



LESSON 1

1775
1776

1787

1790

1795

THE ARTICLES OF CONFEDERATION

READ ALOUD

The colonists' ragged army had defeated the mighty British. What did that mean for the men and women who had risked their lives for independence? Abigail Adams wrote to her husband, John Adams. "I desire that you would remember the ladies," she said. "We will not hold ourselves bound to obey laws in which we have no voice or representation."

Focus Activity

READ TO LEARN

What kind of government did the Articles of Confederation create?

VOCABULARY

Articles of Confederation

Shays's Rebellion

Northwest Ordinance

territory

statehood

PEOPLE

Richard Allen

Daniel Shays

PLACES

Northwest Territory

Indiana

Ohio

Wisconsin

Michigan

Illinois

THE BIG PICTURE

Abigail Adams was thinking about the changes that independence might bring. People in the 13 states believed that anything was possible. Many of the enslaved African Americans who had fought against the British in the American Revolution asked for their freedom. Some got it. **Richard Allen**, a former slave, started the Free African Society in 1787. This was the first group of African Americans in North America to organize for rights.

Everyone was thinking about change. The states, too, began to think about their independence. First they set up their own governments. By 1777, 10 of the 13 states had constitutions. Soon, however, there were problems between the states. In 1783 George Washington wrote, "It is yet to be decided whether the Revolution [was] a blessing or a curse." The states were independent. But they were not fully united.

THE FIRST CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

In 1781 the Second Continental Congress adopted the **Articles of Confederation**. The Articles set up our first central government. Because of the years of British rule, many Americans did not trust a strong central power. So the Articles of Confederation gave most powers to the state governments.

A Weak Government

Each state made laws, collected taxes, and printed money. Money printed by one state was not always accepted in another. Most people thought they were citizens of one state, not citizens of the United States.

Congress could not settle problems between states. It could not enforce the laws it passed.

Congress did not have money to pay soldiers who fought in the Revolution. Lack of money caused serious problems in Massachusetts. To get the money it needed, Massachusetts put heavy taxes on land. Its courts jailed farmers who did not pay. They also took their land. Many farmers were owed money from Congress.

In 1786 Massachusetts farmer **Daniel Shays** protested. He and about 1,000 other farmers fought the local militia. Eight men died before the uprising called **Shays's Rebellion** was stopped.

Shays's Rebellion made Patrick Henry say, "Our body politic is dangerously sick." Things would never improve, said George Washington, under the "half-starved, limping government" of the Articles of Confederation.



Shays's Rebellion (left) showed that the central government was weak. Neither paper money from Massachusetts nor coins from New Jersey could buy goods in other states.



THE NORTHWEST ORDINANCE

Congress did pass some very important laws under the Articles of Confederation. The **Northwest Ordinance**, passed in 1787, gave new **territories** a way to become states. A territory is land that belongs to a government.

The Northwest Territory

After the American Revolution the United States claimed a region west of it called the **Northwest Territory**. Use the map on this page to locate

it. The Northwest Territory included the future states of **Indiana**, **Ohio**, **Wisconsin**, **Michigan**, and **Illinois**.

The Northwest Ordinance divided this huge territory into smaller territories. The people who lived in a territory could apply for **statehood** when its population reached 60,000. Statehood means to become a state. The ordinance did not allow an existing state to claim any part of the new territories.

The Nation Grows

Under the British, the Northwest Territory had been set aside for Native Americans. Now thousands of United States citizens began moving into the area. Many arrived in covered wagons with all their belongings.

Congress divided the land into townships of six square miles each. Each township then became a self-governing part of the territory.

The Northwest Ordinance gave new settlers in the territories the same rights that citizens had in the



Ohio was the first territory to join the United States under the **Northwest Ordinance**.

1. Which territories do you think would become states after Ohio?
2. What effects do you think settlement of the Northwest Territory had on Virginia and Pennsylvania?



This is a later version of the Great Seal of the United States.

13 states. It also outlawed slavery and the hiring of indentured servants. In addition the ordinance made sure that each township set aside land for public schools. Members of Congress believed that if people were going to govern themselves, they had to be well educated.

