

# Lesson 1: A Weak Government

## Vocabulary

**Articles of Confederation** an early plan for the new American government

**ratify** to approve or accept something

**legislative branch** the part of government that makes laws

**executive branch** the part of government that puts laws into effect

**judicial branch** the part of government that makes sure laws are understood correctly

**inflation** an economic condition in which prices rise very quickly

**Shays' Rebellion** an uprising of farmers who were angry about state taxes

**Northwest Ordinance of 1787** a plan for dividing the Northwest Territory

## The Articles of Confederation

Americans did not want their new government to have too much power. The **Articles of Confederation** was a plan for this government. It was **ratified**, or approved, in 1781. It gave states freedom to rule themselves. The Articles said that states would be joined in a league of friendship. The Articles created a weak central government. The central government had only a **legislative branch**. It was called Congress. Congress made laws. Yet it could not collect taxes from the states. The Articles did not set up a **judicial branch**, or court system. They also did not set up an **executive branch** to carry out laws.

## A Government in Trouble

The nation did not work well under the Articles of Confederation. The government had to borrow money because it could not collect taxes. The nationalists wanted a stronger central government. The United States also had other money problems. Each state and Congress made its own money. People had trouble figuring the value of the different kinds of money. Prices rose very quickly. This **inflation** made Congress's money almost worthless.

## Shays' Rebellion

Massachusetts taxed its citizens to pay back its debts. When farmers could not pay, the state took away their land. Daniel Shays was a farmer in Massachusetts. He led a group of angry farmers in a rebellion. These farmers wanted to close courts that punished people who owed money. They also wanted lower taxes. In 1787 they attacked a government building to get weapons. The attack was not successful. Many nationalists felt **Shays' Rebellion** showed that there should be a stronger central government.

## The Northwest Ordinance of 1787

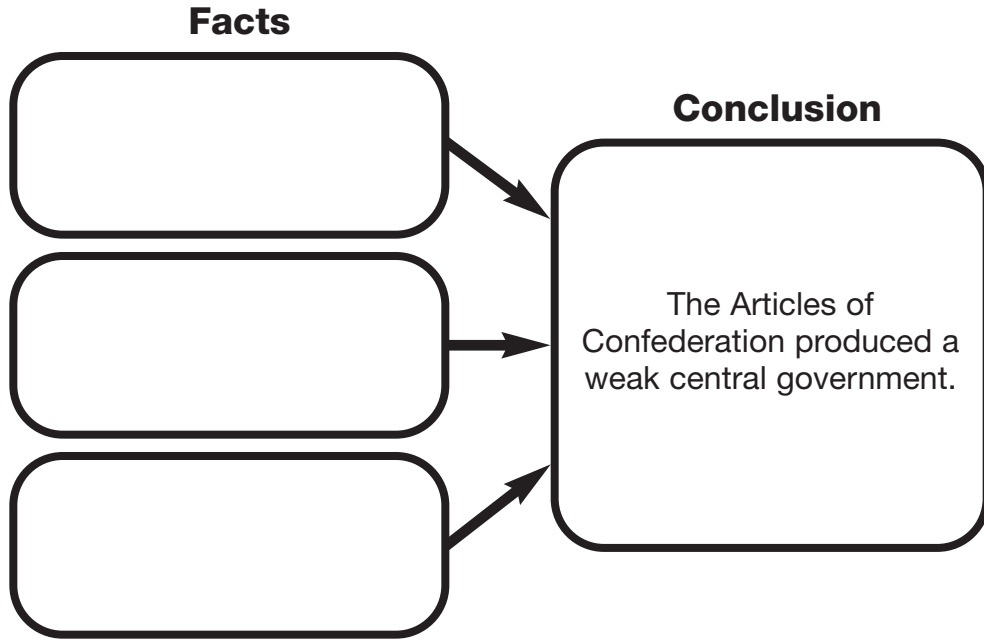
The Treaty of Paris of 1783 gave the United States a lot of land. Congress wanted this land to become states. The Northwest Territory was part of this land. Congress came up with the **Northwest Ordinance of 1787**. It was a plan for dividing the Northwest Territory. It also described how a territory could become a state.

## Growing Concerns

Nationalists were getting more worried. George Washington felt that if the states were not joined under a central government the country would be ruined. In May 1787 Congress held a meeting to change the Articles of Confederation.

# Lesson 1: Review

1.  **Draw Conclusions** Fill in the missing facts that lead to the given conclusion.



2. What were the goals of the Articles of Confederation?

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3. What caused Shays' Rebellion?

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4. **Critical Thinking: Cause and Effect** Identify the events that led to the Northwest Ordinance of 1787.

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5. What led George Washington to say: "What stronger evidence can be given of the want of energy in our government?"

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