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Building a Nation



Building a Nation



Part Three of The American Revolution
Written by Terry Miller Shannon

www.readinga-z.com

Focus Question

How did the United States develop from thirteen separate colonies to one united nation?

Words to Know

checks and balances	judicial
compromise	legislative
constitution	prosperity
debates	ratify
debts	rebellion
executive	representatives
expansion	seizing
federal	treaty
guaranteed	tyranny

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Part Three of The American Revolution

Building a Nation tells about the efforts of thirteen colonies to build a nation.

Read *Seeds of Revolution* and *Battling for Independence* to find out what events led to the creation of the United States of America.

Building a Nation
Level Z Leveled Book

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Fountas & Pinnell	U-V
Reading Recovery	N/A
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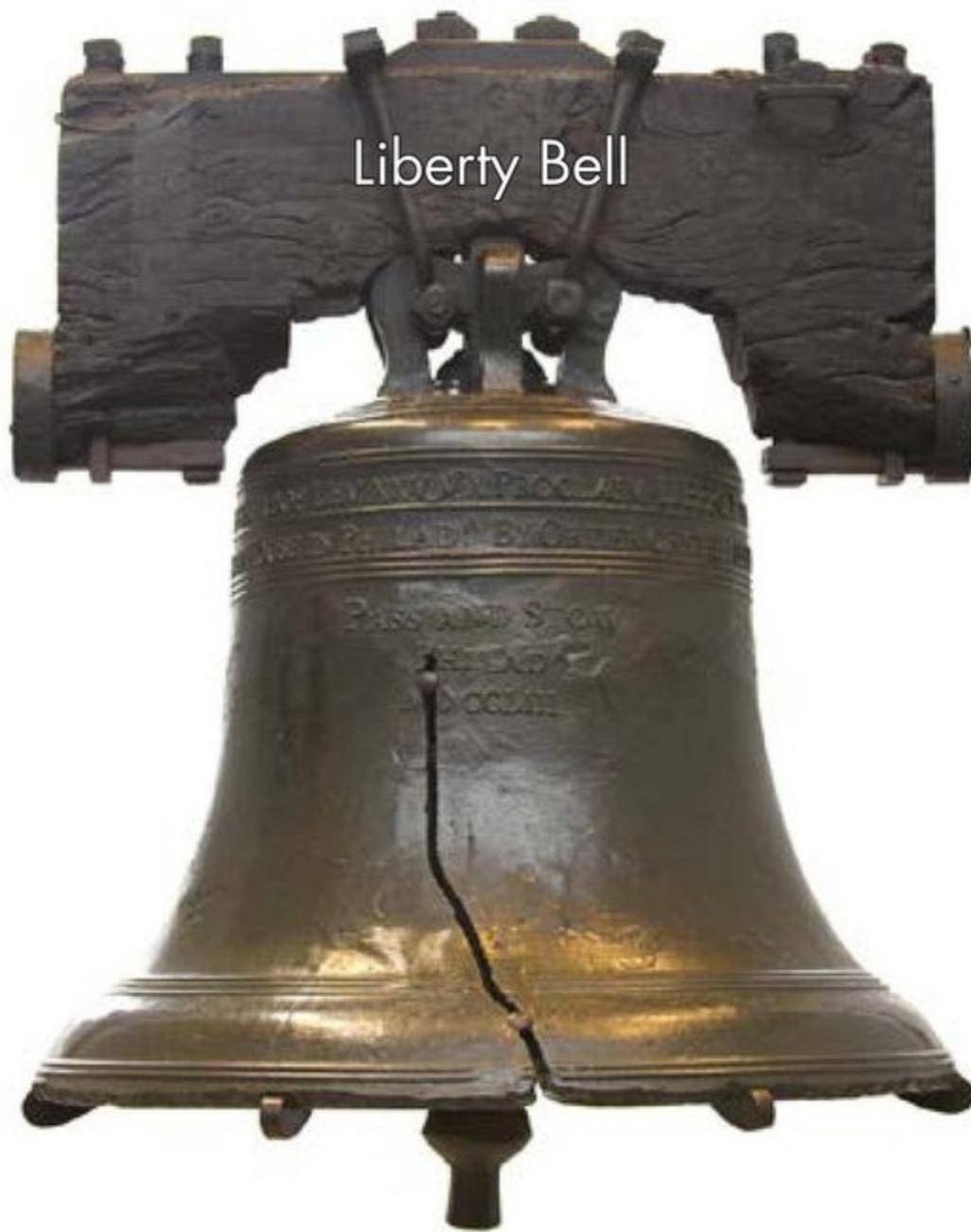


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Colonists fight British soldiers at the Battle of Lexington.

