7th Grade Great Compromise Inquiry

Is Compromise Always Fair?

Supporting Questions

1. How was representation determined under the Articles of Confederation?
2. What was the Virginia Plan?
3. What was the New Jersey Plan?
4. How did the Connecticut Plan break the impasse?

# 7th Grade Great Compromise Inquiry

## Is Compromise Always Fair?

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### Formative Performance Task

- **Write a description of how states were represented in the Congress under the Articles of Confederation.**
- **Write a summary of the Virginia Plan highlighting the impact on large and small states.**
- **Write a summary of the New Jersey Plan highlighting the impact on large and small states.**
- **Write a claim with evidence about how the Connecticut Plan broke the gridlock at the Constitutional Convention.**

### Featured Sources

- **Source A:** Excerpt from Articles of Confederation
- **Source B:** Diagram of the Virginia Plan
- **Source C:** Chart of the US population in 1790
- **Source A:** Excerpt from Notes of Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787 (Virginia Plan)
- **Source B:** Diagram of the New Jersey Plan
- **Source A:** Excerpt from Notes of Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787 (New Jersey Plan)
- **Source B:** Excerpt from Notes of Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787 (Connecticut Plan)
- **Source C:** Excerpt from Notes of Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787 (Connecticut Plan)

### Summative Performance Task

**ARGUMENT** Is compromise always fair? Construct an argument (e.g., detailed outline, poster, essay) that discusses whether or not the Great Compromise was fair to both less populated and more populated states using specific claims and relevant evidence from historical sources while acknowledging competing views.

**EXTENSION** Hold a mock Constitutional Convention debate about the Great Compromise.

### Taking Informed Action

- **UNDERSTAND** Investigate an issue that requires compromise over representation in a school or community setting (e.g., representation on a student council for the school).
- **ASSESS** Determine the benefits and drawbacks for various approaches to representation.
- **ACT** Create a plan that balances the needs of both sides and share it with students and leaders in the school.
Overview

Inquiry Description

This inquiry leads students through an investigation of the Great Compromise using various sources related to its adoption. The Great Compromise was the pivotal breakthrough of the 1787 Constitutional Convention. Originally formed to revise the weak Articles of Confederation, the convention quickly took on the massive task of designing a new federal government. While the work of the convention occurred quickly, May 25 to September 17, 1787, it was not without considerable debate, disagreement, and compromise. The July 16th “Great Compromise” on the Connecticut Plan regarding the structure of the government was perhaps the most consequential compromise. By investigating the compelling question, students examine the structure of government under the Articles of Confederation, investigate two proposals (Virginia and New Jersey plans) for a new arrangement, and analyze the role of the Connecticut Plan and the Great Compromise in the development of the United States Constitution. By completing this inquiry, students will begin to understand the importance of compromise in democracies.

In addition to the Key Idea listed previously, this inquiry highlights the following Conceptual Understandings:

- (7.4a) Throughout the American Revolution, the colonies struggled to address their differing social, political, and economic interests and to establish unity. The Articles of Confederation created a form of government that loosely united the states, but allowed states to maintain a large degree of sovereignty.
- (7.4b) The lack of a strong central government under the Articles of Confederation presented numerous challenges. A convention was held to revise the Articles, the result of which was the Constitution. The Constitution established a democratic republic with a stronger central government.
- (7.4c) Advocates for and against a strong central government were divided on issues of states’ rights, role/limits of federal power, and guarantees of individual freedoms. Compromises were needed between the states in order to ratify the Constitution.

NOTE: This inquiry is expected to take four to six 40-minute class periods. The inquiry time frame could expand if teachers think their students need additional instructional experiences (i.e., supporting questions, formative performance tasks, and featured sources). Inquiries are not scripts, so teachers are encouraged to modify and adapt them to meet the needs and interests of their particular students. Resources can also be modified as necessary to meet individualized education programs (IEPs) or Section 504 Plans for students with disabilities.

Structure of the Inquiry

In addressing the compelling question “Is compromise always fair?” students work through a series of supporting questions, formative performance tasks, and featured sources in order to construct an argument supported by evidence while acknowledging competing perspectives.
Staging the Compelling Question

In staging the compelling question, “Is compromise always fair?” teachers may ask students to think of times when they made a compromise in order to get something done. Students may need to be told that compromise is when people come to agreement about something that is in dispute when each side agrees to give something up.

