The Great Compromise
When the Constitutional Convention began, Edmund Randolph and James Madison put forward the **Virginia Plan** that called for a government much like the one we have today. There would be three branches: legislative, executive, and judicial. The legislative branch would be made up of two houses; however, unlike our national government today, representation in both houses would be based upon a state’s population. This plan differed from the Articles of Confederation that gave each state one vote in Congress regardless of its population.

Smaller states like Delaware and New Jersey objected to this, saying that large states would easily outvote them if the number of votes were based on population. After weeks of debate, William Patterson of New Jersey put forth a plan that called for three branches including a legislature with only one house where each state would have one vote. The **New Jersey Plan** with a single house legislature and equal representation was more like Congress under the Articles.

The convention was deadlocked and appeared ready to fall apart when Roger Sherman proposed a compromise. Sherman’s proposal has come to be known as the **Great Compromise**. It called for a Congress with two houses (also known as “bicameralism”) – the Senate and the House of Representatives. The Senate would give equal representation to all of the states which satisfied the small states. The House of Representatives would be based on a state’s population which satisfied the large states. Delegates narrowly approved Sherman’s compromise on July 16, 1787.

Slavery Compromises
Since representation in the House of Representatives was to be based on population, a debate arose over whether slaves should be counted in a state’s population. According to James Madison’s diary, the issue of slavery was the most divisive subject at the convention. While many of the Founding Fathers including George Washington saw slavery as inconsistent with the principles of the Revolution and the Declaration of Independence, they knew that there was little chance of abolishing slavery. After all, if those opposed to slavery insisted on its abolition, slave states could have walked out of the convention and formed their own nation with a pro-slavery constitution. Washington and other Founders hoped that slavery could be eliminated from the United States once a strong union was formed.

The compromise that settled the issue of how to count slaves for representation in the House came to be known as the **Three-fifths Compromise**. It is sometimes wrongly said that the compromise meant the founders considered slaves as only partial human beings. In fact, the compromise had nothing to do with the human worth of the individual slave. States with slaves wanted to count all of their slaves in the state’s population because that would yield more representatives in Congress. The opponents of slavery, noting that slaves had no rights of citizenship including the vote, argued that slaves should not be counted at all for purposes of representation. In the end, the compromise was to count three-fifths of the state’s slaves in the total population. In another words, for every five slaves, three of would be added to the population count used to determine representation in the House of Representatives.

The delegates also disagreed over the slave trade. By the time of the Convention in 1789, some northern states had outlawed slavery. These states wanted a ban on the slave trade included in the Constitution. Southern slave states objected, claiming that the slave trade was important to their agricultural economy. Finally, the two sides compromised by allowing the slave trade to continue for 20 years after which time the Congress could regulate it. In 1808, Congress abolished the slave trade.
1. What differences between the thirteen states made compromise necessary?

2. Why did the small states object to the Virginia Plan?

3. Who proposed the Great Compromise?
   a. James Madison
   b. Roger Sherman
   c. William Patterson
   d. George Washington

4. Describe the structure of the government created by the Great Compromise.

5. If there were 500,000 slaves in Virginia in 1798, how many counted towards its population?
   a. 300,000
   b. 30,000
   c. 500,000
   d. 150,000

6. What was the Northern states argument for slaves NOT counting towards population?

7. What might have happened if opponents of slavery at the Convention insisted on abolition of slavery?

8. When did Congress finally abolish the slave trade in the United States?
   a. 1776
   b. 1787
   c. 1808
   d. 1865

9. What do you think made the Constitution a stronger government than the Articles of Confederation?
THE CONSTITUTION
A BUNDLE OF COMPROMISES

1. What differences between the thirteen states made compromise necessary?

The states differed in size which affected how much sway they would have in Congress if it was based on population and also over slavery because it was allowed in the South, but not in most of the North.

2. Why did the small states object to the Virginia Plan?

The Virginia Plan was based on each state’s population, so smaller states thought that larger states would always outvote them.

3. Who proposed the Great Compromise?
   a. James Madison
   b. Roger Sherman
   c. William Patterson
   d. George Washington

4. Describe the structure of the government created by the Great Compromise.

The Great Compromise had a 2 house legislature – with a Senate based on population and a Senate with equal representation.

5. If there were 500,000 slaves in Virginia in 1798, how many counted towards its population?
   a. 300,000
   b. 30,000
   c. 500,000
   d. 150,000

6. What was the Northern states argument for slaves NOT counting towards population?

Northern representatives to the Convention said that if slaves were not allowed the rights of citizens then they should not be counted towards population.

7. What might have happened if opponents of slavery at the Convention insisted on abolition of slavery?

They might have walked out of the Convention and created their own nation with slavery allowed.

8. How many states abolished slavery during the founding era?
   a. 1776
   b. 1787
   c. 1808
   d. 1865

9. What do you think made the Constitution a stronger government than the Articles of Confederation?

Open to student opinion provided they support their answer with information learned from the text.