FAMILY CONSTITUTION LESSON

Made Possible by MERCY GILBERT MEDICAL CENTER

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Reader's Theater

UNITE or DIE

How Thirteen States Became a Nation

Visit www.jacquelinejules.com or www.charlesbridge.com for more information about the children's book, *Unite or Die*.

Written by Jacqueline Jules, Illustrated by Jef Czekaj © Charlesbridge, 2009

Lesson Outline

This suggested outline will help you organize a fun, meaningful lesson. Make adjustments to fit your family's traditions and needs. Smaller families may want to invite another family to join them. Additional reader's theater scripts and other materials can be downloaded at www.constitutionweek.com.

Welcome: Welcome your family to this Family Constitution Lesson. Explain that the reason for this lesson is to participate in our civic duty by educating ourselves about American history and the principles of our democratic republic. This lesson is part of Constitution Week, celebrated September 17th through the 23rd of each year. Look over the Constitution Week calendar and discuss what events you might participate in as individuals or as a family.

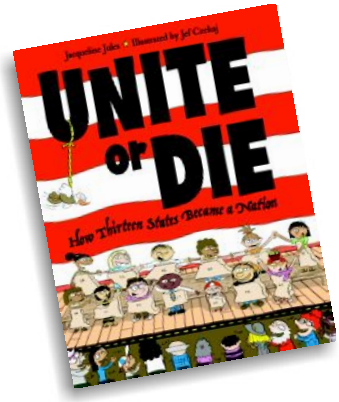
Open: Begin the lesson with an opening that best fits your family's traditions. For example: start with the Pledge of Allegiance, a prayer, a song, etc.

Lesson: Present the Unite or Die reader's theater. Make adjustments for your family as needed. Additional scripts and props can be downloaded at www.constitutionweek.com.

Activity/Game: Use a suggested activity included or choose one of your own.

Closing: End the lesson with an ending that best fits your family's traditions.

Refreshments: Enjoy a suggested refreshment or choose one of your own.



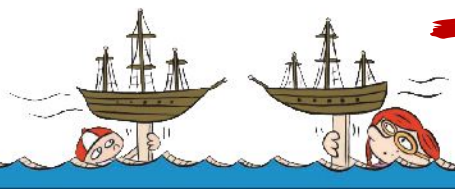
Lesson Content

If available, read the book *Unite or Die* to the family so that they may become acquainted with the story and vocabulary. Next, handout copies to each person. (For challenged readers, consider assigning them the part of Rhode Island or New Jersey). If time permits, let the family practice their parts, and perform the play with props and costumes. If time is limited, simply have each person read their parts on the first run-through. Divide the following parts as needed. Each person may have more than one part.

Reader's Theater Parts

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

Visit www.constitutionweek.com to download materials for making props to enhance the reader's theater experience.



Constitution Week USA

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Reader's Theater

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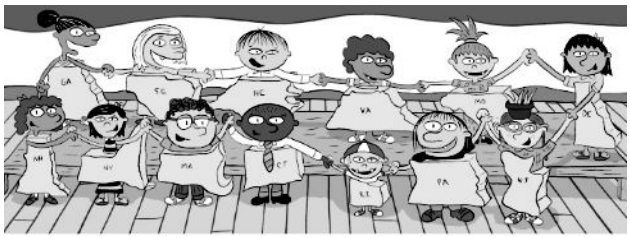


Scene One

Narrator: On September 3, 1783, the Treaty of Paris was signed, officially ending the American Revolution. Thirteen colonies had won their independence from England. A new country was born.

The new country was called the United States of America—but it was not united. Each state had its own leaders and its own government. The states were like thirteen separate countries.

Connecticut: We're on our own now!

New York: Shouldn't someone be in charge?

Pennsylvania: We just got rid of King George. We don't want anyone telling us what to do.

Delaware: I'll make my own decisions, thank you very much.

Narrator: The country operated under a document called the Articles of Confederation. This political system gave the national government very little power. Each state took care of its own business.

But without a strong national government, the states had problems.

Massachusetts: When I go to Rhode Island they won't take my money!

Rhode Island: Of course not! You're money is worthless here.

Massachusetts: Then how can we do business with each other?

North Carolina: Don't we need a treaty to trade? Who can negotiate for all of us?

New York: How can we decide once and for all who owns what? New Hampshire is trying to claim land that belongs to me.

New Hampshire: Not true! That land belongs to me!

Maryland: Maybe it's time we sat down to talk about things.

Scene Two

Narrator: In September 1786, delegates from Pennsylvania, Delaware, Virginia, New Jersey, and New York gathered in Annapolis, Maryland. They discussed the problems among the states and identified what had to be done.

Virginia: The Articles of Confederation make the national government helpless and hopeless. We need a government that works!

Delaware: But we only have five states represented here. What can we do?

Virginia: We can call another convention. We can ask everyone to come and help revise the Articles of Confederation.

