

**Teacher Directions**

1. Ahead of time, slice the Federalist and Anti Federalist packets so that each argument appears on its own slip of paper.
2. Divide the class into two equal teams. Assign or allow students to select a facilitator, but inform the class that all members of each team are expected to speak in the debate.
3. Distribute the Federalist packet to one team and the Anti Federalist packet to the other. Instruct students to read the Directions and Background or do this together as a class.
4. Instruct each team to evenly divide the arguments so that all members have an argument to present. Each individual should read their argument and determine whether it provides background on their position, a response to the other position, or a convincing argument in support of their position.
5. When students have read and grouped their arguments, inform them that the debate will have three rounds. In Round 1, the Federalists will present their background arguments first, followed by the Anti Federalists. In Round 2, the Anti Federalists will present their responses first, followed by the Federalists. In Round 3, the Federalists will present their most convincing arguments first, followed by the Anti Federalists.
6. Inform students that they must take notes on their own team and the other team's arguments using a T chart. Remind them to be civil while speaking to the other team and polite and quiet while listening to arguments.
7. If internet access is available, the activity can be extended to allow for student research. In this case, or if students are experienced in debate, teams may draft their own opening and closing speeches or write their own arguments and responses. However, to keep the activity short it is better to focus on understanding and categorizing the arguments provided.
8. When both teams have had 3 rounds and all students have read a statement, give the class a moment to review their notes before asking them to vote on a winning team. If the class is highly competitive, they may need to vote by secret ballot.

### Student Directions

1. Distribute your team's arguments so that everyone has at least one argument. Read your arguments individually.
2. Decide whether you think your argument is background information, a response to the other side, or a convincing argument for your side. If you have trouble, work with your teammates.
3. If you have access to the internet, you may visit the websites of your arguments for more information. If you have time for extra research, the website <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/fed-antifed/introduction-to-the-federalist-antifederalist-debates/> has much more detailed arguments for both sides.

### Background

From <https://judiciallearningcenter.org/the-ratification-debate/>:

Once the Constitution of the United States was written in 1787 at the Philadelphia convention, the next step was ratification. This is the formal process, outlined in Article VII, which required that nine of the thirteen states had to agree to adopt the Constitution before it could go into effect. As in any debate there were two sides, the Federalists who supported ratification and the Anti-Federalists who did not.

From <https://www.constitutionfacts.com/us-articles-of-confederation/the-great-debate/>:

The Federalists wanted to ratify the Constitution, the Anti-Federalists did not. One of the major issues these two parties debated concerned the inclusion of the Bill of Rights. The Federalists felt that this addition wasn't necessary, because they believed that the Constitution as it stood only limited the government not the people. The Anti-Federalists claimed the Constitution gave the central government too much power, and without a Bill of Rights the people would be at risk of oppression.

## Federalist Arguments

1. Led by Alexander Hamilton, albeit secretly at first, the Federalists were the first political party of the United States. They supported the Constitution, and attempted to convince the States to ratify the document. <https://www.constitutionfacts.com/us-articles-of-confederation/the-great-debate/>
2. Hamilton, along with John Jay and James Madison, anonymously published a series of essays known as the Federalist Papers under the pseudonym "Publius." <https://www.constitutionfacts.com/us-articles-of-confederation/the-great-debate/>
3. Both Hamilton and Madison argued that the Constitution didn't need a Bill of Rights, that it would create a "parchment barrier" that limited the rights of the people, as opposed to protecting them. <https://www.constitutionfacts.com/us-articles-of-confederation/the-great-debate/>
4. [Hamilton and Madison] eventually made the concession and announced a willingness to take up the matter of the series of amendments which would become the Bill of Rights. Without this compromise, the Constitution may never have been ratified by the States. Surprisingly enough, it was Federalist James Madison who eventually presented the Bill of Rights to Congress despite his former stance on the issue. <https://www.constitutionfacts.com/us-articles-of-confederation/the-great-debate/>
5. Federalists believed that the nation might not survive without the passage of the Constitution, and that a stronger national government was necessary after the failed Articles of Confederation. <https://judiciallearningcenter.org/the-ratification-debate/>
6. The Federalists met Anti-Federalist arguments that the new government created by the Constitution was too powerful by explaining that the document had many built-in safeguards, such as:  
Limited Government: Federalists argued that the national government only had the powers specifically granted to it under the Constitution, and was prohibited from doing some things at all. <https://judiciallearningcenter.org/the-ratification-debate/>
7. The Federalists met Anti-Federalist arguments that the new government created by the Constitution was too powerful by explaining that the document had many built-in safeguards, such as:  
Separation of Powers: Federalists argued that, by separating the basic powers of government into three equal branches and not giving too much power to any one

