

United States History

Ratification of the Constitution: the Federalist – Anti-Federalist Debate

Preparation guidelines

SHOULD THE CONSTITUTION BE RATIFIED?

In class we will engage in a historical debate on the above question. The class will be divided into three groups. One group will represent the Federalists, and support the ratification of the Constitution, while a second group will represent the anti-Federalists, and oppose the ratification of the Constitution. Your task will be to convince the members of the third group, the decision-makers, of your position. *In considering the question, think about whether the Constitution preserved the ideals of the revolution or limited the gains of the revolution.*

Large group preparation: The purpose of large group preparation is to brainstorm ideas, prepare for the opening statement, and anticipate the opposing position.

For the Constitutional debate, large group preparation should entail the following:

For the debaters:

1. Discuss the experiences of the colonies under British rule and of the states under the Articles of Confederation.
2. Discuss the meaning of democracy, republicanism, and federalism.
3. Examine the Constitution and consider it within the context of the above issues.
4. Discuss the opposing side. What are the strongest arguments against your position? How can you defend against those arguments?
5. Create an outline with a clear thesis and main arguments to allow three minutes of spoken discussion on the topic.

For the decision makers:

1. Develop a broad understanding of the question and the issues pertaining to the question. Consider points 1-3 above.
2. Develop a battery of questions for each debater (approximately 8-10 for each side). The questions should elicit a narrative response and challenge the debater to consider and justify his position. (You may not use all of your questions in the debate; however, you need enough questions to fully engage the three-minute questioning phase.)
3. Develop a final question. The final question must be the same for each debater, but each decision-maker does not have to ask the same final question. The final question should be challenging, and also capture the essence of the debate, while not repeating the debate question.

Additional suggestions:

You do not want to read your opening statement. However, your outline will include your main ideas and a bulleted list of supporting facts. Likewise, you should rehearse your opening statements to gain a sense for the pacing of three minutes. Remember, if you finish your opening before the time expires, you must wait quietly before moving onto the next phase of the debate. Furthermore, you might want to ask a partner to ask some anticipatory questions so that you are prepared for the questioning phase of the debate.