**8 How Did Compromise Shape the U.S. Constitution?**

In 1787, delegates from 12 of the 13 states gathered in Philadelphia with the original goal of revising the failing Articles of Confederation. Instead, they decided to start over. Over the course of a hot, closed-door summer, these delegates, now called the **Framers**, debated and negotiated the structure of a brand-new government.

The **Constitutional Convention** was marked by deep disagreements, especially about how states should be represented, how much power the federal government should have, and the role of slavery. But despite their divisions, the delegates managed to compromise. The most famous of these was the **Great Compromise**, which created a **bicameral** (two-house) Congress, one house based on population (House of Representatives) and one with equal state representation (Senate).

Another key deal was the **Three-Fifths Compromise**, which resolved how enslaved people would be counted for representation and taxation. While these compromises helped the Constitution move forward, they also embedded serious tensions that would shape the nation's history for generations.

**Key Terms and Definitions**

| **Term** | **Definition** |
| --- | --- |
| **Constitutional Convention** | The 1787 meeting in Philadelphia where the U.S. Constitution was written. |
| **Framers** | The delegates who designed and debated the U.S. Constitution. |
| **Great Compromise** | An agreement to create a two-house legislature: one based on population and one with equal state votes. |
| **Three-Fifths Compromise** | An agreement to count three-fifths of enslaved people for representation and taxes. |
| **Bicameral Legislature** | A legislative body with two chambers or houses. |

**Active Learning Exercise: Constitutional Convention Simulation**

**Orienting Question:**

*How did compromise shape the future of our nation?*

**Objective:**

Students will roleplay delegates at the Constitutional Convention and work through major compromises.

**Instructions:**

1. **Assign Delegate Groups (Preparation: 5–10 minutes):**  
   Divide students into small groups representing:
   * **Large states** (e.g., Virginia)
   * **Small states** (e.g., New Jersey)
   * **Southern states** (concerned with slavery and exports)
   * **Northern states** (more urban, industrial, and anti-slavery)
   * A moderator group (can be a teacher or a designated “James Madison” figure)
2. **Present Three Key Issues:**
   * **Representation in Congress:** Will it be based on state size or equal for all?
   * **Slavery and Population Counts:** Should enslaved people count toward a state’s population?
   * **Regulation of Trade:** Should Congress control trade, including tariffs and the slave trade?
3. **Deliberation (20 minutes):**
   * Groups discuss each issue from their assigned perspective.
   * Encourage persuasive arguments and negotiation between groups.
   * Moderator calls for votes and drafts the “Constitution” as agreements are reached.
4. **Debrief Discussion (10 minutes):**
   * What compromises were easiest? Which were hardest?
   * Did everyone feel the final outcome was fair?
   * How do these compromises reflect what’s in the actual Constitution?

**Review Questions**

1. What was the original purpose of the Constitutional Convention?
2. What did the Great Compromise establish?
3. How did the Three-Fifths Compromise try to balance opposing interests?
4. Why was secrecy important to the Framers during the Convention?
5. How did the Convention reflect both cooperation and conflict among the states?