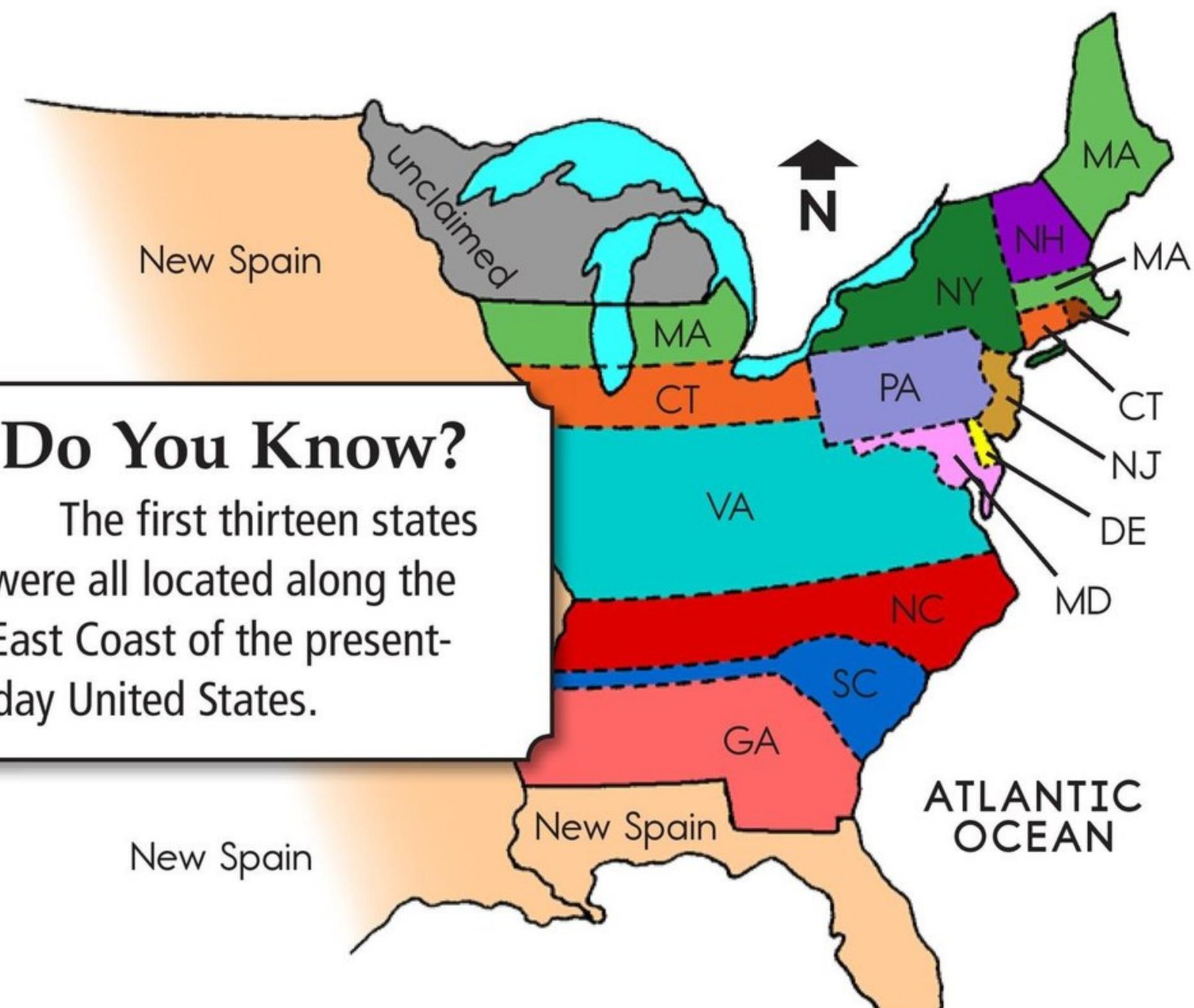
Introduction

In 1776, representatives of the thirteen colonies signed the Declaration of Independence, proclaiming they were free and independent of Great Britain's rule. The colonies became a union of states called the United States of America. The new union of states needed to devise a system of government.

Delegates from the states began to draft a plan for their new government. It would take five years to establish the plan within the new union of states because of the war with Great Britain. However, it would take another forty years and another war with Great Britain for this new union to feel united.

The Articles of Confederation

In 1777, delegates at the Second Continental Congress agreed to send the new plan for government to the states for review. The document detailing the plan would become known as the Articles of Confederation. It did not refer to the United States as a nation, but as a “firm league of friendship” between thirteen states. The document set up a weak **federal** government and strong state governments. The states liked the power given to them under the Articles.