person or group, the Constitution provided balance and prevented the potential for tyranny. <https://judiciallearningcenter.org/the-ratification-debate/>

8. The Federalists met Anti-Federalist arguments that the new government created by the Constitution was too powerful by explaining that the document had many built-in safeguards, such as:

Checks and Balances: Federalists argued that the Constitution provided a system of checks and balances, where each of the three branches is able to check or limit the other branches. <https://judiciallearningcenter.org/the-ratification-debate/>

9. The Federalists argued that the federal courts had limited jurisdiction, leaving many areas of the law to the state and local courts. The Federalists felt that the new federal courts were necessary to provide checks and balances on the power of the other two branches of government. They believed the federal courts would protect citizens from government abuse, and guarantee their liberty. <https://judiciallearningcenter.org/the-ratification-debate/>

10. Federalism is a form of government in which power is divided between the national government and the state governments. In the United States, there is a federal court system. In addition, each state has its own courts. <https://judiciallearningcenter.org/the-ratification-debate/>

11. [The Federalists papers] are a series of eighty-five letters written to newspapers in 1787-1788 by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, urging ratification of the Constitution. After a new Constitution, intended to replace the ineffectual Articles of Confederation, had been hammered out at the Philadelphia Convention, it was agreed that it would go into effect when nine of the thirteen states had approved it in ratifying conventions. <https://www.history.com/topics/federalist-papers>

12. [The authors] addressed the objections of opponents, who feared a tyrannical central government that would supersede states' rights and encroach on individual liberties. All strong nationalists, the essayists argued that, most important, the proposed system would preserve the Union, now in danger of breaking apart, and empower the federal government to act firmly and coherently in the national interest. Conflicting economic and political interests would be reconciled through a representative Congress, whose legislation would be subject to presidential veto and judicial review. <https://www.history.com/topics/federalist-papers>

13. This system of checks and balances and the Constitution's clear delineation of the powers of the federal government—few, limited, and defined, as Madison put it—would protect states' rights and, as they saw it, individual rights. The ultimate protection of individual liberties had to wait for later passage of the Bill of Rights, for these men, as their arguments made plain, distrusted what Madison called "the superior force of an interested and overbearing majority." <https://www.history.com/topics/federalist-papers>

14. Many of the constitutional provisions [the authors] praised were intended precisely to dampen democratic "excesses." The articles, written in the spirit both of propaganda and of logical argument, probably had little influence on public opinion of the day. Nevertheless, the essays, published in book form as *The Federalist* in 1788, have through the years been widely read and respected for their masterly analysis and interpretation of the Constitution and the principles upon which the government of the United States was established. <https://www.history.com/topics/federalist-papers>

### Anti Federalist Arguments

1. In the ratification debate, the Anti-Federalists opposed to the Constitution. They complained that the new system threatened liberties, and failed to protect individual rights. The Anti-Federalists weren't exactly a united group, but instead involved many elements. <https://www.constitutionfacts.com/us-articles-of-confederation/the-great-debate/>

