



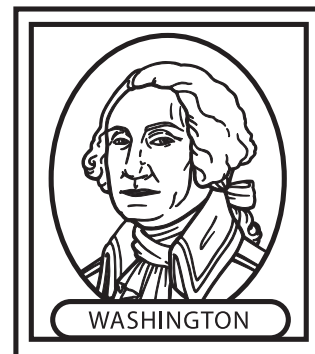
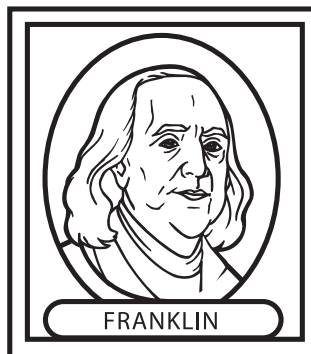
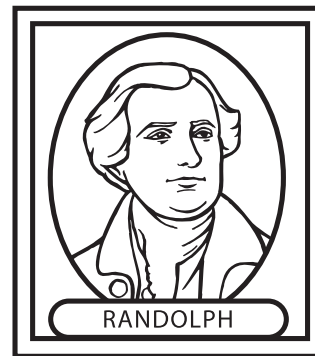
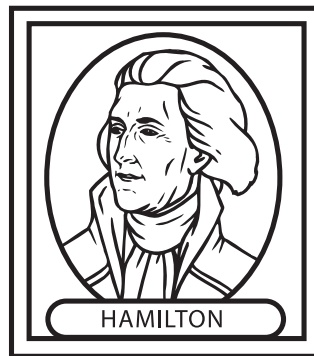
# The Convention Leaders

When Thomas Jefferson heard who was attending the Constitutional Convention, he called it “an assembly of demigods” because the members were so rich in education and political experience. These practical national leaders were often successful businessmen as well. The list of occupations included merchants, lawyers, army officers, plantation owners, judges, financiers, politicians, farmers, doctors, and even a shoemaker.

At a time when a college education was an opportunity for only a tiny fraction of the populace, almost half of the delegates were college educated. There were four graduates of Yale, four from William and Mary, three from Harvard, two from Columbia, and eight from Princeton. Some had been educated in Europe and several others had little formal education but were self-taught. The delegates were well read in the classics of Greece and Rome and were familiar with the latest political ideas and intellectual discussions.

Thirty-nine of the 55 delegates had served in Congress under the Articles of Confederation. A few of the delegates had helped write their new state constitutions, and many had served in their state legislatures or as officers in the state. Seven of the delegates had been or were governors of their states. Nearly half had fought in the Revolutionary War, and eight of the delegates had signed the Declaration of Independence.

Fifty-five delegates attended the convention at one time or another and 39 delegates signed the document. Although each state had only one vote in the proceedings, states had various numbers of delegates. New Hampshire had two delegates, Massachusetts four, Connecticut three, New York three, New Jersey five, Pennsylvania eight, Delaware five, Maryland five, Virginia seven, North Carolina five, South Carolina four, and Georgia four. Rhode Island refused to send anyone.





# The Convention Leaders *(cont.)*

## **James Madison**

The most important member of the convention was the 36-year-old scholarly lawyer from Virginia who became known as the “Father of the Constitution.” The shortest man at the convention, the five feet four inches Princeton graduate studiously prepared for his role. He had previous experience as a member of the Virginia legislature and as a member of Congress under the Articles of Confederation.

Madison arrived in Philadelphia nearly three weeks early armed with books and ideas. At his request, his friend Thomas Jefferson had sent him hundreds of books dealing with history, types of government, law, ancient civilizations, and modern nations. He studied John Adams’ new book on constitutions. He analyzed all forms of government, took notes, and wrote suggestions.

Madison’s studies confirmed his thinking about the need for a new form of a strong, national government with supremacy over the states. He believed such a government would reduce economic and social differences between the states, even differences over slavery. Most historians believe that he was the principal author of the Virginia Plan which became the basic concept around which the Constitution was framed. Even before the convention started, he devised the system of ratification that would be used to achieve acceptance of the Constitution.

Never absent from the proceedings, James Madison always sat in front of the convention and took extensive notes on almost all speeches, arguments, and discussions. He argued strenuously for ratification and was the author of at least 26 of The Federalist Papers in support of ratification. In the new government, Madison became a congressman and chairman of the committee that wrote the amendments which became known as the Bill of Rights. Later he served as Secretary of State and President of the United States.