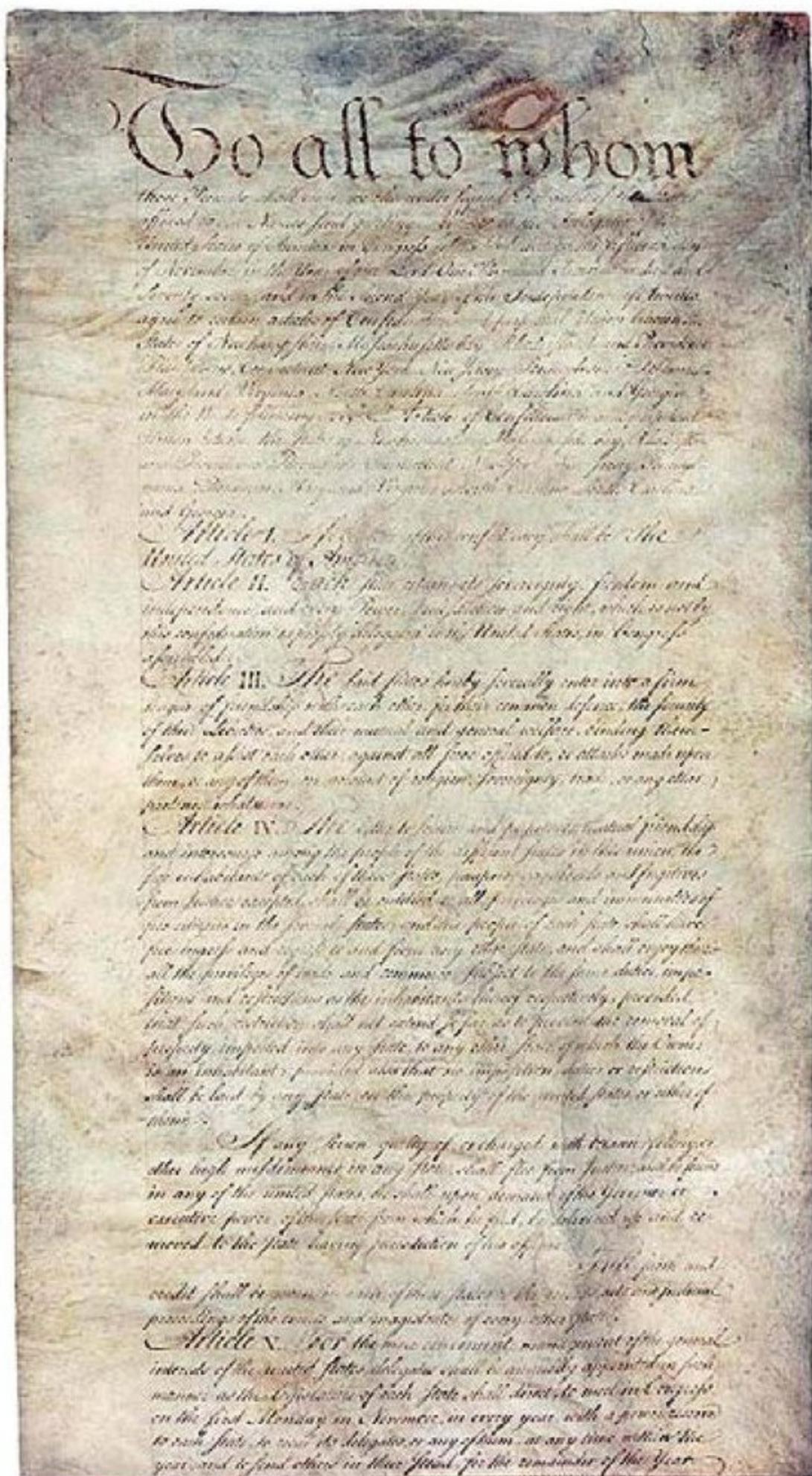


Do You Know?

The first thirteen states were all located along the East Coast of the present-day United States.

Land claims of states under the Articles of Confederation

The Articles of Confederation gave the federal government of the United States no power and no freedom to act. The



The Articles of Confederation

was in charge. A president was elected to oversee the proceedings of Congress but had no power to make decisions. Congress also did not have the power to change the Articles if the union of states decided something about the plan was not working. Nine of the thirteen states had to agree to changes in the Articles.

United States had **debts** from the war, but Congress, the one branch of federal government created by the Articles, could not tax people to raise money to pay off the debts. The lack of power to tax would prove to be a fatal flaw in the Articles of Confederation. More flaws would be seen in the next few years, including that no one **executive**

The Treaty of Paris

It took almost five years for all thirteen states to come to an agreement and approve the Articles of Confederation.

In 1781, the major fighting of the Revolutionary War ended with U.S. General George Washington's win over British General Charles Cornwallis at Yorktown, Virginia. The war itself wasn't really over for two more years.

Representatives from the United States and Great Britain discussed peace terms in Paris, France, from the middle of 1782 until the **Treaty of Paris** was signed on September 3, 1783. Only then was the war officially over.

- The peace treaty established two important ideas:
1. It recognized the new United States as an independent country.
 2. It set the borders of the new United States. It included all land from the Atlantic Ocean west to the Mississippi River with the exception of New Orleans and the Floridas, which Spain controlled. The United States' northern border was set at the Great Lakes and along the borders of Quebec and Nova Scotia.



The Treaty of Paris



Thinking Critically

WHY was it important for the U.S. to be recognized in the Treaty of Paris as independent of Britain?

IN YOUR MIND, what might have happened if the treaty did not recognize U.S. independence?

Why Did It Take So Long?

The Treaty of Paris was not signed until two years after the war ended at Yorktown. Great Britain was in no hurry to please the United States. Britain also hoped a delay would increase the chances that colonists who had fled the colonies due to their loyalty to Britain would get paid for property they lost when they fled. Estimates vary on how many colonists loyal to Britain left during and after the war, but some put the number around 100,000.

Money Problems

Once the Revolutionary War was over and the Treaty of Paris signed, the United States had terrible money troubles. The government had no money and no power to tax, so many of the soldiers were not paid. But an even bigger money headache faced the new nation: war debts. The nation owed more than \$76 million to foreign countries, individual Americans, and state banks. Leaders did not know how they would raise the money to pay off the debts.

In Massachusetts, money problems inspired a **rebellion**. Farmers who could not pay their debts lost their farms. In 1786, Daniel Shays, a former Revolutionary War captain, and about a thousand other people marched on the town of Springfield, Massachusetts, and then headed to Boston. The U.S. Army met them there, and gunfire was exchanged. Some of the workers were tried and hanged, while others were not punished. Shays' Rebellion made it clear to leaders that a stronger federal government was needed.



This gold U.S. Half Eagle was made in 1795.



Constitutional Convention

To solve the many problems of the United States, fifty-five men arrived in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, for a meeting at Independence Hall in May 1787. The goal of the meeting was to change the Articles of Confederation to make a stronger federal government. The men drafted a **constitution** that would establish a president to lead the union, give Congress the power to tax, and create a way to change the governing document.



