

# **The Great Compromise**

## **Teacher Power Point Notes**

### **Historical background leading up to the debate excerpts in the Constitutional Convention on the Great Compromise, with debate summaries**

#### **Essential Question:**

Was the Great Compromise a fair solution?

What is the role of compromise in political processes?

#### **The Articles of Confederation**

- After the American Revolution, the individual State Legislatures chose to form the **Articles of Confederation**. The articles were designed to maintain state sovereignty and created a small, weak federal government to connect the states in some way.
  - Under the articles, the federal government had limited power. They could not tax, raise revenue, regulate trade, or enforce the laws. This was good for the states who did not want to repeat their experience with King George. However, this caused economic failure, interstate contention, and a lack of unification between states.

#### **The Constitutional Convention (1787)**

- In September of 1786, five of the delegates to the 1787 convention met at the Annapolis Convention to call for revision and alteration of the Articles of Confederation. The Confederation Congress authorized a formal Convention between representatives from the states to do so.
- In May of 1787, delegates from 12 of the 13 states met in Philadelphia with the intention of addressing the inadequacies of the Articles.

- The Rhode Island delegates chose not to attend the convention because of their adamant disapproval of instating a stronger national government
  - Why would Rhode Island fear a strong national government?
- Although the original Virginia Plan only proposed to alter and enlarge the Articles, the delegates eventually decided to create an entirely new national government with the proper powers needed to found an efficient country.

### **The Main Question: Representation**

- The most debated question of the Convention was how the states would be represented in the National Legislature. Two plans were proposed: Virginia Plan and the New Jersey Plan.
  - The Virginia Plan is most well-known for its proposition for **proportional representation** based on either how much the state pays in taxes to the government or the amount of free inhabitants in the state. This would benefit large states because they would hold more power in Congress.
    - Is this fair? Should states with larger populations have more influence in legislative decision-making?
  - The New Jersey Plan proposed to perpetuate the articles' representative plan while enlarging the Legislative powers to be more efficient. Had the New Jersey plan been adopted, each state would have had a single vote in Congress.
    - What are the pros and cons of **equal representation**?

## **The Great Compromise**

- The Great Compromise is also known as the Connecticut Compromise because members from the Connecticut delegation, Roger Sherman and Oliver Ellsworth, assisted in drafting and supporting it. The earliest form of this language is from the First Committee on Representation, chaired by Elbridge Gerry.
  - Although originally rejected, the compromise was reintroduced and adopted. The Convention then created two separate Committees on Representation to decide the proportion at which the lower house would be appropriated.

## **Debates from the 1787 Constitutional Convention**

**Learning Objective:** Students will analyze the primary source records and proceedings from the 1787 Constitutional Convention to evaluate the causes and consequences of the Great Compromise. This will help them understand the importance of compromise in political processes.

### **Essential Questions:**

Was the Great Compromise a fair solution?

What is the importance of compromise in political processes?

### **Summary of Excerpts**

- E672308 - On May 29, the Virginia Plan is proposed. The second resolution contained within the plan introduced proportional representation. It recommended basing representation on “quotas of contributions”, the amount of money a state pays in taxes, or the amount of free people living within a state. The option was offered because different states would benefit from one more than the other.

- E675207 - On May 30, Alexander Hamilton proposed to amend the Virginia Plan by basing representation exclusively on the amount of free people living in a state. His amendment was not debated by the delegates and postponed.
- E675445 – On June 11, John Rutledge proposed to base representation exclusively on the amount of money each state contributes to the federal government through taxes. Pierce Butler agreed with Mr. Rutledge and supported the amendment stating that “money was power”.
- E672420 – The New Jersey plan is offered to the Convention. The goal is to expand and revise the Articles of Confederation instead of replacing them. The plan intended to keep equal representation for each state in Congress.
- E675589 – James Madison gives a speech in response to the New Jersey plan and says that the delegates are aware that equal representation is not fair to the large states. Even those delegates from smaller states agree with Madison. He mentions that the small states proposed to redraw the state lines to make each state the same size. Madison asks if that would be a viable solution.
- E672692 – The First Committee on Representation reports to the Convention. The chairman, Mr. Gerry, reports the earliest language of the Great Compromise, proportional representation in the House and equal representation in the Senate.
- E672693 – Mr. Gerry supports the report from the committee although he has objections to the language. He states that finding a compromise is the more important than being entirely satisfied with the results. His statements embody the idea of compromise and the importance of the Great Compromise.