

Grade Eleven Sample Test Item—Reading

Achievement Level: Standard Exceeded

Read the text and answer the questions.

The New Nation in Trouble

by Craig Blohm

In a small hotel in Paris, three Americans took turns with a quill pen and red wax, signing and sealing an official document. It was September 3, 1783, and these men—John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and John Jay—were signing the peace treaty that ended the war between England and its American colonies. The Revolutionary War was over, and the United States of America was now truly free. But although eight years of conflict had ended, America’s internal struggles were just starting. Let us begin by returning to the year 1776....

The Articles of Confederation

The 13 Colonies were not without some form of government during the Revolution. It had become clear that to pursue a war against England, some unifying element was necessary. Many Colonial leaders also anticipated the day when the war would be over and the new states would have to govern themselves. Meeting in Philadelphia in 1776, the Second Continental Congress took up the question of a framework for the new nation. Acting on a proposal by Richard Henry Lee of Virginia, a committee of 13 members (one from each colony) was established on June 12 to draw up a plan for confederation. John Dickinson, a scholarly lawyer from Pennsylvania, headed the group. A week after the Declaration of Independence was adopted, Dickinson presented the committee’s document, written in his own hand. Called “The Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union,” it recommended a strong central government. This proposal caused a stir in Congress, and a heated debate followed.

The Debates Begin

Many delegates feared a government that called for a powerful central authority. After all, wasn’t that what the Revolution was all about? King George III was the authority from which the colonies were trying to break away. To replace one king 3,000 miles away with another on their own shores made no sense. No, the delegates felt that any federal government had to be less powerful than the individual states.

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Other objections to the Articles of Confederation also were discussed. How would each state be represented? How much should each contribute to a national treasury? And what was to be done with the western territories? The debate dragged on as each point was addressed. Finally, on November 15, 1777, Congress adopted the Articles. Ratification took almost three-and-a-half years, but on March 1, 1781, the last state, Maryland, accepted the Articles of Confederation. The United States had its first government framework. There was just one problem: It did not work.

Five Weaknesses

Although Congress could pass laws and negotiate treaties with foreign nations under the Articles of Confederation, the framework had five basic weaknesses:

1. Congress could not raise money by taxing the people directly. It could only ask for contributions from the states.
2. Congress did not have the power to organize a practical money system. Meanwhile, the country was flooded with worthless paper currency.
3. Congress could not improve the flow of trade among states. Individual states were blocking products from out of state.
4. The federal government had no armed forces, except for troops that states chose to send. It had no power to raise its own troops.
5. The federal government had no way to deal directly with its citizens. Congress could work only with state governments.

A Rope of Sand

More than one of the new nation's leaders called the Articles of Confederation "a rope of sand," and they were indeed just about as effective as that. In the words of the Articles themselves, they created "a firm league of friendship between the states." In addition, "[e]ach state retains its sovereignty, freedom and independence." So the states remained powerful, while Congress was left weak. There was no chief executive or national judicial system.

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Further, the passage of any important measure required the consent of nine states. To amend the Articles required the consent of all 13! The Articles of Confederation created a weak league of 13 states rather than one strong nation. And after years of war, a strong nation was badly needed.

Failed Convention

The infant nation, ravaged by war and deeply in debt, fell into a severe depression. Trade with England was drastically curtailed. The states bickered among themselves over land claims and taxes. Jobs were scarce, and people lucky enough to find work were paid low wages. Debtor prisons began filling with people who could not repay what they had borrowed. It was a rough beginning indeed.

Two states, Maryland and Virginia, had been quarreling over navigation rights to the Potomac River. After a meeting held in 1785 to settle these differences, James Madison of Virginia felt that all the states should meet to discuss America's commercial problems. Nine states accepted Madison's invitation. When the convention began in 1786 in Annapolis, Maryland, however, only five states were represented. Discouraged by the poor turnout, those present reluctantly abandoned the idea of a trade conference. Then Alexander Hamilton proposed that delegates from all the states should convene in Philadelphia in May 1787 to discuss the inadequacies of the Articles of Confederation. The stage was set for what we know today as the Constitutional Convention. Although many Americans did not yet realize it, the Articles' days were numbered.