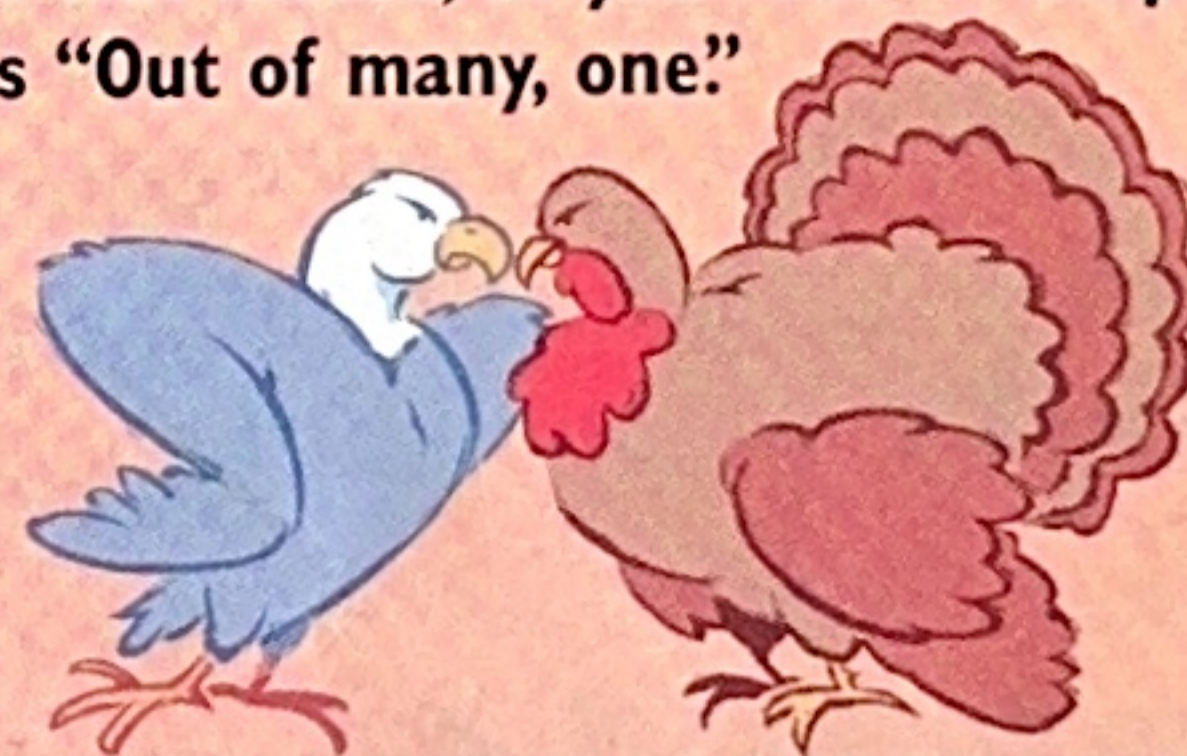
WHY IT MATTERS

The Northwest Ordinance was one important legacy of the Articles of Confederation. The ordinance would be used as a model for creating new territories for over 100 years. However, the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation created several problems for the new country. Many Americans thought that the United States needed a stronger central government.

DID YOU KNOW?

How was the Great Seal of the United States chosen?

In the 1700s most countries had a seal that they used to stamp official documents. When our country won its independence, our leaders decided to create a Great Seal to represent the new country. Benjamin Franklin suggested a picture of a wild turkey on the seal. It was not a bad choice—turkeys are one of the few large birds that are native to North America. However, in 1782 Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams settled on a seal that showed an eagle with a ribbon in its mouth. On the ribbon is the Latin phrase *E pluribus unum*. This motto, as you read in Chapter 1, means “Out of many, one.”



✓ Reviewing Facts and Ideas

SUM IT UP

- The Articles of Confederation, adopted in 1781, set up the first central government for the 13 states after their independence.
- The weaknesses of the central government under the Articles of Confederation made it hard to solve problems between the states. Congress did not have enough power to do this.
- The Northwest Ordinance was passed under the Articles of Confederation in 1787. This law provided a way for territories to become states.

THINK ABOUT IT

1. The Articles of Confederation gave most powers to the states. Why?
2. When could a territory ask for statehood under the ordinance?
3. **FOCUS** Why did colonists want a stronger central government?
4. **THINKING SKILL** Was Patrick Henry stating a fact or an opinion when he said that the government was “dangerously sick?”
5. **GEOGRAPHY** You read that part of today’s Middle West was known as the Northwest Territory. Why do you think this was so?