**US History**

**UNIT 3: REVOLUTION AND CONSTITUTION**

**Textbook:** Chapters 3, 4, and Living Constitution Section

**SSUSH3a-c:** Analyze the primary causes of the American Revolution.

**SSUSH4a-f:** Analyze the ideological, military, social, and diplomatic aspects of the American Revolution.

**SSUSH5a-e:** Investigate specific events and key ideas that brought about the adoption and implementation of the United States Constitution.

**This unit examines the causes, progress, and results of the American Revolution. This unit will focus on early American documents such as the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution. You will study the roles of women, American Indians, and free and enslaved Blacks in the Revolution and learn about how important leaders in colonial government worked to form and strengthen the new nation.**

**French and Indian War**

The French and Indian War resulted from a long-simmering rivalry between Great Britain and France and their competition for territory in North America. The French and Indian War broke out in 1754 when Great Britain challenged the French for control of the land that is now Ohio and western Pennsylvania. American Indians tended to support the French because as fur traders, the French were not as focused as the English on building permanent settlements. Great Britain eventually won the war

The Treaty of Paris (1763), which ended the French and Indian War, forced France to turn over control of Canada to Great Britain. France also surrendered its claim to all land east of the Mississippi River, except for the city of New Orleans. (SSUSH3a)

Additionally, the treaty gave the British government more control over its colonies. The colonists objected to the loss of control over their own affairs, and some Americans began to think about an American revolution. Tensions grew when Parliament passed laws to tax the colonists to pay for the cost of keeping a large standing army in North America that would protect both Britain’s possessions and the American colonists from attacks.

Tensions increased with the Proclamation of 1763, by which Americans were forbidden from settling beyond the Appalachian Mountains to limit their conflicts with American Indians as well as to keep colonists in designated areas to allow the government to gain much-needed revenue. (SSUSH3b)

**Colonial Resistance**

England’s American colonists believed the king and Parliament were violating their rights as Englishmen. Among the rights they felt were being violated were protection from taxation without representation, the right to a trial by a jury of their peers, protection from searches without warrants, and protection from having troops quartered on their property. Parliamentary actions to tax the colonists or to enforce the tax laws provoked a negative reaction from the colonists that eventually led to open rebellion. These actions included the Stamp Act and the Intolerable Acts.

* **The Stamp Act** required the colonists to print newspapers, legal documents, playing cards, and so forth on paper bearing special stamps (like postage stamps). Buying the stamped paper was the equivalent of paying a tax. Some colonists formed groups called the Sons of Liberty to stop distribution of the stamped paper. Nine colonies sent representatives to the Stamp Act Congress, which sent a formal protest to the king. (SSUSH3b)
* **The Intolerable Acts** closed the port of Boston as punishment for the Boston Tea Party. These acts also allowed British officials accused of major crimes to be tried in England and forced the colonists to house British troops on their property. These acts, along with the suspension of the Massachusetts colonial government, were designed to discourage the colonists from resisting British authority, but in fact unified them to work against the British government. (SSUSH3b)

**Committees of Correspondence**

The Committees of Correspondence formed in reaction to the passage of the Stamp Act. Their purpose was to keep colonies in communication about issues of concern to the colonists, particularly in relation to British actions or legislation. These committees helped to protest actions that the colonists believed were unfair.

American colonists opposed to British authority in Massachusetts formed a secret organization called the Sons of Liberty. To show their dislike of British rule, they damaged British property, including government offices, and the homes of wealthy supporters of the British. The Daughters of Liberty joined the Sons of Liberty in protesting British rule in North America. They wove homespun fabric to make clothes and other goods so the colonists would not need to rely on British imports. (SSUSH3b)

**Common Sense**

In January 1776, Thomas Paine published *Common Sense*. This small pamphlet had a big effect on colonists and moved many Americans to support independence from Great Britain. Colonists were persuaded by the logic of Paine’s arguments. Some of these arguments were the following:

* The Atlantic Ocean was too wide to allow Britain to rule America as well as an American government could.
* It was foolish to think an island could rule a continent.
* The idea of Britain being America’s “mother country” made Britain’s actions all the worse because no mother would treat her children so badly. (SSUSH3c)