Independence Hall

Twelve of the thirteen states sent delegates. Each delegate was an influential leader in his own state and was known as a leader in the new union. All the delegates were wealthy, educated white men. They elected George Washington to oversee the meeting, which became known as the Constitutional Convention. The convention lasted for several weeks.

Debates over revisions to the Articles of Confederation raised tempers on two issues. The first issue was representation. More representatives in Congress would equal more power. Two plans were proposed. One based representation on population, which meant more representatives for states with more people. The other plan made representation equal for all states.

The second issue was slavery, which was important to the farming economy in the South. Slaves were people who were forced to work without pay. Southern states wanted to ensure they could keep their slaves and that their slaves, who could not vote, would be counted for representation. The delegates for the Southern states thought that by counting slaves for representation, their states would be on more equal footing with the Northern states.

An editorial cartoon shows debates during the Constitutional Convention.



The delegates developed a **compromise** on both representation and slavery. For representation, they created two houses of Congress. In the Senate, all states would be equally represented. In the House of Representatives, states would be represented based on their population. On the issue of slavery, the delegates prohibited Congress from making any changes to control slavery for twenty years. They also agreed to count three-fifths of the slaves living in slave states when deciding how many representatives each state would get. Delegates also debated how much power the president should have. They developed a system of **checks and balances** to give each branch of the government equal power. Three branches were proposed in all—a **legislative** branch with two houses of Congress, an executive branch with a president, and a **judicial** branch with a system of courts to enforce laws. A system to change the Constitution was also built into the document.

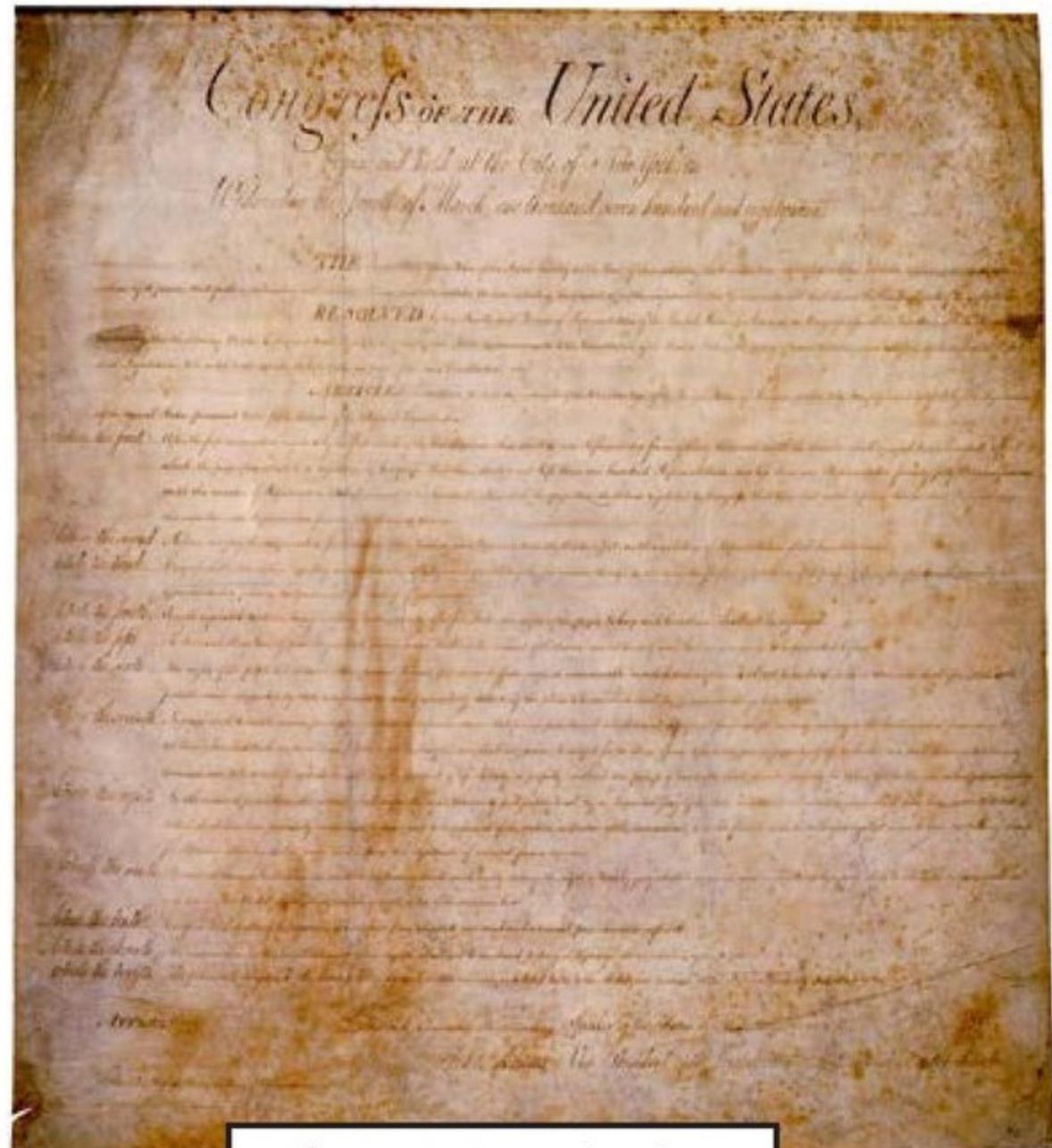


George Washington addresses the Constitutional Convention.