## **Benjamin Franklin**

Benjamin Franklin, at 81 the oldest delegate to the convention and in poor health, arrived at the Philadelphia State House in a Chinese sedan chair carried by four prisoners from the city jail. An internationally renowned scientist and inventor, Franklin had only recently returned from France. Wealthy and very influential throughout the colonies and in his adopted state of Pennsylvania, Franklin was the presiding officer of the Pennsylvania delegation.

Franklin had long supported a strong national government. As early as 1754, he proposed the Albany Plan of Union to create such a government. Ben Franklin had signed the Declaration of Independence and the Treaty of Paris. He had negotiated the alliance with France which was essential to the success of the war for American independence.

Franklin had a reputation for witty and charming conversation. Because he gave many dinner parties, someone from the convention always attended and stayed near Franklin to make sure he never gave away any secret details or convention gossip. They merely diverted the conversation.

Franklin was often ill and did not actually speak much at the convention, but his diplomatic comments and shrewd common sense often helped to diffuse anger and support compromise. Although Franklin was widely admired, he was not always listened to. Among other suggestions, he supported unpaid public servants and a one-house legislature. He said the Constitution wasn’t perfect but that it needed to be given a chance.



# The Convention Leaders *(cont.)*

## **George Washington**

George Washington, the 55-year-old Virginia planter who had led his country through eight years of war as Commander-in-Chief of the revolutionary army, was famous throughout the nation and widely regarded as the “Father of his Country.” Washington’s presence and influence were essential to the success of the convention.

The presiding officer of the convention, Washington was fair and impartial and rarely allowed his personal feelings to show. In private discussions, he was a forceful advocate for a strong central government and an effective voice for compromise. He feared sectional conflict and rivalries among the individual states. He had been often frustrated by the failures of the Continental Congress to provide adequate pay and supplies for his army, and he knew that many of these deficiencies resulted from the inherent weakness of Congress.

## **Alexander Hamilton**

Hamilton had been Washington’s military aide and close friend during the war. An immigrant from the West Indies, he graduated from Columbia University and practiced law in New York where he had also been a delegate to Congress under the Articles of Confederation. The 30-year-old Hamilton had supported the idea of a Constitutional Convention since 1780. He had attended the Annapolis Trade Convention which recommended a convention to revise the Articles of Confederation.

Alexander Hamilton favored an extremely powerful central government. He disliked the idea of “sovereign states” which he perceived as weak and jealous of each other. Hamilton wanted a strong chief executive with many powers usually associated with kings. He suggested a lifetime term for the president who would have absolute veto power over congressional laws.

The other two delegates from New York never voted to support Hamilton’s suggestions and left the convention because they didn’t approve of the new form of government. Hamilton came and went but did sign the document and support its ratification. He wrote at least 51 of The Federalist Papers and was influential in convincing New Yorkers to ratify the Constitution. New York’s support was considered crucial to success due to its location and size. Hamilton was killed in a duel with Aaron Burr in 1804.

## **Edmund Randolph**

Randolph was the governor of Virginia and a major leader of the Virginia delegation. He presented the Virginia Plan, a resolution to create a new form of government rather than revise the Articles of Confederation. He was an effective speaker and participant. He refused to sign the final document because it lacked a Bill of Rights, but he did work effectively for ratification.



# The Convention Leaders *(cont.)*

## **Gouverneur Morris**

A 35-year-old Columbia graduate, Morris was born into a wealthy family. His fondness for racing horses had cost him a leg but did not seem to slow him down. He had signed the Articles of Confederation as a delegate from New York and served in the Continental Congress. Morris later moved to Pennsylvania and was a convention member from that state. Morris was an outstanding speaker and made as many speeches as Madison. He favored a strong central government and wanted property qualifications for voting and holding office. Morris actually wrote much of the document as a member of the Committee of Style and Arrangement.

## **George Mason**

A 62-year-old aristocratic planter and colonel in the Revolutionary army, Mason was an important voice in the convention and an intense believer in democracy. He opposed counting slaves for the House of Representatives and wanted to curtail the slave trade. He insisted that the House have the power to initiate tax bills. The author of Virginia's Declaration of Rights, he wanted a Bill of Rights in the document and left the convention, refusing to sign the Constitution when it was not added.

## **John Dickinson**

Dickinson, a 55-year-old lawyer and scholar who had been governor of both Pennsylvania and Delaware, represented Delaware at the convention. He was famous as a revolutionary activist and author of *The Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania* in which he attacked British taxation without representation. He was chairman of the committee which wrote the Articles of Confederation. He particularly feared domination by the large states.

