



## Passing the Constitution: A Lesson in State Ratification

### Purpose of the Lesson:

The purpose of this lesson is to introduce students to the ratification period that followed the Federal Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia. Through various activities to understand the what, why, who, where, and when of state ratification debates, students will see that state ratification of the Constitution was a critical element of establishing the new government's legitimacy. Student activities throughout the day will help to build a State Ratification Bulletin Board that highlights the students' views and acquired knowledge.

### Critical Engagement Question:

What is ratification and what is its significance to the United States Constitution?

### Overview of the Lesson:

This lesson will be completed in five parts, each part covering one of the five Ws (what, why, who, where, and when) to help students understand state ratification. In the first part of the lesson, "What is ratification?" students will be introduced to the basic vocabulary of ratification, practicing their vocabulary by defining the words in their own terms and illustrating them on pieces of paper to be added to a "State Ratification" bulletin board. The next activity, "why" will require reading from some of the state ratification convention proceedings. Students will use these readings to understand what happened at a state ratification proceeding and add those observations to their bulletin board. The next two activities will cover the "who" and "where" of state ratification as students complete a coloring activity to identify the opinions of groups of individuals in each state. The final activity to discover the "when" of state ratification will have each student (or set of students) take on the role of a ratifying state and through a simulated timing of ratification, see just how long it took each state to join the union.

### Lesson Objectives:

1. Students will understand what ratification is and why it is significant.
2. Students will consider how it would have divided the Union if New York State did not ratify the Constitution.
3. Students will understand where ratification took place and the timing of each state's ratification of the Constitution.

## Common Core State Standards:

English Language Arts, Reading: Informational Text & Literature Grade 4

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.5 Describe the overall structure (e.g., chronology, comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in a text or part of a text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.3 Explain events, procedures, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text, including what happened and why, based on specific information in the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including those that allude to significant characters found in mythology (e.g., Herculean).

## Materials:

1. Teachers will need a ratification time table, found in appendix A.
2. Small individual copies and one large bulletin board sized copy of the ratification map of the 13 states, found in appendix B and D.
3. Students will need pencils, crayons, markers, and sheets of paper (star shapes & rectangles preferred)
4. Pamphlet of state convention proceedings. See appendix C. To save time, teachers may want to choose 4-5 passages from the list provided in the appendix. Recommended questions and observations for these passages are found in comments.

## Time and Grade Level:

One 50 minutes Grade 4 social studies (local history and government) classroom

## Warm-up for the Lesson:

The warm-up for this lesson will require the teacher to review the [ratification debate documents](#) in the ConSource.org library and Article VII of the Constitution (found [here](#)) to become familiar with the proceedings that are central to this lesson. In class, the teacher will work with students to present keywords and concepts for the lesson.

## Teacher & Student Warm-up:

Present each word to students in turn and ask students to guess what the word might mean, before revealing the definition. It might be best to write each word on the chalkboard and keep track of student suggestions. After revealing the definition, incorporate the definitions given by students, to explain how or how not, each student definition fits into the real definition. For each vocabulary word, ask for a volunteer to write the word on a vocabulary star with a collaborative definition of the term that incorporates both the class definitions and the dictionary definition.

### Recommended Vocabulary Warm-up for Students:

**Democracy:** A system of government by the whole population or all of the people; typically through elected representatives. Control of an organization or group by the majority of its members.

**Union:** A political unit consisting of a number of states or provinces with the same central government.

**Ratify:** To sign or give formal agreement to, making it officially valid.

**The Constitution:** A basic written set of principles and precedent of federal government in the United States.

**Delegate:** A person who is sent or asked to represent others.

### Activity:

#### Warm-up activity: WHAT (see above)

1. After introducing the lesson with a discussion of particular terms and concepts, have students affix their vocabulary stars to a bulletin board that has been covered with the large ratification map provided in appendix B and labeled, "Passing the Constitution: State Ratification"

#### Activity Part 1: WHY

2. Distribute a copy of the state ratifications proceedings packet to each student as well as highlighters, if needed. If necessary for time, pick and choose various passages from the provided list in the appendix.
3. Read through each selected passage as a class, asking students to highlight the things they hear that describe why the delegates might have been brought together.  
\* After reading each passage and before starting the next, ask students what they highlighted. Elaborate on the passages read and student responses to explain why the ratification proceedings were a necessary step in creating the new government.
4. Have several students write down the information gathered from the readings on colored rectangles to add to the bulletin board.  
\* Try to get students to write down observations related to the openness of the ratification proceedings, what the conventions were for, how many people attended the proceedings, whether or not ratification was considered a good thing.