On September 17, 1787, thirty-nine delegates of the convention signed the Constitution and sent it to the states for a vote. People everywhere discussed whether the Constitution made a good plan for government.

A group called the Federalists worked to get states to **ratify** the Constitution.

Another group, called the Antifederalists, worked against it becoming the law of the land.



The U.S. Constitution

The Antifederalists said the Constitution needed to list the people's rights that could not be taken away by the government. Eventually, the Federalists and the Antifederalists reached an agreement that included ten changes to the Constitution, which were called the Bill of Rights. The Bill of Rights **guaranteed** the right to free speech, the right to practice a religion, and other rights.

Thinking Critically

WHY did the delegates compromise on so many issues to create the Constitution?

IN YOUR MIND, how does compromise make things stronger?



Abigail Adams was an early supporter of women's rights in America.

Liberty for All?

Slaves were not free, and neither were women. Women weren't able to vote, and pretty much had to do as their husbands or fathers told them. John Adams's wife, Abigail, frequently mentioned this fact to her husband:

"Whilst you are proclaiming peace and goodwill to men . . . you insist upon retaining an absolute power over wives," she wrote to John. In another letter, she wrote: "In the new code of laws . . . I desire you remember the ladies . . ."

Under the new Constitution, George Washington was elected president of the United States of America. He took office on April 30, 1789. He served two four-year terms as president.

Washington named Alexander Hamilton as secretary of the treasury. Hamilton's plan to fix the nation's money problems included taxes on imports and the first national bank. Hamilton's plan seemed to restore faith in the government and stimulated growth in the economy.

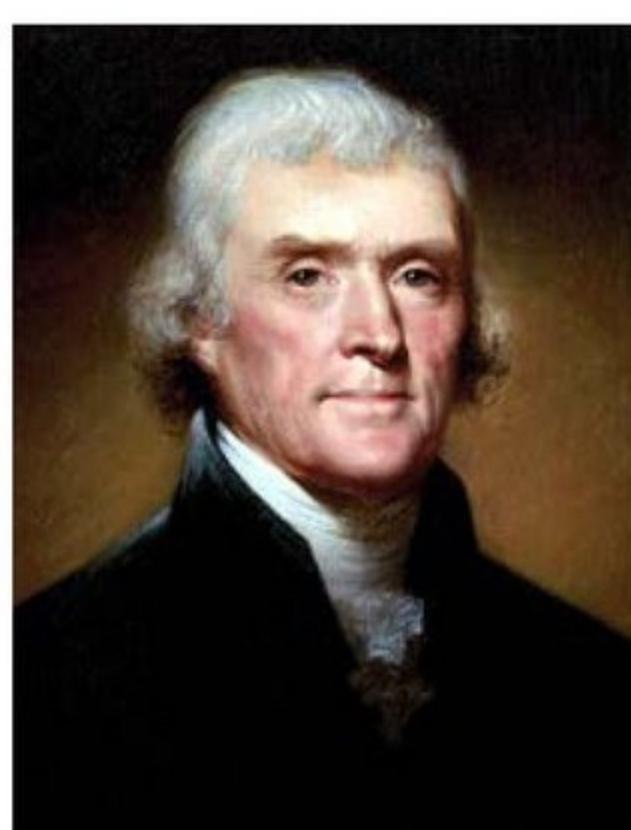
John Adams was elected the second president of the United States in 1796. The third was Thomas Jefferson in 1801.



George Washington
President 1789–1797



John Adams
President 1797–1801



Thomas Jefferson
President 1801–1809

Arguments Over Land

Another problem that faced the new country was how to divide up the enormous amount of land the United States gained after winning the Revolutionary War. Everyone greedily claimed the new lands. Some areas were claimed by several states at one time.

