**Federalists vs. Anti-Federalists**

When the American Revolutionary War ended, the colonists faced many problems. Even though people from different colonies had joined together to fight the British, they still felt that they were citizens of their own separate colonies. **The Articles of Confederation** set up a new government that was very loosely organized. The “Articles” gave most of the power to the states and very little power to the national government. Under the Articles of Confederation, there was no national executive or court system. The national government could not raise an army, collect taxes, or regulate trade between the states. Even though the new government could print and coin money, many states printed their own money. Some even placed **tariffs** on **goods** from other states. Just imagine the problems this created! To buy or sell goods in the next state, one might have to use a different **currency** or even pay a tariff. With no power to raise an army, the new nation was **vulnerable** to attack from other countries. Faced with debt, economic problems and struggles between the states, the Articles of Confederation were not working! Many were afraid that the states might separate into thirteen different countries.

Because of the many problems under the Articles of Confederation, each state was asked to send **delegates** to a convention in Philadelphia in May, 1787. The purpose of the convention was to discuss how to make the national government stronger. Rhode Island was the only state that did not send a delegate. Fifty-five delegates from twelve states gathered at the Pennsylvania State House. Because they wanted to be able to discuss and debate their ideas “freely,” it was decided to conduct all meetings in secret. Guards were placed at the doors and the State House windows were covered. So began long months of discussion, debate, and compromise. Early in the convention, the delegates came to an unexpected decision. They decided that rather than try to fix the Articles of Confederation, a new plan of government with a new constitution needed to be developed. As the discussion and debate proceeded, a division took place among the delegates. One group, **the** **Federalists**, believed in a strong national government. The other group, **the Anti-Federalists**, favored states and individual rights.

**Who Were the Federalists?**

The Federalists believed in a strong national government that would have power over the states. They believed that a large **republic** was the best way to protect individual rights and freedom. The members of this group were more likely to be wealthier merchants, bankers, lawyers, manufacturers, and plantation owners. The Federalists tended to be more educated. John Adams, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, James Madison, John Jay and Alexander Hamilton were important Federalists. The Federalists were in favor of a national bank and did not think that a bill of rights was needed. They were in favor of **ratifying** the Constitution.

**Who Were the Anti-Federalists?**

The Anti-Federalists were against a strong national government. They believed that each state should have its own independent government. Many Anti-Federalists didn’t have a lot of trust in government and feared that a strong national executive might become a king or **dictator**. They also felt that only a small republic could protect individual rights and freedom. The Anti-Federalists were mostly farmers and tradesmen and less likely to be wealthy. Among the important Anti-Federalists were Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, Samuel Adams, George Mason, Edmond Randolph, and Elbridge Gerry. The Anti-Federalists were opposed to a national bank and believed that a bill of rights was important and necessary. They were opposed to **ratifying** the Constitution.

**The Great Debate**

The delegates discussed, debated and compromised for many long months. Finally, in September the final draft was ready to be signed. Some of the delegates were not happy with the new Constitution and some left Philadelphia. On the signing day, September 17th, only 42 delegates were present. Three delegates refused to sign the Constitution that day- Anti-Federalists George Mason, Edmond Randolph, and Elbridge Gerry.

The new Constitution had to be approved (ratified) by 9 of the 13 states. Debates and arguments started throughout the states. Essays and letters were written; newspaper articles and pamphlets appeared that supported and opposed the new constitution. Political celebrations, parades and protests were held. Speeches were made in meeting houses, taverns and on street corners. Friends, neighbors, workers and family members discussed and debated the issues. One of the most hotly debated issues was that the Constitution did not have a bill of rights. By the end of July 1788, eleven states had **ratified** the Constitution. North Carolina and Rhode Island still would not approve the Constitution until it had a bill of rights. Finally, James Madison drafted a bill of rights in 1789. By November, North Carolina had ratified the constitution. But it would not be until May of the following year that Rhode Island would vote to **ratify**. It was the Anti-Federalist outcry that caused the Bill of Rights (the first 10 **amendments**) to be added to the United States Constitution. These 10 amendments guarantee rights and freedoms that are basic to all Americans.

Who was the winner in this debate? If the Federalists hadn’t won, we wouldn’t have a Constitution. But if the Anti-Federalists hadn’t disagreed, the Constitution would not have a Bill of Rights.