Supporting Question 1

The first supporting question—“How was representation determined under the Articles of Confederation?”—helps students begin to understand the competing views of large and small states regarding representation in Congress by asking them to consider the original arrangement for representation in the unicameral (one-house) legislature under the Articles of Confederation. The formative performance task calls on students to write a description of how states were represented in the Congress under the Articles of Confederation. The featured source for this question is an excerpt from the Articles of Confederation.

Supporting Question 2

The second supporting question—“What was the Virginia Plan?”—highlights an essential component in understanding the eventual Great Compromise. The Virginia Plan put forward a scheme for a new government that proposed a bicameral (two-house) Congress with representation in each house determined by population. Thus, larger states would have more members in each of the two houses of Congress. The formative performance task asks students to write a summary of the Virginia Plan with consideration for how large-state and small-state constituents might view this plan. The featured sources for this task are James Madison’s description of the Virginia Plan from his Notes of Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787, a diagram of the Virginia Plan, and a chart of the United States population in 1790.

Supporting Question 3

The third supporting question—“What was the New Jersey Plan?”—also underscores an essential component in understanding the Great Compromise. The New Jersey Plan, a response to the Virginia Plan from small-state representatives, put forward a plan for a unicameral (one-house) Congress with equal representation of states and no regard for population. The plan kept in place the arrangement for Congress in effect under the Articles of Confederation but expanded the authority of Congress. The formative performance task asks students to write a summary of the New Jersey Plan with consideration for how large-state and small-state constituents might view it. The featured sources for this task are James Madison’s description of the New Jersey Plan from his Notes of Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787 and a diagram of the New Jersey Plan.
Supporting Question 4

The fourth supporting question—“How did the Connecticut Plan break the impasse?”—allows students to extend their knowledge about the debate over the design of federal government in the United States. The question focuses on the compromise effort evident in the Connecticut Plan, which was intended to break the impasse between large states, whose representatives favored the Virginia Plan, and small states, whose representatives favored the New Jersey Plan. The formative performance task asks students to use their knowledge from the previous tasks, along with new information about the Connecticut Plan, to write a claim supported by evidence about how the Connecticut Plan broke the impasse at the Constitutional Convention. The featured sources for this formative performance task are James Madison’s description of the Connecticut plan from his *Notes of Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787*; his summary of the differences between the Virginia and New Jersey plans as proposed by James Wilson, a delegate to the Constitutional Convention from Pennsylvania; and his description of the approval of the Connecticut Plan.

Summative Performance Task

At this point in the inquiry, students have examined representation in the Articles of Confederation and the three major plans proposed during the Constitutional Convention. Students should be expected to demonstrate the breadth of their understandings and their abilities to use evidence from multiple sources to support their claims. In this task, students construct an evidence-based argument using multiple sources to answer the compelling question “Is compromise always fair?” It is important to note that students’ arguments could take a variety of forms, including a detailed outline, poster, or essay.

Students’ arguments will likely vary, but could include any of the following:

- The Great Compromise was fair to all sides because it balanced the needs of states with large and small populations.
- The Great Compromise gave too much power to less populated states by making representation in the Senate equal regardless of population.
- The Great Compromise gave too much power to heavily populated states by basing representation in the House of Representatives on population.

To extend their arguments, teachers may stage a mock Constitutional Convention debate about the Great Compromise. Students can play historical characters from the convention, including those mentioned in the featured sources.

Students have the opportunity to Take Informed Action by drawing on their understandings of the Great Compromise to consider an issue related to representation in their school or community. To understand more about the task, students investigate an issue that requires compromise over representation in a school or community setting (e.g., representation on a student council for the school). To assess the issue, students determine the benefits and setbacks for various approaches to representation. To act, students create a plan that balances the needs of both sides and share it with other students and leaders in the school.
Supporting Question 1

**Featured Source**

**Source A:** Second Continental Congress, Article V of the Articles of Confederation dealing with representation in Congress, *Articles of Confederation* (excerpt), 1777

**Article V**

For the more convenient management of the general interests of the United States, delegates shall be annually appointed in such manner as the legislature of each state shall direct, to meet in Congress on the first Monday in November, in every year, with a power reserved to each state to recall its delegates, or any of them, at any time within the year, and to send others in their stead, for the remainder of the Year.

No State shall be represented in Congress by less than two, nor by more than seven Members; and no person shall be capable of being delegate for more than three years, in any term of six years; nor shall any person, being a delegate, be capable of holding any office under the United States, for which he, or another for his benefit receives any salary, fees or emolument of any kind.

