pack for this lesson.*

Part III: Federalist vs. Anti-Federalist Debate

Explain that students are going to get a chance to role play the discussions and debates over the Constitution between the Federalists and Anti-Federalists.

A. Divide the class into six groups.

Distribute **Handout D: Short Biographies** to each student. Assign each group one of the following Federalists or Anti-Federalists: James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, George Mason, Patrick Henry, or Richard Henry Lee.

B. Distribute **Handout E: Debate: Federalist vs. Anti-Federalist** to each student.

Review the instructions on the handout. Give students time to absorb the material and prepare for the debate. If you have chosen to allow them to do further research, give them time to research their assigned person. (You should also decide whether students should be given credit for—or be allowed to wear—costumes at the debate.)

C. When the day for the debate arrives, be sure to have students introduce their characters. Form new groups, each with one of the Federalists and Anti-Federalists. Pose the debate questions to the groups and have students discuss them in their small groups.

NOTE: The debate questions are listed on slide 7 of the slide pack for this lesson.

E. Engage the whole class in a discussion/debrief about the role play. Questions to raise include:

- What was the best argument you heard someone make?
- Based on the arguments you heard today, would you have favored or opposed the Constitution? Why?

NOTE: These questions are listed on slide 8 of the slide pack for this lesson.

F. **Assessment.** Ask students to write their own version of a “Federalist Paper.” In it, students should:

- Choose one feature of democratic government they think is important today (e.g., separation of powers, consent of the government, a free press, or federalism).
- Describe that feature: What does it mean? Why is it important? Is it something debated today? How so?
- Conduct independent research to answer any of the questions above.
- Present their Federalist Paper either as an essay (300 words), slide presentation (5-8 slides), or another format (agreed upon by the teacher).