Name _____ Date _____

Constitutional Convention: Comparing the Virginia and New Jersey Plans

Directions: Read the passage. Then answer each question.

The Constitutional Convention

Two Plans and a Compromise

In May 1787, delegates from twelve states met in Philadelphia to fix the weak national government. George Washington led the meetings, which were kept secret. Most delegates soon agreed to write a new plan of government. The hardest question was how the states would share power in Congress.

The Virginia Plan came first. James Madison wrote most of it, and it was presented in late May. It called for a strong national government with three branches. Congress would have two houses, and in both of them a state's number of seats would depend on its population. Large states such as Virginia liked this plan because they would get more votes.

In contrast, the New Jersey Plan, presented by William Paterson in June, kept a Congress with only one house. Each state would have one equal vote, as under the Articles of Confederation. Small states such as New Jersey and Delaware backed this plan. They feared that large states would outvote them under the Virginia Plan.

The plans did share some ideas. Both would make the national government stronger than it was under the Articles. Both also included leaders to carry out the laws and national courts.

Because neither side would give in, the convention came close to breaking apart. To end the deadlock, delegates from Connecticut offered a middle path. On July 16, the convention approved what became known as the Great Compromise. Congress would have two houses. In the House of Representatives, seats would be based on population. Every state would have two members in the Senate.

Delegates also clashed over slavery. Southern delegates wanted enslaved people counted in their states' populations to gain more seats in the House. Many Northern delegates objected that enslaved people could not vote and that Southern law treated them as property. The delegates agreed to count three of every five enslaved people when dividing seats in the House. This agreement became known as the Three-Fifths Compromise, and it gave Southern states extra seats and power. The delegates also agreed that Congress could not end the import of enslaved people before 1808.

On September 17, 1787, thirty-nine delegates signed the Constitution. It then went to the states for approval.

1. How does the passage present the Virginia Plan and the New Jersey Plan?

A. It describes only the plan that the convention adopted without changes.

B. It compares them, showing how each would share power in Congress and what they had in common.

C. It argues that the New Jersey Plan was the fairer choice.

D. It treats them as two causes of the American Revolution.

2. Match each idea to the plan that included it.

Write the letter of the matching answer on each line.

1. _____ Seats in both houses of Congress based on how many people a state had
2. _____ One house of Congress with an equal vote for each state
3. _____ A House based on population and a Senate with two members per state

A. Virginia Plan
B. Great Compromise
C. New Jersey Plan
D. Bill of Rights

3. According to the passage, why did small states back the New Jersey Plan?

A. They wanted seats in Congress to be based on population.

B. They feared that large states would outvote them under the Virginia Plan.

C. They hoped to end slavery in every state.

D. They wanted a king to lead the new government.

4. Which sentence from the passage shows a cause-and-effect relationship?

A. "The Virginia Plan came first."

B. "George Washington led the meetings, which were kept secret."

C. "Because neither side would give in, the convention came close to breaking apart."

D. "The plans did share some ideas."

5. Which two ideas did both the Virginia Plan and the New Jersey Plan include, according to the passage?

☐ A. A Senate with two members from each state

☐ B. Seats in Congress based on each state's population

☐ C. One equal vote for each state

☐ D. A national government stronger than the one under the Articles

☐ E. Leaders to carry out the laws and national courts

6. Why does the passage explain both plans before it describes the Great Compromise?

A. The Great Compromise was the least important event at the convention.

B. The two plans were the only ideas the convention approved.

C. Readers need to understand the disagreement to see how the compromise settled it.

D. The author wants readers to decide which plan was better.

7. Which of these happened first, based on the dates in the passage?

A. Thirty-nine delegates signed the Constitution.

B. William Paterson presented the New Jersey Plan.

C. The Constitution went to the states for approval.

D. Delegates approved the Great Compromise.

8. Complete the sentence with words from the word bank.

Word bank
import • 1776 • 1865 • sale • 1808

The delegates agreed that Congress could not end the _____ of enslaved people before _____.

9. What was one effect of the Three-Fifths Compromise?

A. Enslaved people gained the right to vote in House elections.

B. Slavery ended in every state by 1808.

C. Southern states gained extra seats and power in the House.

D. Small states received as many House seats as large states.

10. How does the passage organize what it says about the dispute over slavery?

A. It tells only the Southern side of the dispute.

B. It tells what Southern delegates wanted, why many Northern delegates objected, and how both sides settled it.

C. It lists events in the order they happened over many years.

D. It argues that the convention should have ended slavery.