Each State shall maintain its own delegates in a meeting of the states, and while they act as members of the committee of the states.

In determining questions in the United States, in Congress assembled, each state shall have one vote.

Freedom of speech and debate in Congress shall not be impeached or questioned in any Court, or place out of Congress, and the members of Congress shall be protected in their persons from arrests and imprisonments, during the time of their going to and from, and attendance on Congress, except for treason, felony, or breach of the peace.

Supporting Question 2

**Featured Sources**

| Source A: James Madison, journal notes describing what became the Virginia Plan, *Notes of Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787* (excerpts with description of the historical context), May 29, 1787 |

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**NOTE:** The Notes of Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787 was James Madison's daily record of the debates during the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia. This excerpt was recorded on May 29, 1787, when the Virginia Plan, or Randolph Resolutions, was presented to the delegates.

**Madison's Notes**

**Tuesday May 29, 1787**

Mr. RANDOLPH then opened the main business. He expressed his regret, that it should fall to him, rather than those, who were of longer standing in life and political experience, to open the great subject of their mission...

[Mr. RANDOLPH] then proposed as conformable to his ideas the following resolutions, which he explained one by one.

1. ...the Articles of Confederation ought to be so corrected and enlarged as to accomplish the objects proposed by their institution; namely, "common defense, security of liberty and general welfare."

2. ...the rights of suffrage in the National Legislature ought to be proportioned to the Quotas of contribution, or to the number of free inhabitants, as the one or the other rule may seem best in different cases.

3. ...the National Legislature ought to consist of two branches [houses].

4. ...the members of the first branch of the National Legislature ought to be elected by the people of the several States... 

5. ...the members of the second branch of the National Legislature ought to be elected by those of the first, out of a proper number of persons nominated by the individual Legislatures....

6. ...each branch [house] ought to possess the right of originating

**Historical Context**

Edmund Randolph was a delegate from Virginia. Other Virginia delegates had more experience, but Randolph was selected to present the ideas of the Virginia delegation because he was such a good speaker.

The Constitutional Convention was called to alter the Articles of Confederation, not to replace them.

Under the Articles of Confederation, each state had one vote in the Congress regardless of its population.

The Articles of Confederation had only one house in the legislature.

The first branch refers to what we call today the House of Representatives.

The second branch refers to the Senate. The 17th amendment led to people directly voting for their senators after 1913.

The House of Representatives has sole authority to originate laws related
Acts [laws]...

7. ...a National Executive be instituted; To be chosen by the National Legislature...and that besides a general authority to execute the National laws, it ought to enjoy the Executive rights vested in Congress by the Confederation.

8. ...the Executive and a convenient number of the National Judiciary, ought to compose a Council of revision with authority to examine every act of the National Legislature before it shall operate.

9. ...a National Judiciary be established to consist of one or more supreme tribunals, and of inferior tribunals to be chosen by the National Legislature....

to funding.

Citizens vote for the president of the United States, but an electoral college ultimately chooses the president.

The delegates to the convention decided against a Council of Revision.

There was no federal judicial branch under the Articles of Confederation.
Supporting Question 2

**Featured Source**

**Source B:** Diagram of the plan for representation put forward by Edmund Randolph at the Constitutional Convention of 1787, “The Virginia Plan,” 2015

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*Initiate, pass, and overturn veto

Bills

*Veto

Council of Revision

*Subset

Appeal of Last Resort

First Branch

Second Branch

National Legislature

Term Limits

Elect

Nominate

13 State Legislatures

Elect

Limit: 1 term

National Executive

Establish

“Inferior Courts”

“1 or more” Supreme Tribunals

First Appeal

Appointed for life

Supporting Question 2

**Featured Source**

**Source C:** Chart showing total and slave populations of the United States by state, “1790 Census Records: Chart of Slave Populations,” 2015

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**NOTE**—Although the census data presented here were collected after the Constitutional Convention of 1787, it was selected for this inquiry as it is assumed to be a fairly accurate representation of population figures in 1787.