Activity Part 2: WHO & WHERE

6. Distribute individual maps to students with the names of the states blacked out (See appendix D for this worksheet). For the next 5 to 10 minutes, assist students in identifying and labeling the states for a short geography lesson.

\*Share with students that only 12 states initially ratified the Constitution (even though only 9 needed to approve the Constitution in order to approve the new government), with the 13th following much later. Ask students to guess which state that was and highlight the label.

7. Next, ask students to look at the state of New York and share with students that it was one of the last states to approve the new Constitution.

\*Ask students why this was significant, searching for a response that if New York had not ratified the constitution, the union would have been geographically divided. Ask students what this would mean to the country. If necessary ask students to think about the divide as if it was there own house that was split down the middle. What would this mean for governance? Communication?

· In your opinion, how would the United States be different if New York State did not join the Union?

8. To help students visualize the divide, have students color the state of New York in a color of their choice and the states above and below New York in different colors.

\*Visit each student as they color to ask them clarifying questions about what ratification means to the new government and what it would mean if a key state did not ratify the Constitution.

Activity Part 3: WHEN

9. As you invite students to go paste their observations (written on the colored rectangles) from the reading activity, talk about the amount of time it took to ratify the Constitution and share the list of states which initially ratified the Constitution.

10. Assign each of several students a state and follow the timing chart in appendix A to demonstrate to students in real time the amount of time it took for the Constitution to be ratified. As each state ratified the Constitution, the students assigned to that state should come up and color/number the state.

**Homework:**

As students leave the classroom, distribute a post-it to each student and have each student write an answer to the prompt: What would the United State be like if the Constitution was not ratified? When students return to class the next day, use these post-its as “entry tickets” which students paste on the ratification bulletin board on their way to their seats.

Appendix A. Ratification Time Table

Number	Date	State	Timing: 1 second for each day
1	December 7, 1787	Delaware	Immediately
2	December 12, 1787	Pennsylvania	5 seconds later
3	December 18, 1787	New Jersey	6 seconds later
4	January 2, 1788	Georgia	15 seconds later
5	January 9, 1788	Connecticut	7 seconds later
6	February 6, 1788	Massachusetts	28 seconds later
7	April 28, 1788	Maryland	50 seconds later
8	May 23, 1788	South Carolina	25 seconds later
9	June 21, 1788	New Hampshire	29 seconds later
10	June 25, 1788	Virginia	4 seconds later
11	July 26, 1788	New York	1 second later
12	November 21, 1789	North Carolina	8 minutes later (wrap-up the lesson and distribute homework while waiting for the time)