**Committee of Five**

Five delegates were chosen by the Continental Congress to write a rationale for independence. They were: Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Robert Livingston, and Roger Sherman. This group eventually presented a draft of the Declaration of Independence (primarily written by Jefferson) to the Continental Congress for review. (SSUSH4a)

**Declaration of Independence**

The Declaration of Independence is one of the most important documents in American history. Thomas Jefferson wrote the first draft and then made revisions suggested by John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and others. Because the Declaration addressed a worldwide audience, its language was made simple and direct so people everywhere would understand and sympathize with the colonists’ cause. After it explains the philosophical and legal reasons for seeking independence from Britain, the Declaration has its longest section, which gives numerous examples of how King George III violated the rights of the colonists. Finally, the Declaration offers a discussion of the Americans’ many unsuccessful attempts to get relief from Britain and ends with the conclusion that the only way for Americans to have their rights restored is to restore them themselves by declaring independence from Britain and by controlling their own government. (SSUSH4a)

**George Washington and the Continental Army**

When the American Revolution began, George Washington was named commander in chief of the Continental Army. He displayed extraordinary leadership abilities in the role. Washington reorganized the army, secured additional equipment and supplies, and started a training program to turn inexperienced recruits into a professional military.

This training program was aided by Baron von Steuben, a Prussian military officer who had experience in training troops for battle and typical 18th century combat techniques. He developed uniform military drills and practices to make Washington’s untrained army into a more effective, well-trained fighting force.

Life was hard for the common soldier in the Continental Army. Enlistments lasted from one to three years, and the states differed in how they treated their soldiers in terms of the following: how well and how often they paid their soldiers; how they housed them when they were not on the march; and how they supplied them with food, clothing, and equipment. These issues undermined morale, as did the army’s stern discipline, the chances of being wounded or killed, and British victories. In winter of 1777–1778, the Continental Army faced one of its most difficult trials at Valley Forge. It suffered from starvation, disease, and the lack of adequate shelter. Despite its hardships, under the leadership of George Washington, the army could remain together and receive valuable training so that it could fight the British in 1778. (SSUSH4c)

**French Alliance**

France decided to support the Americans during the Revolution because of the American victory at the Battle of Saratoga in 1777. Benjamin Franklin, the American diplomat in Paris, signed economic and military treaties with France for the United States. France sent army and navy units to fight on the side of the Americans. Military specialists such as the Marquis de Lafayette assisted in the training of American forces. Lafayette worked closely with George Washington and was very successful and brave during many battles of the American Revolution. The assistance of the French navy (at the Battle of Yorktown in particular) and trainers like Lafayette were instrumental in winning the British surrender.



**Yorktown**

In 1781, with the help of the French navy, which prevented the British from escaping, the American forces could defeat the British in three weeks of fighting. British General Cornwallis surrendered to George Washington at Yorktown on October 17, 1781. This victory marked the end of the American Revolution.

**Free Blacks during the Revolution**

Enslaved and free Blacks, in many cases, viewed the American Revolution as an opportunity for expanding their own rights with the basis for revolution being a call to protect natural rights. Estimates suggest at least 5,000 enslaved and free Blacks fought with the Patriots. However, those who fought with the Continental Army and with the colonial militia groups did not receive their freedom (if they were enslaved) or equal rights (if they were free) following the conclusion of the Revolutionary War. (SSUSH4e)

**1783 Treaty of Paris**

The 1783 Treaty of Paris formally concluded the American Revolutionary War. The United States won its independence from Great Britain and gained control of land stretching to the Mississippi River. Britain ceded Florida to Spain and certain African and Caribbean colonies to France. (SSUSH4f)