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**1790 Census Records: Chart of Slave Populations**

- **Connecticut**
- **Delaware**
- **Georgia**
- **Maryland**
- **Massachusetts**
- **New Hampshire**
- **New Jersey**
- **New York**
- **North Carolina**
- **Pennsylvania**
- **Rhode Island**
- **South Carolina**
- **Virginia**

**Legend:**
- Total Population (1790)
- Slave Population

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Supporting Question 3


**NOTE:** The *Notes of Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787* was James Madison’s daily record of the debates during the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia. This excerpt was recorded on June 15, 1787, the day that the New Jersey Plan, or Paterson resolutions, was presented to the delegates. James Madison spelled William Paterson using two Ts (Patterson). This spelling has been preserved in the transcript presented here.

**Madison’s Notes**

**Friday June 15, 1787**

Mr. PATTERSON, laid before the Convention the plan which he said several of the delegates wished to be substituted in place of that proposed by Mr. Randolph...*

The propositions from New Jersey moved by Mr. Patterson were in the words following.

1. ...the Articles of Confederation ought to be so revised, corrected and enlarged, as to render the federal Constitution adequate to the exigencies of Government, and the preservation of the Union.

2. ...in addition to the powers vested in the United States in Congress, by the present existing articles of Confederation, they be authorized to pass acts for raising a revenue, by levying a duty or duties on all goods or merchandizes of foreign growth or manufacture, imported into any part of the United States: to pass Acts for the regulation of trade & commerce as well with foreign nations as with each other....

3. ..the U.S. in Congress be authorized to elect a federal Executive to consist of persons; that the Executives besides their general authority to execute the federal acts ought to appoint all federal officers not otherwise provided for, and to direct all military operations....

**Historical Context**

William Paterson was a delegate at the Constitutional Convention from New Jersey who would later sign the Constitution. New Jersey, despite having a large population today, had a relatively small population in 1787.

The states, with the exception of Rhode Island, sent a total of 55 delegates to Philadelphia to fix the Articles of Confederation, not to write a plan for a new system of government.

Under the Articles of Confederation, the federal government had no way to tax or regulate trade.

The electoral college, not Congress, elects the president. Today, the president does in fact appoint federal officers and does direct the military as commander in chief.
4. ... a federal Judiciary be established to consist of a supreme Tribunal the Judges of which to be appointed by the Executive, and to hold their offices during good behavior....

The Articles of Confederation did not include a federal supreme tribunal or court.

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Supporting Question 3

**Featured Source**

**Source B:** Diagram of the plan for representation put forward by William Paterson at the Constitutional Convention of 1787, “The New Jersey Plan,” 2015

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Supporting Question 4

| Featured Source | Source A: James Madison, journal notes describing what became the Connecticut Plan, Notes of Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787 (excerpts with description of the historical context), July 5, 1787 |

NOTE: The Notes of Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787 was James Madison’s daily record of the debates during the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia. This excerpt was recorded on July 5, 1787, the day Elbridge Gerry of Connecticut reported on a plan for settling the differences among delegates regarding representation as put forward in the Virginia and New Jersey plans.

Madison’s Notes

THURSDAY July 5th, 1787

Mr. GERRY delivered in from the Committee appointed on Monday last the following Report....That the subsequent propositions be recommended to the Convention on condition that both shall be generally adopted....

1. That in the first branch of the Legislature each of the States now in the Union shall be allowed one member for every 40,000 inhabitants: that each State not containing that number shall be allowed one member: that all bills for raising or appropriating money, and for fixing the Salaries of the officers of the government of the United States shall originate in the first branch of the Legislature, and shall not be altered or amended by the second branch: and that no money shall be drawn from the public Treasury but in pursuance of appropriations to be originated in the first branch....

2. That in the second branch each State shall have an equal vote.

Mr. GHORUM observed that as the report consisted of propositions mutually conditional he wished to hear some explanations touching the grounds on which the conditions were estimated.

Mr. GERRY. The Committee were of different opinions as well as the Deputations from which the Come. were taken and agreed to the Report merely in order that some ground of accommodation might be proposed....

Historical Context

Elbridge Gerry served as a Connecticut delegate to the Constitutional Convention and chairman of a committee that created the Connecticut Plan. Later in life, he would go on to become vice president under Madison, but perhaps he is best known for having a political term named after him—gerrymandering—which is the practice of altering voting districts into often bizarre shapes.

The first branch of the legislature is the House of Representatives.

The total population of the country in 1787 was less than four million people. The largest state at the time, Virginia, had 400,000 free persons and 250,000 enslaved persons.

Today, each state has one member in the House per 650,000 inhabitants. The present number of representatives is 435.

The second branch is the Senate, which has two senators representing each state. Today, the Senate has 100 senators.

