Section 1: The Articles of Confederation

IDEAS BEHIND GOVERNMENT
After winning independence from Great Britain, the United States needed to form new governments. The Americans first looked to English law for ideas. The **Magna Carta** and the **English Bill of Rights** gave them inspiration. Ideas from the Enlightenment also influenced them. English philosopher John Locke had thought the government had a duty to guard people's rights. In 1639 the people of Connecticut had created a government plan considered to be the first written **constitution** in the colonies. During the American Revolution nearly every state wrote a constitution to ensure that citizens elected representatives to make laws. **Suffrage** varied considerably from state to state. Some constitutions banned slavery. The **Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom** was an example of a law providing religious freedom.

ARTICLES OF CONFEDERATION
The Continental Congress named a Committee of Thirteen, with one member from each colony. This committee drafted the **Articles of Confederation**. Under the Articles, the Confederation Congress had limited powers to guard the people's freedoms. Each state had one vote in the Congress. The Congress had powers, but it could only ask the states for money and soldiers. States could refuse these requests. After some conflicts, the Articles were **ratified** by all the states to form the first American government.

NORTHWEST TERRITORY
Congress decided to raise money to pay debts by selling the ordinance lands. Congress passed the **Land Ordinance of 1785**. The **Northwest Ordinance of 1787** formed the **Northwest Territory**. It was then split up into several smaller territories. When the population of a territory hit 60,000, its settlers could draft their own constitution and ask to join the Union. Slavery was banned in the Northwest Territory.

Section 2: The New Nation Faces Challenges

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
The Continental Army broke up soon after the signing of the Treaty of Paris of 1783. The Articles of Confederation provided no way to raise a new army. The United States had a hard time guarding against foreign threats. Problems also arose in trading with Britain, which closed many British ports to U.S. ships. The British also forced American merchants to pay high **tariffs**. U.S. merchants increased prices to pay them, and costs were passed on to customers. In 1784 Spanish officials shut down the lower Mississippi River to U.S. shipping. Western farmers and merchants used the river to ship goods east and overseas. The U.S. government failed to work out an agreement with Spain. Critics thought Spain would have negotiated longer if America had a strong military force. The loss of the British West Indies markets meant farmers could not sell goods there. U.S. exports dropped while lower-priced British goods kept entering America. Congress could not pass tariffs.

ECONOMIC PROBLEMS
Trade problems among the states, war debt, and a poor economy hurt the states. The Confederation Congress had no power to regulate **interstate commerce**. States looked out only for their own trade interests. In addition, states had trouble paying off war debts. They printed paper money, but it had no gold or silver backing and little value. This caused inflation, which occurs when increased prices for goods and services combine with the reduced value of money. The loss of trade with Britain coupled with inflation created a **depression**.

SHAYS'S REBELLION
Massachusetts collected taxes on land to pay its war debt. This policy hurt farmers who owned land. The courts made them sell their property to pay taxes. **Daniel Shays** and his followers defied a state order to stop **Shays's Rebellion**. They were defeated by state troops, and 14 leaders were sentenced to death. However, the state freed most, including Shays. Many citizens agreed with Shays.

CALL FOR CHANGE
The weaknesses of the Confederation government led leaders, including James Madison and Alexander Hamilton, to ask all 13 states to send delegates to a Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in May 1787 to revise the Articles of Confederation, and create a better constitution.

Section 3: Creating the Constitution

CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION
The **Constitutional Convention** met in May 1787 in Philadelphia, where America had declared independence. Twelve states sent delegates. Most delegates were educated and had served in state legislatures or Congress. James Madison attended.

GREAT COMPROMISE
States disagreed about representation, tariffs, slavery, and strength of the central government. In the **Virginia Plan**, the legislature would be selected on the basis of population. The **New Jersey Plan** proposed that each state receive an equal number of votes. The **Great Compromise** gave every state, regardless of size, an equal vote in the upper house of the legislature. Each state would be represented in the lower house based on population.

THREE-FIFTHS COMPROMISE
The **Three-Fifths Compromise** satisfied northerners, who wanted the number of slaves in southern states to determine taxes but not representation. It also satisfied southern delegates, who wanted slaves counted as part of their state populations to increase their power. The delegates agreed to end the slave trade in 20 years.

THE LIVING CONSTITUTION
The delegates wanted to protect **popular sovereignty**. They created **federalism** to accomplish that. States control government functions not assigned to the federal government.

CHECKS AND BALANCES
The Constitution balances power among the **legislative branch**, the **executive branch**, and the **judicial branch**. The Constitution's framers established **checks and balances** to prevent any one branch from becoming too strong. The Constitution was completed in September 1787. Congress and then the states ratified the Constitution.

Section 4: Ratifying the Constitution

FEDERALISTS AND ANTIFEDERALISTS
Antifederalists believed that the Constitutional Convention should not have formed a new government. Delegate **George Mason** opposed the Constitution because it did not contain a section that guaranteed individual rights. Most **Federalists** thought that the Constitution provided a good balance of power. Many wealthy planters, farmers, and lawyers were Federalists. Yet, many craftspeople, merchants, and poor workers also backed the Constitution.

FEDERALIST PAPERS
The *Federalist Papers* were written anonymously by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and

John Jay in defense of the Constitution. They tried to persuade people that the Constitution would not overwhelm the states. Madison stated that the diversity of the United States meant no single group would take over the government. The Constitution needed only nine states to pass it, but each state should ratify it as a way of proclaiming national unity. Every state except Rhode Island held state conventions that gave citizens the right to discuss and vote on the Constitution. On December 7, 1787, Delaware became the first state to ratify it. The Constitution went into effect in June 1788 after New Hampshire became the ninth state to ratify it. Several states ratified the Constitution only after a bill protecting individual rights was promised.

BILL OF RIGHTS
Many Antifederalists did not believe that the Constitution would safeguard personal rights. In the first session of Congress, James Madison spurred the legislators to develop a bill of rights. The rights would then become **amendments** to the Constitution, after a two-thirds majority of both houses of Congress and three-fourths of the states approved them. Article V of the Constitution spelled out this way of changing the document to bend it to the will of the people.

In December 1791 Congress proposed 12 amendments and turned them over to the states for ratification. By December 1791 the states had ratified the **Bill of Rights**. Ten of the proposed 12 amendments were written to protect citizens' rights. These amendments show how to amend the Constitution to meet the needs of a growing nation.