## Appendix B. Ratification Map

### Ratification of the Constitution

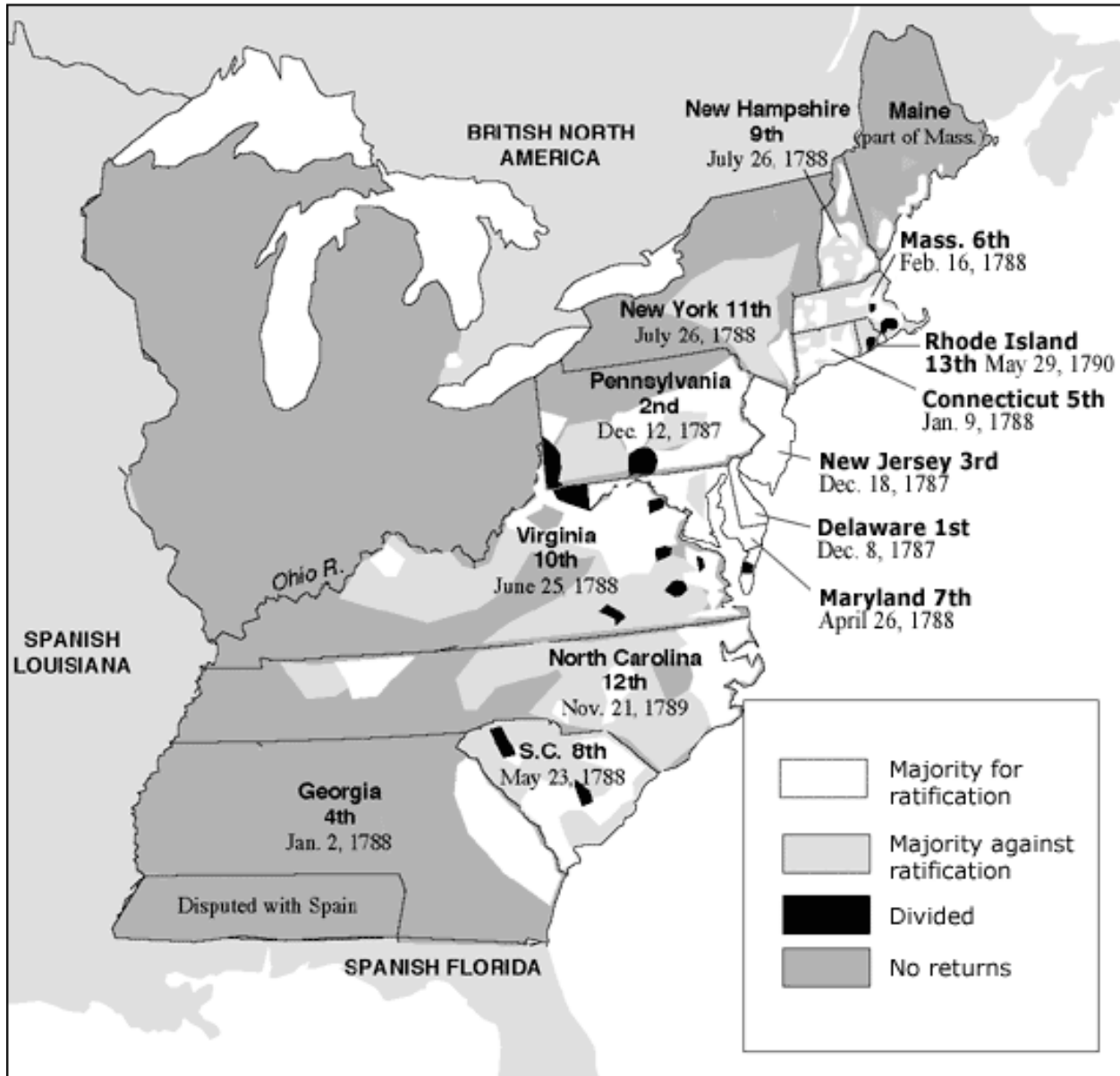


Image obtained: Grade 11: Comprehensive TAKS Practice Test  
<http://www.glencoe.com/qe/qe96.php?qi=2491>

## Appendix C. State Ratification Convention Proceedings

Highlighted sections for each of the ratification proceedings identify the basic information that you should help students discover while reading. By opening the comments bar, you will be able to see suggested questions to pose during the reading activity to draw out these observations.

### I. First Day of the New York Ratification Convention

#### [NY Ratification Convention Journal \(June 17, 1788\)](#)

Pursuant to concurrent resolutions of the Senate and Assembly of this State, of the thirty-first day of January and first day of February last, the Delegates chosen by the people of this State in the respective counties,<sup>1</sup> to form a Convention to take into consideration the report of the Convention of the States lately assembled in Philadelphia,<sup>2</sup> and the letter and resolutions which accompanied the same to Congress, and the resolution of Congress thereon, met in the Court-house in Poughkeepsie, in the county of Dutchess. The certificates of the Supervisors of the respective counties being read, it appeared that the following gentlemen were elected Delegates to form the Convention, viz.... The Convention unanimously elected his Excellency George Clinton, Esquire, to be their President, and placed him in the chair accordingly. The Convention appointed John Mc. Kesson and Abraham B. Bancker, to be their Secretaries. David Barclay was appointed doorkeeper, James Pritchard, messenger, and Nicholas Power, printer to the Convention.