## **Roger Sherman**

A 56-year-old Connecticut lawyer, judge, and member of Congress who had signed the Declaration of Independence and the Articles of Confederation, Sherman feared democracy. He felt the common people were stupid and easily misled. He was a poor speaker with a strong Yankee accent who was not too popular with the other delegates. He was fearful of domination by the large states. He saw no reason for a Bill of Rights.

## **Elbridge Gerry**

A 43-year-old wealthy Massachusetts merchant with a Harvard education, Gerry was a consistent opponent of a strong national government and a permanent national army. Although he had signed both the Declaration of Independence and the Articles of Confederation, he feared too much democracy and election by the people. Nonetheless, he wanted frequent yearly elections for the House of Representatives but a fifteen-year presidential term. He left the convention and did not sign the Constitution because it lacked a Bill of Rights.



# Reading Comprehension Quiz

## The Men at the Convention

**Directions:** Read pages 16–19 about The Convention Leaders. Answer these questions based on the information in the selection. Circle the correct answer in each question below. Underline the sentence in the selection where the answer is found.

- Who is called the “Father of the Constitution”?  
A George Washington                      C Ben Franklin  
B James Madison                          D Gouverneur Morris
- Which convention member had written “The Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania”?  
A Ben Franklin                              C Alexander Hamilton  
B Roger Sherman                          D John Dickinson
- Which Connecticut signer of the Declaration of Independence feared democracy and felt the common people were stupid?  
A Roger Sherman                          C Edmund Randolph  
B Elbridge Gerry                          D Alexander Hamilton
- Which New York delegate favored a powerful central government and a strong chief executive with almost king-like powers?  
A George Washington                      C Roger Sherman  
B Alexander Hamilton                      D Gouverneur Morris
- Who was the presiding officer at the convention?  
A Thomas Jefferson                      C James Madison  
B George Washington                      D John Dickinson
- Which delegate signed both the Declaration of Independence and the Articles of Confederation but not the Constitution?  
A Roger Sherman                          C Elbridge Gerry  
B George Washington                      D George Mason
- Who wrote most of the Constitution in his own handwriting as a member of the Committee of Style and Arrangement?  
A Gouverneur Morris                      C John Dickinson  
B James Madison                          D Roger Sherman
- Which New Yorker wrote at least 51 of The Federalist Papers in support of ratification?  
A James Madison                          C Roger Sherman  
B Alexander Hamilton                      D John Adams
- Who had proposed the Albany Plan of Union in 1754?  
A George Washington                      C Roger Sherman  
B Benjamin Franklin                      D George Mason
- Who kept extensive notes at the convention and devised the method of ratification?  
A John Adams                              C James Madison  
B Governor Morris                          D Edmund Randolph



# Answer Key

## Page 31

- 1. C      6. A
- 2. D      7. B
- 3. B      8. B
- 4. C      9. D
- 5. C      10. A

## Page 32

- 1. B      6. D
- 2. A      7. D
- 3. D      8. A
- 4. B      9. D
- 5. B      10. B

## Page 33

- 1. B      6. C
- 2. D      7. A
- 3. A      8. B
- 4. B      9. B
- 5. B      10. C

## Page 34

- 1. D      6. A
- 2. A      7. B
- 3. B      8. B
- 4. D      9. A
- 5. A      10. B

## Page 35

*Supreme Court Decisions*

D - F - A - C - B - E

*Amendment Match*

8 - 6 - 10 - 19 - 1 - 13 - 15-26 - 1 - 24 - 2 - 5 - 18 - 21-4 - 1 - 7 - 1 - 6 - 6 - 17 - 16-22 - 23

## Page 37

State	Date Admitted Month/Year	Number of Representatives	Number of Senators
New Hampshire	June 1788	3	2
Massachusetts	February 1788	8	2
Rhode Island	May 1790	1	2
Connecticut	January 1788	5	2
New York	July 1788	6	2
New Jersey	December 1787	4	2
Pennsylvania	December 1787	8	2
Delaware	December 1787	1	2
Maryland	April 1788	6	2
Virginia	June 1788	10	2
North Carolina	November 1789	5	2
South Carolina	May 1788	5	2
Georgia	January 1788	3	2

- 2. Virginia  
Massachusetts  
Pennsylvania
- 3. Rhode Island  
Delaware

4. New York is located between the Northern and Southern states. It would have physically separated the nation.