2. One faction opposed the Constitution because they thought stronger government threatened the sovereignty of the states. <https://www.constitutionfacts.com/us-articles-of-confederation/the-great-debate/>

3. Others argued that a new centralized government would have all the characteristics of the despotism of Great Britain they had fought so hard to remove themselves from. <https://www.constitutionfacts.com/us-articles-of-confederation/the-great-debate/>

4. Others feared that the new government threatened their personal liberties. <https://www.constitutionfacts.com/us-articles-of-confederation/the-great-debate/>

5. During the push for ratification, many of the articles in opposition were written under pseudonyms, such as "Brutus," "Centinel", and "Federal Farmer," but some famous revolutionary figures such as Patrick Henry came out publicly against the Constitution. <https://www.constitutionfacts.com/us-articles-of-confederation/the-great-debate/>

6. Although the Anti-Federalists were unsuccessful in the prevention of the adoption of the Constitution, their efforts were responsible for the creation and implementation of the Bill of Rights.

<https://www.constitutionfacts.com/us-articles-of-confederation/the-great-debate/>

7. The Anti-Federalists believed the Constitution granted too much power to the federal courts, at the expense of the state and local courts. They argued that the federal courts would be too far away to provide justice to the average citizen. [https://](https://judiciallearningcenter.org/the-ratification-debate/)

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8. Anti-Federalists argued that the Constitution gave too much power to the federal government, while taking too much power away from state and local governments. Many felt that the federal government would be too far removed to represent the average citizen. Anti-Federalists feared the nation was too large for the national government to respond to the concerns of people on a state and local basis.

<https://judiciallearningcenter.org/the-ratification-debate/>

9. The Anti-Federalists were also worried that the original text of the Constitution did not contain a bill of rights. They wanted guaranteed protection for certain basic liberties, such as freedom of speech and trial by jury.

<https://judiciallearningcenter.org/the-ratification-debate/>

10. A Bill of Rights was added [to the Constitution] in 1791. In part to gain the support of the Anti-Federalists, the Federalists promised to add a bill of rights if the Anti-Federalists would vote for the Constitution. <https://judiciallearningcenter.org/the-ratification-debate/>

11. The first kind [of Anti Federalist] is represented by politicians such as Roger Sherman and Oliver Ellsworth of Connecticut. They entered the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia with a suspicious disposition toward the Virginia Plan and its attempt to give sweeping powers to Congress and to reduce the role of the states in the new American system. This first group achieved considerable success in modifying this national plan back in the direction of federal principles.

12. In the final document [the Constitution], the powers of Congress are listed, each state is represented equally in the Senate and composed of Senators elected by the state legislatures, the president is to be elected by a majority of the people plus a majority of the states, the Constitution is to be ratified by the people of nine states, and the Constitution is to be amended by 2/3 of the House plus 2/3 of the Senate plus 3/4 of the state legislatures. <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/fed-antifed/antifederalist/>

13. The second kind of Antifederalist is one who was not privy to the debate in Philadelphia, and has some deep concerns about the POTENTIALITY of the Constitution to lead to the concentration of power in the new government. . . . They warned that without certain amendments, including a bill of rights that stated clearly what the new government could and could not do, the new Constitution had the POTENTIALITY to generate a consolidated government over a large territory in which one of the branches of government—the Presidency and the Judiciary were the leading candidates—would come to dominate.

14. [Some Anti Federalists] warned that the partly national and partly federal Constitution would veer naturally in the direction of wholly national unless certain precautions were put in place to secure the partly-national and partly-federal arrangement. <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/fed-antifed/antifederalist/>

15. The third and final group of Antifederalists was those who wanted as little deviation from the Articles as possible and saw the partly-national and partly-federal compromise as totally unsustainable. The arrangement was doomed to produce a wholly national outcome unless radical amendments were secured that altered and abolished the very structure and powers that the Framers took four months to erect. <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/fed-antifed/antifederalist/>