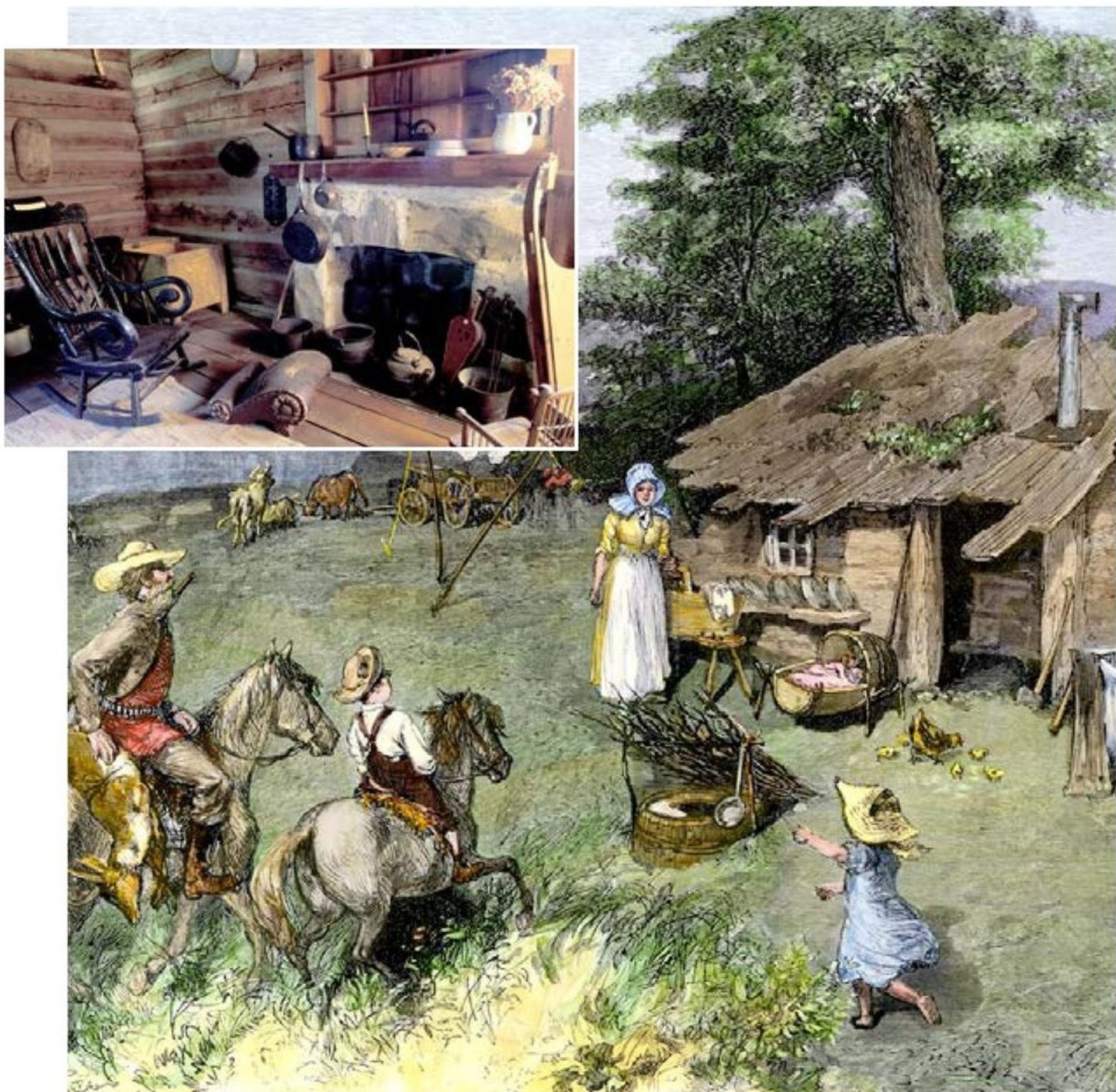
The Land Ordinance of 1785 spelled out how to divide the new land into townships and sections. Many sections were to be sold to settlers. Other sections were set aside for the government and public schools.

In 1787, Virginia state delegate Thomas Jefferson designed the Northwest Ordinance, which listed rules for how new states would be created in the Northwest Territory.

It ensured that the United States would not hold colonies as Britain had done.



Tecumseh led the Shawnees to fight against American settlers moving into the Northwest Territory where Native Americans had been living for centuries.



Settlers built homes, such as the one above, when they moved westward.

The Land Ordinance and the Northwest Ordinance set the stage for a huge westward movement of settlers in the early 1800s. To make this **expansion** easier, roads, canals, and railroads were built. The nation was expanding rapidly, and the new government was keeping up with the pace. Debts were being paid, land disagreements were settled, and a division of power for the new government was established. The outlook for the new nation was bright.

The Louisiana Purchase

With all this **prosperity** and expansion, leaders of the United States started making plans. France held the land from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains and the port of New Orleans. U.S. citizens could not use the Mississippi River or the port of New Orleans to move crops for trade. The United States sent word to Napoleon Bonaparte, France's emperor, to try to buy New Orleans.

Bonaparte had some military setbacks in Europe, and he needed troops and money. In order to fund his war, he offered to sell not only New Orleans but also the entire Louisiana Territory for \$15 million. In October 1803, the United States purchased the Louisiana Territory for France's asking price—and doubled the size of the nation. The purchase also added 200,000 people to the United States.



Exploration and War

In May 1804, President Thomas Jefferson sent two army officers—Meriwether Lewis and William Clark—plus a 45-member group to find a route across the continent. They were to explore the Louisiana Territory and report back. After more than two years, the group returned with journals, drawings, samples of wildlife and plants, and stories of the Native Americans they had met on their travels.



Lewis and Clark's group travels through the Louisiana Territory.

It seemed that the United States had a firm hold on its land in North America. However, while Lewis and Clark explored the new western territory of the United States, an old ally—France—fought a raging war with Great Britain. President Jefferson kept the United States out of the war. When James Madison became president in 1808, he hoped to do the same.

The United States would not be able to stay out of the war. British and French ships began **seizing** and searching U.S. ships in order to keep supplies from reaching their enemies. The British also seized the sailors on the captured ships and forced them to serve as British sailors. This made U.S. citizens subject to British **tyranny** once again.

In 1812, President Madison told Britain to stop searching and seizing U.S. ships or there would be war. Not satisfied with the response, Madison declared war on June 18, 1812.