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**Supporting Question 4**

| Featured Source | Source B: James Madison, journal notes comparing the Virginia and New Jersey plans, *Notes of Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787* (excerpt with description of the historical context), June 16, 1787 |

NOTE: Here is modified text from James Madison’s record of James Wilson’s comparison of the Virginia and New Jersey plans as recorded on June 16, 1787.

**Madison’s Notes**

**SATURDAY June 16, 1787**

MR. WILSON entered into a contrast of the principal points of the two plans so far he said as there had been time to examine the one last proposed. These points were

1. In the Virginia plan there are two and in some degree three branches in the Legislature: in the plan from New Jersey there is to be a single legislature only.

2. Representation of the people at large is the basis of the one. The State Legislatures, the pillars of the other.

3. Proportional representation prevails in one: equality of suffrage in the others.

4. A single Executive Magistrate is at the head of the one, a plurality is held out in the other.

5. In the one the majority of the people of the United States must prevail. In the other a minority may prevail.

**Historical Context**

James Wilson served as a Pennsylvania delegate to the Constitutional Convention. He was well respected by his peers and was a very vocal delegate. He is best known for proposing the Three-Fifths Compromise to settle the issue of whether or not to count slaves towards each state’s population.

The Virginia Plan called for representation based on population. The New Jersey Plan called for equal representation, as had been the case with the Articles of Confederation.

Individual citizens did not get the right to vote for senators directly until 1913.

Wilson is describing the basic goals of the Virginia and New Jersey Plans.

The New Jersey Plan was more of a proposal to change the Articles of Confederation, rather than to create a new form of government.

The Virginia plan favored the majority of people, as the numbers of Americans living in heavily populated states far outnumbered those living in less populated states. The New Jersey plan might have allowed the minority living in less-populated states to always have their way.

This annotated version of James Madison’s convention notes was created for the New York State K–12 Social Studies Toolkit by Binghamton University, 2015. The text is excerpted from the original, and spelling has been modernized. Public domain. Available from the Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, Yale Law School, Lillian Goldman Library: [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/debates_616.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/debates_616.asp). See also a crowd-sourced annotated version of the document at ConText: [http://context.montpelier.org/document/178](http://context.montpelier.org/document/178).
### Supporting Question 4

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<th><strong>Featured Source</strong></th>
<th><strong>Source C:</strong> James Madison, journal notes describing the approval of the Connecticut Plan, <em>Notes of Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787</em> (excerpts with description of the historical context), July 17, 1787</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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**NOTE:** Below is modified text from James Madison's July 17, 1787, record of state votes on the compromise suggested by Roger Sherman, which was known as the Connecticut Plan. In the notes on the transcript the vote reads: “Connecticut, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, North Carolina [Mr. Spaight, no], aye-5; Pennsylvania, Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia, no-4; Massachusetts, divided, [Mr. Gerry, Mr. Strong, aye; Mr. King, Mr. Gorham, no.]”

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**Madison's Notes**

**Monday July 17, 1787**

Resolved that in the original formation of the Legislature of the U. S. the first branch thereof shall consist of sixty-five members, of which number New Hampshire shall send (3); Massachusetts, (8); Rhode Island, (1); Connecticut, (5); New York, (6); New Jersey, (4); Pennsylvania (8); Delaware, (1); Maryland, (6); Virginia, (10); North Carolina, (5); South Carolina, (5); and Georgia, (3).

But as the present situation of the States may probably alter in the number of their inhabitants, the Legislature of the U. S. shall be authorized from time to time to apportion the number of representative....

Resolved, that a Census be taken within six years from the first meeting of the Legislature of the United States and once within the term of every 10 years afterwards of all the inhabitants of the U. S. in the manner and according to the ratio recommended by Congress....

Resolved that in the second branch of the Legislature of the U. S. each State shall have an equal vote.

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**Historical Context**

The first branch of the legislature is the House of Representatives. The delegates suggested that the House would have 65 members distributed as recorded by Madison. When the first Congress met three years later, in 1790, there were 105 representatives in the House.

The number of representatives was increased 12 times from 1790 to 1910. Since 1910, there have been 435 members in the House of Representatives after the number was capped at 435 in 1913.

The first census was conducted in 1790, and the population was counted at 3,929,214. The 23rd and most recent census, taken in 2010, recorded the population at 308,745,538.

The second branch of the legislature is called the Senate.

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