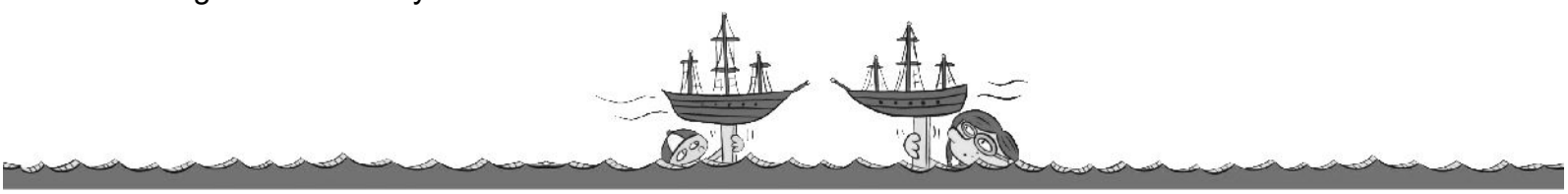
Pennsylvania: That's an excellent idea! Let's meet in Philadelphia in the same hall where the Declaration of Independence was signed.

Scene Three

Narrator: The convention began on May 25, 1787. Twelve states sent delegates.

Rhode Island: But not me! I don't want anything to do with this suspicious nonsense.

Narrator: Virginia had an idea—an idea so different, it would have to replace the Articles of Confederation, rather than revise them.



Virginia: I am proud to propose the Virginia Plan. It's a government with three branches: executive, legislative, and judicial.

New Jersey: I see the plan also calls for a two-house legislature. Is that a good idea?

Pennsylvania: Sure, the number of delegates will be based on population. What's wrong with that?

Delaware: If you have more delegates, you'll have more votes than I do!

North Carolina: But you're not even half my size. Why should you have the same number of votes?

Connecticut: Without equal representation, my vote will be ignored.

Narrator: The big states and small states argued for weeks. Delegates became discouraged.

New York: If we can't agree on anything, how can we stay one country?

Georgia: But we could have even bigger problems if we break apart!

Pennsylvania: Will the United States of America survive?

Narrator: Fortunately, the Connecticut delegation came to the rescue.

Connecticut: I have an idea! The House of Representatives can be based on population. The Senate can have two delegates for every state!

Maryland: So every state, no matter how small, will have two votes in the Senate.

Massachusetts: But states with more people will have more delegates in the House of Representatives.

Delaware: I can live with that.

New York: I can, too.

Narrator: A major hurdle had been overcome. The delegates now had a framework for a new constitution. But there were still many other decisions to be made.

New York: How long should the president's term in office be?

North Carolina: What should Congress be in charge of?

Connecticut: What about power? Who will have the most? The president, Congress, or the Supreme Court?

Georgia: What if Congress passes bad laws? How will we stop them?

New Hampshire: Hold on! If someone has too much power, we're right back where we started—fighting tyranny!

Narrator: The powers among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches were carefully separated and balanced in the new constitution.

New Jersey: I won't sign this document if you take away all my power!

New Hampshire: What about my state government?

Georgia: Calm down! The Constitution still allows us to make laws to meet the local needs of our people.

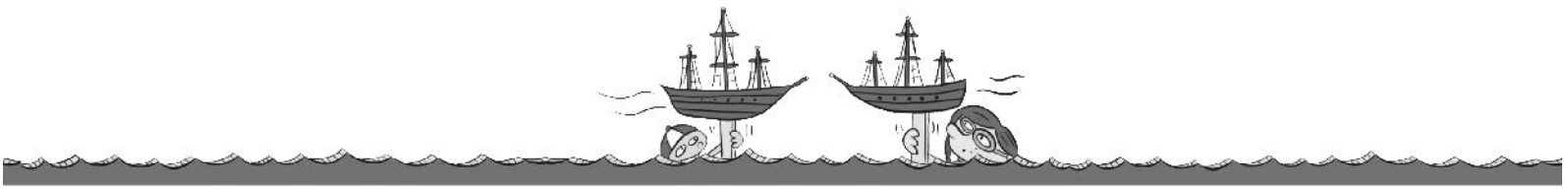
Maryland: But the Constitution will be the supreme law of the land and we won't be allowed to pass a law that conflicts with it.

Narrator: The delegates worried about many details of the new government. In the end, they realized that no document could be made perfect for all generations.

Pennsylvania: We need a way to make amendments to the Constitution to take care of problems that don't exist yet.

Massachusetts: True! But if we all have to agree on each change, we could be in for big trouble.

Narrator: Because it would be nearly impossible to get unanimous approval for all changes, the Constitution says amendments become law if ratified by three-fourths of the states.

On September 17, 1787, the United States Constitution was signed by representatives of twelve states. The ratification process was lengthy, but eventually all thirteen states approved the Constitution. A new government was born.

All: The United States of America! United at last and ready to govern ourselves!