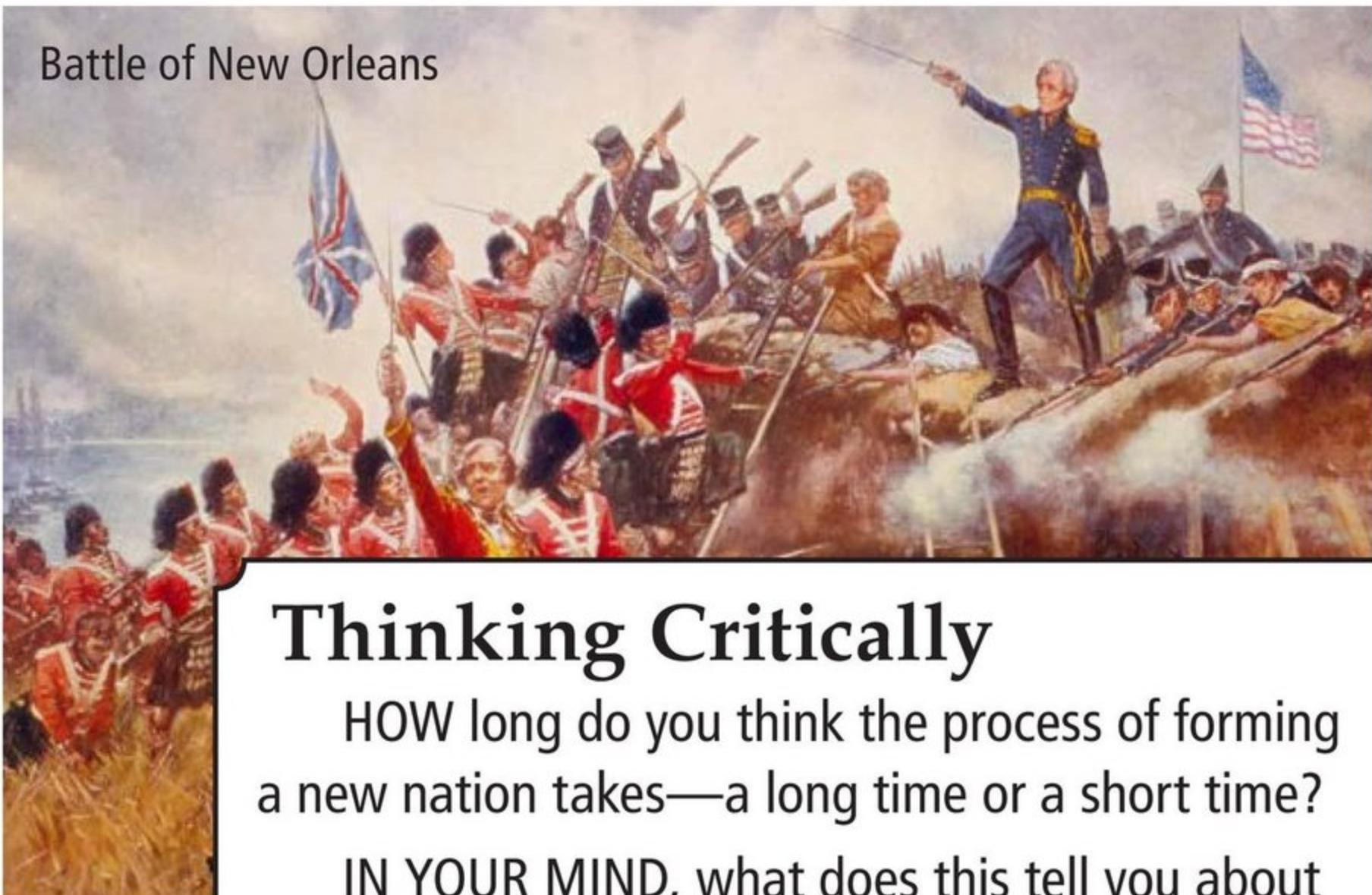
The United States did not have the ships to fight the British navy. An invasion to conquer British-controlled Canada failed. For two and a half years, the United States remained at war with Britain. On December 24, 1814, the two countries

signed a peace treaty to end the war.



The U.S. ship *Constitution* defeats the British ship *Guerriere* on August 19, 1812.

Battle of New Orleans



Thinking Critically

HOW long do you think the process of forming a new nation takes—a long time or a short time?

IN YOUR MIND, what does this tell you about new governments being formed today?

The United States engaged in one more battle against the British after the official end of the war. On January 8, 1815, Americans decisively won the Battle of New Orleans under General Andrew Jackson (who was unaware a peace treaty had been signed). Almost three hundred British soldiers died. The U.S. death toll was less than twenty.

The victory at the Battle of New Orleans made it clear that the United States, not Great Britain, truly controlled the western part of the country. It also made U.S. citizens feel as if they had won the war. In truth, neither side was victorious. Maybe the most important outcome was that the late victory made the new United States of America feel truly united as one nation.

Timeline of the American Revolution

1754–63 French and Indian War



1764–65 Sugar Act, Quartering Act, and Stamp Act

1767 Townshend Acts

1770 Boston Massacre

1774 Coercive (Intolerable) Acts; First Continental Congress meets

1775 Revolutionary War starts; Second Continental Congress meets

July 4, 1776 Declaration of Independence signed

1781 Revolutionary War ends; Articles of Confederation approved by all thirteen states

1786 Shays' Rebellion

1787 Constitutional Convention held

1791 Constitution ratified by all states; Bill of Rights ratified

1812 War with Britain begins again

1814 Treaty of Ghent signed to end War of 1812

Glossary

checks and balances (n.)	the division of power among branches of government so that no one branch can dominate the others (p. 12)
compromise (n.)	a decision between parties in an argument where both sides give up something to reach an agreement (p. 12)
constitution (n.)	the basic laws of a state or nation that tell how the government is run (p. 10)
debates (n.)	discussions between people or groups who have different opinions on an issue (p. 11)
debts (n.)	things, usually money, that are owed to someone else (p. 6)
executive (adj.)	of or relating to a branch of government that leads a nation and carries out the laws of the land (p. 6)
expansion (n.)	an increase in the size, amount, volume, or scope of something (p. 17)
federal (adj.)	of or relating to a central government that shares power with separate states or regions (p. 5)
guaranteed (v.)	promised or ensured (p. 13)
judicial (adj.)	of or relating to the branch of government that makes sure laws agree with the constitution (p. 12)
legislative (adj.)	of or relating to the branch of government that makes laws (p. 12)