Ordered, That the doors of the Convention Chamber be open when the Convention are sitting.<sup>3</sup>

The resolutions of the Senate and Assembly of the 31st day of January and first day of February last, were then read, and are in the words following, viz. . . . David Hopkins, Esquire, appeared and produced a certificate of the Supervisors of Washington county, that he was duly elected in the said county as a member of this Convention, which was read.

Ordered, That Mr. Hopkins do take his seat.

Ordered,

That the business of this Convention be opened every morning with prayer; and that Mr. Duane and Mr. G. Livingston, be a committee to wait on the gentlemen of the clergy in the precinct of Poughkeepsie, and request them to make such arrangements among themselves, that one of them may attend daily for that purpose.

Ordered, That a committee of five members be appointed by ballot, to report rules and regulations for conducting the business of this Convention.

---

<sup>1</sup> Why is it so important that the delegates are chosen by the people? What concept that we've talked about does this remind you of?

<sup>2</sup> What Document is the author referring to here? What important document was written in Philadelphia?

<sup>3</sup> How does an open convention contribute to democracy? What might be bad about allowing everyone to come in? Do you think the New York Convention made a good choice?

The ballots being taken and told, it appeared that Mr. Duane, Mr. Jones, Mr. R. Morris, Mr. Lansing and Mr. Haring, were elected. Ordered, That those five gentlemen be a committee for that purpose.

Then the Convention adjourned until eleven of the clock to-morrow morning.

## II. First Day of the Connecticut Ratification Convention

### [Connecticut Ratification Convention Proceedings: Weekly Monitor \(January 3, 1788\)](#)

The assembly being thus formed and the roll called in the State House; on motion of Colonel Jesse Root, seconded by Colonel Eliphalet Dyer, etc., the delegates repaired in solemn procession to the North Meeting House, where, after prayers offered by the Reverend Mr. [Nathan] Strong, by order of the President,

the proposed CONSTITUTION was read, together with the several public resolves, official letters, etc., accompanying the same, in their order. Whereupon, the Lieutenant Governor [Oliver Wolcott] proposed that in order to obtain and facilitate a fair, free, full, and advantageous discussion of the important subject, it should be taken up in cursory manner, by single articles, sections, paragraphs, or detached clauses and sentences as occasion might require; with suitable pauses for any objections, doubts, or queries to be freely offered for particular explanation, etc., yet so as to preclude no general remarks or observations which any gentleman might be disposed to make on either side in the process of such disquisition, or general review, at the close thereof.<sup>4</sup> And being seconded by General Samuel H. Parsons, Dr. William Samuel Johnson, Judge Richard Law, Mr. Oliver Elsworth, Colonel John Chester, etc., with this addition, viz., “that no other vote be taken thereon till the one decisive, general question.”<sup>5</sup> It was agreed nem. con. and voted accordingly; and thereupon from day to day.<sup>1</sup> [Weekly Monitor, 14 January]

## III. Delaware State Ratification Convention results, Philadelphia Independent Gazetteer

### [Delaware State Convention: Philadelphia Independent Gazetteer \(December 10, 1787\)](#)

By a gentleman who arrived last evening from Delaware, we have received the following important intelligence:

Delaware State Convention.

The deputies of the state Convention of Delaware met at Dover, on Monday the third instant (December) and a house being formed, they elected James Latimer, Esquire, President. On Thursday they ratified the new Federal Constitution by an unanimous vote, and on Friday every member signed the ratification as follows:

---

<sup>4</sup> How did the Connecticut Convention organize their proceedings? Were people allowed to talk whenever they wanted? Could they talk about any part of the Constitution at any time?

<sup>5</sup> What did the convention vote on?