**Articles of Confederation and Shays’ Rebellion**

The Articles of Confederation was America’s first constitution, written during the American Revolution. Since the country was seeking to overthrow the British, a government many colonists believed had taken away important rights, it is not surprising the Articles granted the national government very few powers. There was no executive branch, so foreign policy was conducted by Congress; Congress could print money but did not have the power to tax, making the national currency almost worthless. Congress could maintain the army but had to ask the states for troops, as Congress could not draft soldiers. There was no national court system, so Congress could not enforce the laws it passed. This was left up to the individual states. The Articles gave individual states more power than the national government had. As a result, conflicts among the states threatened the existence of the nation. The political weakness of the United States and its potential for collapse left it vulnerable to attack by foreign countries and convinced many influential Americans to support a Constitutional Convention. Despite these severe limitations, the national government under the Articles of Confederation did pass some significant laws. The Land Ordinance (1785) laid the foundations for surveying new lands, created a method of organizing and selling the land, and became an important source of revenue for the national government. The law also required land be set aside for schools. The national government used the Land Ordinance for the next 72 years, until the passage of the Homestead Act in 1862; over three-quarters of the continental United States was surveyed under this law. The Northwest Ordinance (1787) was also an influential law passed under the Articles. It helped solve competing land claims between the new states and gave the national government the right to administer new territories and decide when they could become states. Both laws helped ensure property rights, rule of law, and education for settlers in the new lands. However, the lack of national power eventually made the country difficult to govern and administer; Shays’ Rebellion (1786) showed many citizens that a revision or replacement of the Articles of Confederation was necessary.

Daniel Shays led more than a thousand farmers who, like him, were burdened with personal debts caused by economic problems stemming from the states’ Revolutionary War debts. Shays and his men tried to seize a federal arsenal in Massachusetts. This was just one of many protests that debt-ridden farmers made during this period. Without the power to tax, America’s weak government could not repair the national economy. Responding to Shays’ Rebellion, George Washington supported the establishment of a stronger central government. In May 1787, he was elected president of the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, where he and many leaders, including the Founding Fathers, created a federal form of government for the United States. Under the federal system of government, the national and state governments would share powers to ensure neither level of government would have absolute power. (SSUSH5a, b)

**Constitutional Convention**

At the 1787 Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, delegates from all thirteen states met to discuss revisions to the Articles of Confederation. The delegates quickly decided that revising the Articles of Confederation would not be enough. They decided to write a new constitution for the country. During the

Constitutional Convention, delegates became organized into two groups: Federalists and Anti-Federalists. Federalists like Alexander Hamilton and James Madison generally wanted a strong national government that could handle national economic, political, and diplomatic issues for the country. Anti-Federalists, on the other hand, wanted to maintain the sovereignty of the individual states. They were concerned that too much power would be given to the national government and the states would lose control over their individual interests. They believed that a national government with a strong executive branch would be able to dominate the states and take away the rights of individual citizens. Delegates from the small states worried that they would lose representation in a national government that favored states with larger populations.

Eventually, the delegates reached a compromise known as the Great Compromise. James Madison managed to convince the delegates from the small states and large states to give up some of their demands. Under the compromise, the Constitution would create a system of checks and balances among the three branches of government: the executive, the legislative, and the judicial. The compromise also created a legislative branch with two houses (the House of Representatives and the Senate) that satisfied the concerns of representation that the small states and large states had.

Another concern Anti-Federalists had was the rights of individuals and states. They wanted to guarantee personal liberties that were not already included in the Constitution. Federalists had argued that a strong national government would not infringe upon these liberties because it was understood that these were natural rights. However, before enough of the Anti-Federalist delegates would agree to the Constitution, they insisted that these liberties be included. James Madison promised those delegates that these rights would be added as amendments to the Constitution. These became known as the Bill of Rights, which was added in 1791. In ten separate amendments, the Bill of Rights protected individual and states’ rights. (SSUSH5c, d, e)

**The Great Compromise**

One great issue facing the delegates to the Constitutional Convention was how different-sized states could have equal representation in the new government. States with large populations supported a plan to create a legislative branch in which representatives were assigned based on each state’s population. States with smaller populations supported a plan to create a legislative branch in which all states were equally represented. Delegates to the Constitutional Convention settled the issues of representation in Congress by approving the Great Compromise. This compromise helped “save” the Constitution by settling the dispute between states with large populations and states with small populations. The compromise called for the creation of a legislature with two chambers: a House of Representatives, with representation based on population, and a Senate, with equal representation for all states. (SSUSH5c)

Northwest Ordinance

The first U. S. governmental territory outside the original states was the Northwest Territory, which was created by the Northwest Ordinance. This law demonstrated to Americans that their national government intended to encourage westward expansion and that it would do so by organizing new states that would be equal members of the Union. The ordinance banned slavery in the Northwest Territory. Additionally, the Northwest Ordinance mandated the establishment of public schools in the Northwest Territory. (SSUSH5a)