prosperity (<i>n.</i>)	success, wealth, or good fortune (p. 18)
ratify (<i>v.</i>)	to approve through official means (p. 13)
rebellion (<i>n.</i>)	a fight against authority or power (p. 9)
representatives (<i>n.</i>)	people chosen to speak, vote, or otherwise act on behalf of an individual or group (p. 4)
seizing (<i>v.</i>)	taking control by force (p. 20)
treaty (<i>n.</i>)	a formal agreement of peace or friendship between two nations or groups (p. 7)
tyranny (<i>n.</i>)	harsh or cruel acts by a person or a group in power (p. 20)

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Word Count: 2,079

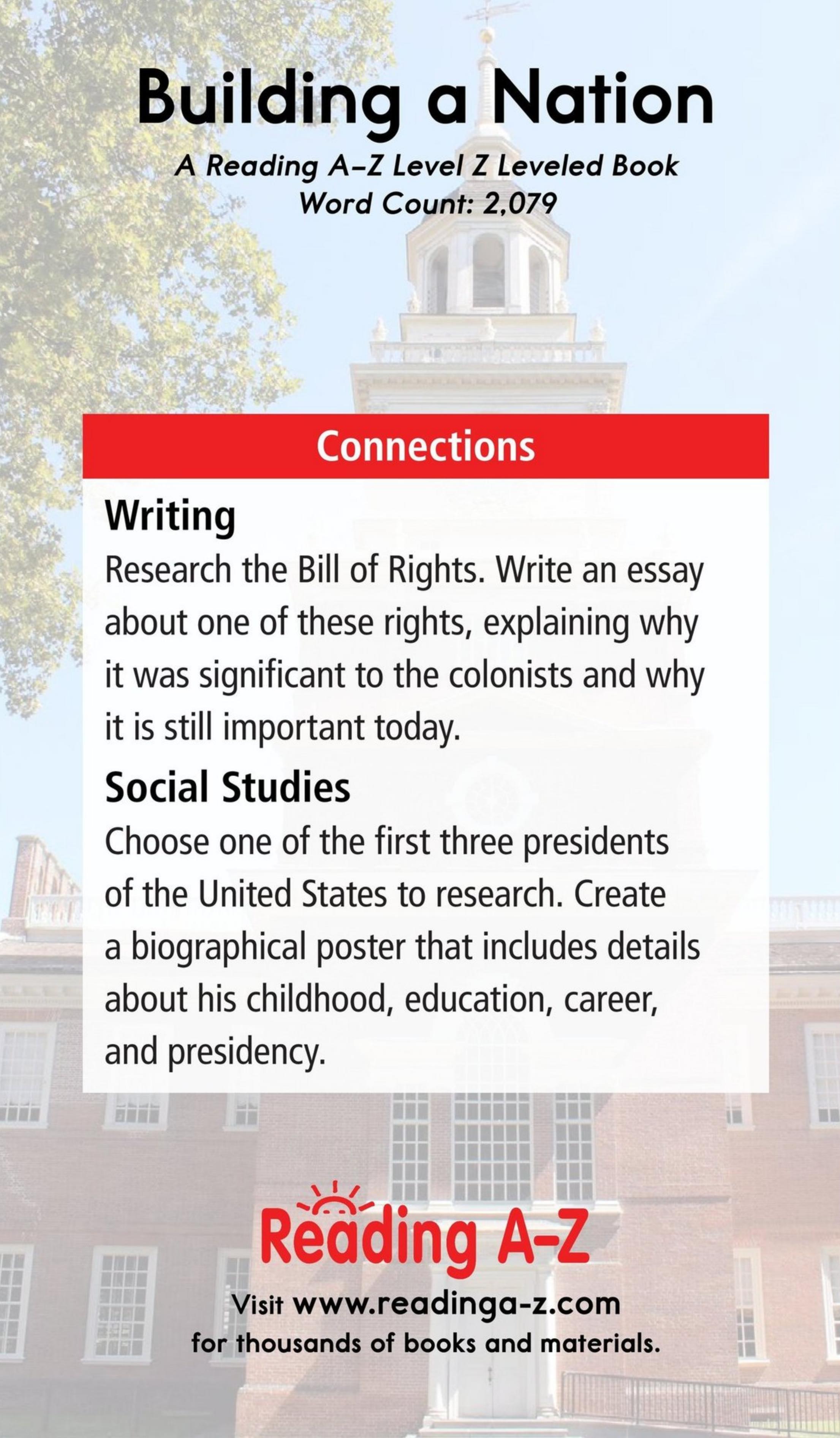
Connections

Writing

Research the Bill of Rights. Write an essay about one of these rights, explaining why it was significant to the colonists and why it is still important today.

Social Studies

Choose one of the first three presidents of the United States to research. Create a biographical poster that includes details about his childhood, education, career, and presidency.



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