“We the Deputies of the people of the Delaware State in Convention met, having taken into our serious consideration, the federal constitution, proposed and agreed upon by the Deputies of the United States, in a General Convention, held at the city of Philadelphia, on the seventeenth day of September, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty-seven, have approved of, assented to, ratified and confirmed, and by these presents, DO, in virtue of the power and authority to us given for that purpose, for, and in behalf of ourselves, and our constituents, FULLY, FREELY, and ENTIRELY APPROVE OF, ASSENT TO, RATIFY and CONFIRM the said CONSTITUTION.”<sup>6</sup>

#### IV. First Day of the Virginia Ratification Convention

##### [Journal Notes of the Virginia Ratification Convention Proceedings \(June 2, 1788\)](#)

This being the day recommended by the Legislature for the meeting of the Convention, to take into consideration the proposed Plan of Federal Government, a majority of the Gentlemen delegated thereto, assembled at the Public Buildings, in Richmond,—Whereupon they proceeded to the choice of a Secretary, when Mr. JOHN BECKLEY, was appointed to that office.

The Honorable EDMUND PENDLETON, was nominated, and unanimously elected President; who being seated in the Chair, thanked the Convention for the honor conferred on him, and strongly recommended to the members to use the utmost moderation and temper in their deliberations on the great and important subject now before them.<sup>7</sup>

On the recommendation of Mr. Paul Carrington, the REV. ABNER WAUGH was unanimously elected Chaplain to the Convention, and ordered to attend every morning to read prayers, immediately after the bell shall be rang for calling the Convention...

...On motion of Mr. George Mason—Ordered, That the Convention be adjourned until to-morrow morning, eleven o'clock, then to meet at the New Academy, on Shockœ-Hill, in this city.

#### V. First Day of the Georgia Ratification Convention

##### [Georgia Convention Proceedings \(December 25, 1787\)](#)

Whereas the General Assembly of the said state did, on the 26th day of October, 1787, in pursuance of the recommendation of Congress,<sup>8</sup> come to the following resolutions, viz.

The members present requested Mr. Isaac Briggs to act as secretary, pro tempore.

Adjourned till tomorrow morning, 11 o'clock.

---

<sup>6</sup> Why do you think the delegates chose to approve the Constitution this way? Why did they use all these words?

<sup>7</sup> Why do you think Mr. Pendleton had to say this? Can you guess why the delegates would be so argumentative about the Constitution?

<sup>8</sup> Where in the Constitution did Congress set up requirements for ratification? [read Article VII to the class, time permitting]

## VI. Second Day of the Pennsylvania Ratification Convention

### [Journal Notes of the Pennsylvania Ratification Convention \(November 3, 1787\)](#)

The Convention met pursuant to adjournment, And resumed the consideration of the first Article of the proposed Constitution. After some debate on the liberty of the press, and on the legislative, executive, and judicial powers of the new government, it was agreed,<sup>9</sup>

On motion of Enoch Edwards, seconded by James Wilson, That the Convention, from and after Monday next, will meet twice a day, viz., at half after nine o'clock in the morning, and half after four o'clock in the afternoon.

Adjourned until three o'clock on Monday next, P. M.

## VII. First Day of the North Carolina Ratification Convention

### [North Carolina Ratification Convention Debates \(July 21, 1788\)](#)

At a Convention, begun and held at Hillsborough, the 21st day of July, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty-eight, and of the independence of America the thirteenth, in pursuance of a resolution of the last General Assembly, for the purpose of a resolution of the last General Assembly, for the purpose of deliberating and determining on the proposed plan of Federal Government.<sup>10</sup>

A majority of those who were duly elected as Members for this Convention, being met at the Church, they proceeded to the election of a President, when his Excellency Samuel Johnston, Esquire, was unanimously chosen, and conducted to the chair accordingly.

The House then elected Mr. John Hunt and Mr. James Taylor, Clerks to the Convention; and also appointed Door-Keepers, &c.