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What conclusion can be drawn about the author’s use of evidence to support his opinion about the Articles of Confederation? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

Area	Reading Demonstrating understanding of literary and nonfiction texts
Standard(s)	Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text.
Answer	Constructed Response: Students write a short response, drawing an inference from the selection and supporting their answers with specific details from the text. A scoring rubric and sample responses for this item appear in Appendix A .

Scoring Rubric and Sample Responses (Constructed Response)

This item is worth a possible two points (0, 1, or 2) and is hand scored.

Scoring Rubric

Score	Rationale
2	<p>A response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gives sufficient evidence of the ability to make a clear inference/conclusion• Includes specific examples/details that make clear reference to the text• Adequately explains inference/conclusion with clearly relevant information based on the text
1	<p>A response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gives limited evidence of the ability to make an inference/conclusion• Includes vague/limited examples/details that make reference to the text• Explains inference/conclusion with vague/limited information based on the text
0	<p>A response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gives no evidence of the ability to make an inference/conclusion <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gives an inference /conclusion but includes no examples or no examples/details that make reference to the text <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gives an inference/conclusion but includes no explanation or relevant information from the text

Sample responses that would earn a “0,” a “1,” and a “2” are provided on the next pages.

The scoring rubric and sample responses are based on the Grade 3 constructed response item on pages 20–23.

Sample Responses

Score: 0 Points

Confederation were a good attempt but not nearly as unifying as they'd hoped for.

That the Articles of Confederation were a good attempt but not nearly as unifying as they'd hoped for.

Score: 1 Point

Evidence can show that the author was clearly not in favor of the ideals expressed in the Articles of Confederation. He said "there was no chief executive or national judicial system". This portrays evidence for how the author is against the Articles of Confederation, ultimately claiming that they were corrupt and overall unsuccessful.

The author does not believe that the Articles of Confederation were beneficial to the United States. The author points out the 5 main weaknesses of the articles and presents evidence that prove that the Articles of Confederation were a "waste of time."

A conclusion that can be drawn from the authors point of view is that he believes the Articles of Confederation will not work. He helps prove this by talking about the heated debates, the main five weaknesses of it, and also the failed convention that followed.

according to the author, the articles of confederation didnt really make our nation stronger. instead it created a weak league of 13 states rather than one nation, which is something we needed at the time. because following that, our nation fell into a severe depression. Many people were unemployed which led to poverty and complications for the people

The author did not like the Articles of Confederation because there were to many problems with them. The author says that the states didn't get along and the government had no power to do very much.

Score: 2 Points

The author's use of evidence demonstrates he did not support the Articles of Confederation, he did not think it worked (and it didn't). "More than one of the new nation's leaders called the Articles of Confederation "a rope of sand," and they were indeed just about as effective as that.", I wanted to emphasize the, "and they were indeed just about as effective as that". That part of the sentence was his opinion. He believed they were about as effective as a "rope of sand." "So the states remained powerful while Congress was left weak. There was no chief executive or national judicial system." It is a fact that there was no executive or judicial branch in the AoC, but the fact that the author mentioned it after, "So the states remained powerful, while Congress was left weak." put across he believed Congress was weak because there was no executive or judicial branch; which is what we have today. "The Articles of Confederation created a weak league of 13 states rather than one strong nation. And after years of war, a strong nation was badly needed." the author claims that having the states more powerful than the federal gov't was wrong and that America needed a stronger federal gov't.

The author's opinion of the Articles of Confederation is it wasn't very good. This can be seen in the section entitled "A Rope of Sand" in which he states that "The Articles of Confederation created a weak league of 13 states rather than one strong nation, a strong nation was badly needed". This shows he thinks it was poorly made making the nation into weak states and not a real nation. Also he goes on in the section "Failed Convention" to say states were "bickering", "deeply in debt", and "It was a rough beginning indeed". These statements show that he felt that the Articles caused these things by titling the section the way he did. Also the author made a list of "Five Weaknesses" but did not do the same for strengths suggesting that he felt the Articles were bad and destined to fail. This is how the author shows his opinion of the Articles of Confederation