Benjamin Franklin

Handout A—Benjamin Franklin
(1706–1790)

1. Franklin improved lives in all these ways:
   a. He made scientific inventions.
   b. He refused to accept patent protection for his famous stove.
   c. He promoted public virtues through his many writings.
   d. He formed a secret society, the Junto, to promote beneficial ideas.
   e. He helped to create the American Philosophical Society to advance the cause of science in the New World.
   f. He played a major role in building the first fire department, the first public library, and the first hospital in Philadelphia.
   g. He served in many public offices.

2. In 1754, the prospect of war with the French led several of the royal governors to call for a congress of all the colonies. One purpose of the meeting was to plan war operations against the French. Another purpose was to prepare some plan of confederation among the colonies. Only seven colonies sent commissioners to this congress, which met in Albany, New York. At Albany, Franklin drafted and introduced the first formal proposal for a permanent union of the thirteen colonies. This became known as the Albany Plan. It was similar to the decentralized system of government that would later emerge under the Articles of Confederation. There would be a union of the colonies under a single central government, though each colony would preserve its local independence.

3. Franklin favored giving the lower house of Congress the sole power to propose money and tax bills. He successfully opposed property requirements for voting and financial tests for holders of federal office. He desired a clear listing of the powers of the federal government. He also supported an executive council instead of a single president. When this idea failed, Franklin seconded the call for an advisory council to the president. He believed that the president should be limited to only one term in office, so that no one man should gain too much power. He also opposed giving the executive absolute veto power over the Congress.

4. As the oldest member of the convention, and as someone who had a long record of accomplishment and public service, Franklin was certainly viewed with respect by most delegates. Perhaps some thought his day had passed. He was seen as a centrist on the issue of the power of the central government. Southern delegates surely resented his antislavery views.

5. Answers will vary but could include the following: Franklin believed that the survival of the republic depended not only on the form of government but also on the virtue of the people; the people have the responsibility of preserving the Constitution.

Handout B—Vocabulary and Context Questions

1. Vocabulary
   a. calm, peace
   b. descendants
   c. enact
   d. given
   e. individual, particular
   f. placed
   g. agreement
   h. required
   i. been created
   j. approval
   k. agree
   l. permission
   m. diplomats
   n. impose, place upon
   o. taxes on imported goods
   p. taxes on ships bringing goods from foreign countries
   q. taxes on domestic goods
2. Context
   a. The document was written in 1754.
   b. It was written in Albany, New York.
   c. Benjamin Franklin wrote the document.
   d. The document is a primary source—a plan of government.
   e. Franklin wrote the plan to propose a design of union of the colonies.
   f. The American colonists and the British government were the audience for the plan.

Handout C—Benjamin Franklin and the Albany Plan of Union
1. Similarities: Both documents propose a stronger union of the colonies in a federal system. The colonies/states retain certain powers in each system. Differences: The Albany Plan creates a central government among the colonies for the first time, whereas the Constitution aims to strengthen the existing general government (“to form a more perfect Union”).
2. Similarities: Both documents create an executive and a legislative branch. Under the Albany Plan, the members of the Grand Council, like the members of the Senate created by the Constitution, are chosen by the colonial/state legislatures. Differences: The Albany Plan creates a unicameral (one-house) legislature, elected every three years. The Constitution creates a bicameral (two-house) legislature, the House members being chosen every two years and the senators every six. House members are elected directly by the people, unlike the members of the Grand Council, who are chosen by the colonial assemblies.
3. Similarities: Both legislatures meet at least once a year. Under both plans, the executive and legislature have a role in the lawmaking process. The president (or president-general) must execute the laws.
4. Similarities: Both the president and the president-general make treaties with the advice of the legislature. They also appoint military officers with the consent of the legislature. Differences: Under the Albany Plan, the president-general does not need the approval of the Grand Council to make war and treaties. Under the Constitution, the president needs two thirds of the senators to approve a treaty he has made. The Congress is given the power to declare war, though the President is commander-in-chief of the armed forces of the United States.
5. Similarities: Both central governments are given the power to tax. Taxes should be just. Differences: There are no significant differences here.

Elbridge Gerry
Handout A—Elbridge Gerry (1744–1814)
1. Gerry signed the Declaration of Independence and the Articles of Confederation.
2. Gerry announced that he could not sign the Constitution. He believed it would create a too-powerful central government. Despite his refusal to approve the document, Gerry did not speak against it. He believed the Constitution was necessary to prevent the union of the states from falling apart. During the ratification debates in Massachusetts, he argued...