The House then appointed a select committee to prepare and propose certain rules and regulations for the government of the Convention in the discussion of the Constitution.<sup>11</sup>

## VIII. Third Day of New Jersey Ratification Convention

### [New Jersey Convention Proceedings: Trenton Mercury \(December 13, 1787\)](#)

---

<sup>9</sup> What were the delegates discussing on their second day? What powers are discussed in the first article of the Constitution? Why might the delegates have been talking about the press and executive and judicial power?

<sup>10</sup> What document are the delegates talking about here? What is a federal system of government?

<sup>11</sup> Why would the convention want to set out certain rules for discussing the Constitution?

...The committee appointed yesterday, to form rules for the government of this Convention, made their report; which, being considered and amended, was agreed to as follows:

Rules for conducting business in the Convention of New Jersey.

I. The Convention shall be opened every morning with prayers.

II. When the President assumes the chair, the members shall take their seats.

III. The Minutes of the preceding day shall be read, and, if necessary, may be corrected.

IV. Every petition, memorial, letter, or other thing of the like kind, read in the Convention, shall be deemed as lying on the table for further consideration, unless any special order be moved thereon.

V. A motion made and seconded shall be repeated by the President; a motion shall be reduced to writing if the President or any two members require it; a motion may be withdrawn by the member making it before any decision is had thereon....VII. If a question under debate contains several points, any member may have it divided.

VIII. No member speaking shall be interrupted but by a call to order by the President, or by a member through the President.

IX. No member shall be referred to in debate by name....

XI. Every member shall conduct himself with decency and decorum. The President himself, or by request, may call to order any member who shall transgress the rules; if the disorder be continued or repeated, the President may refer to him by name; the Convention may then examine and censure the member's conduct, he being allowed to extenuate or justify himself.

XII. Every member shall be in his place at the time the Convention stands adjourned to or within half an hour thereafter.

XIII. No member shall speak more than once in a debate until every member who chooses shall have spoken on the same....

XV. A motion to adjourn may be made at any time and shall always be in order, and the question thereon shall be put without any debate...<sup>12</sup>

..On motion, Resolved, That the Federal Constitution be now read by sections, and, upon each section's being read, every member do make his observations on the same, if any he hath to make; that, after debating on such section, the question be taken whether any further debate be thereon had; and, if the said question be determined in the negative, that the Convention do then proceed in like manner to the next section until the whole be gone through; upon which the general question shall be

---

<sup>12</sup> Why do you think there were so many rules for the New Jersey Convention? Which rules do you think are unfair? Fair? How do you think the rules helped delegates come to a decision?

taken, "Whether this Convention, in the name and in behalf of the people of this state, do ratify and confirm the said Constitution?"<sup>13</sup>

The Convention adjourned till tomorrow morning ten o'clock.

## IX. Fourth Day of the Massachusetts Ratification Convention

### [Journal Notes of the Massachusetts Ratification Convention Proceedings \(January 14, 1788\)](#)

Met according to adjournment The Constitution or Frame of Government, for the United States of America as reported by the Convention of Delegates, from the United States, begun and held at Philadelphia, on the first Monday of May 1787...

On motion, Voted That the Convention sensible how important it is that the great subject submitted to their determination should be discussed and considered with moderation, candour and deliberation, will enter into a free conversation on the several parts thereof by paragraphs **untill every member shall have had opportunity fully to express his sentiments on the same, after which the Convention will consider and debate at large the question, whether this Convention will adopt & ratify the proposed constitution. before any vote is taken expressive of the sense of the Convention,**<sup>14</sup> upon the whole or any part thereof Resolve of the General Court of this Commonwealth of the 10th of March 1787 appointing Delegates for the Convention of the States held at Philadelphia. Ordered to be read...

The first motion was then put & passed in the affirmative.

---

<sup>13</sup> Why do you think the conventions had to either approve or disapprove the Constitution as a whole? What would happen if each state only ratified parts of the proposed Constitution?

<sup>14</sup> Why was it so important to have unanimous support for the Constitution? Why is it important to give each delegate an opportunity to give his opinion about the Constitution?

## Appendix D. Individual Ratification Map, no labels

Image Obtained: Teaching AmericanHistory.org, ratification of the Constitution  
<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/ratification/>

