

Primary Source Set

Principles of the Founding

Guiding Questions

What were the principles of the new Constitution and how did they shape the debate between the Federalists and Anti-Federalists during the ratification debate?

Objectives

- ☐ I can analyze a collection of primary sources for common themes.
- ☐ I can color-code documents to indicate the principles of natural rights, equality and justice.

Directions:

Analyze the Documents.

- Read the excerpts from the founding documents and primary sources.
- Use three colored **highlighters** to **color-code** where you see evidence of:
 - **Natural rights:** Rights which belong to humans by nature and can only be justly abridged through due process. (e.g., life, liberty, property)
 - **Equality:** All individuals have the same claim as human beings to natural rights and treatment under the law. (e.g., fair treatment under the law)
 - **Justice:** Having a political order that protects the rights of all equally and treats everyone equally under the law. (e.g., fair treatment under the law)

Background Information

Anti-Federalists were opposed to the proposed Constitution because they feared it would restrict state power and individual rights. Among the most important of the Anti-Federalist writings are the essays of Brutus.

Brutus 1 excerpt

From: <https://billofrights institute.org/activities/brutus-1-scaffolded>

Text	Vocabulary and Context
In so extensive a republic, the great officers of government would soon become above the control of the people, and abuse their power to the purpose of aggrandizing themselves, and oppressing them...	aggrandizing: empowering
They will use the power, when they have acquired it, to the purposes of gratifying their own interest and ambition, and it is scarcely possible, in a very large republic, to call them to account for their misconduct , or to prevent their abuse of power.	account for their misconduct- when you hold someone accountable for their actions, that is a form of justice.

Background Information

Anti-Federalists were opposed to the proposed Constitution because they feared it would restrict state power and individual rights. Among the most important of the Anti-Federalist writings are the essays of Brutus. This excerpt is from another Brutus essay and assumed to be by the same author.

Brutus 2 excerpt

From: https://docs-of-freedom.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/document/attachment/441/Brutus_No_2_Excerpts_Annotated_Proof_3.pdf

Text	Vocabulary and Context
If we may collect the sentiments of the people of America, from their own most solemn declarations, they hold this truth as self evident , that all men are by nature free.	sentiments: feelings or attitudes solemn: formal, sincere self evident: obvious
No one man, therefore, or any class of men, have a right, by the law of nature, or of God, to assume or exercise authority over their fellows.	assume or exercise authority: collect power over others
The origin of society then is to be sought, not in any natural right which one man has to exercise authority over another, but in the united consent of those who associate	origin: source united consent: collective agreement associate: joined

Background Information

In order to help convince their fellow Americans of their view that the Constitution would not threaten freedom, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay teamed up in 1788 to write a series of essays in defense of the Constitution. The essays, which appeared in newspapers addressed to the people of the state of New York, are known as the Federalist Papers.

Federalist #51 excerpt

<https://billofrightsinstitute.org/primary-sources/federalist-no-51>

Text	Vocabulary and Context
It may be a reflection on human nature, that such devices should be necessary to control the abuses of government. But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary.	The “ devices ” the author is referring to is the system of checks and balances between branches of government in the constitution.
In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.	enable: give the power or means to do something. In this case, the power to control the people. oblige: bind to a course of action legally

Background Information

The Declaration of Independence was drafted by Thomas Jefferson in June of 1776. The Declaration announced to the world that the thirteen American colonies regarded themselves independent sovereign states. In the Preamble, it articulates the fundamental ideas that form the foundation of our country.

Declaration of Independence excerpt

<https://billofrightsintstitute.org/activities/explore-the-declaration-of-independence-natural-rights-and-slavery>

Text	Vocabulary and Context
We hold these truths to be self-evident , that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.	self-evident : obvious endowed : given unalienable : impossible to take away; another term for natural rights
That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.	instituted : established deriving : receiving

Background Information

The Articles of Confederation created an association of sovereign states. The central government had little authority: it had no power to regulate commerce, no power of taxation, and any alterations had to be agreed upon unanimously by all states, which made changes next to impossible.

Articles of Confederation excerpt

<https://billofrightsintstitute.org/primary-sources/articles-of-confederation>

Text	Vocabulary and Context
The better to secure and perpetuate mutual friendship and [trade] among the people of the different States in this Union, the free inhabitants of each of these States, ... shall be entitled to all privileges and immunities of free citizens in the several States;	secure and perpetuate : preserve and continue inhabitants : people living in an area. In this case, the states. privileges and immunities : rights

Background Information

The Constitution was written in the summer of 1787 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, by delegates from 12 states, in order to replace the Articles of Confederation with a new form of government. The Preamble to the document laid out what they hoped to accomplish with the new system of government.

Constitution excerpt

<https://billofrightsinstitute.org/primary-sources/constitution>

Text	Vocabulary and Context
We the People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union , establish justice, insure domestic tranquility , provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity , do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.	union: group connected by a common purpose domestic tranquility- national peace posterity: future generations

Reading Reflection Questions

1. Select two documents that you think reflect the principles of natural rights, equality, and justice? Explain how they do so.

2. Did you notice any differences in how each document approached these principles? What might explain these differences?

3. How do you think the debate between the Federalists and Anti-Federalists influenced the way these principles were included in the Constitution?
