Name _____ Date _____

Articles of Confederation: Weaknesses and Shays' Rebellion

Directions: Read the passage. Then answer each question.

The Articles of Confederation and Shays' Rebellion

A Weak Union and a Farmers' Revolt

During the Revolution, Congress wrote the Articles of Confederation, a plan for a national government. All thirteen states had approved it by 1781. Americans were at war with a king, and many feared that a strong central government could become just as harsh. So the Articles left most power with the states.

Under the Articles, Congress had one house, and each state had one vote. A small state like Delaware had as much say as a large state like Virginia. No leader had the power to enforce national laws, so Congress relied on the states to carry out its decisions.

Money was a serious problem. Congress could ask the states for money, but it could not collect taxes. The states often paid little, so the nation struggled to pay its war debts. Congress also could not control trade between the states, and some states taxed goods from their neighbors. Changing the Articles required all thirteen states to agree, so one state could block any change. The Articles did have successes, such as a plan for turning western lands into new states.

Hard times after the war exposed these weaknesses. In western Massachusetts, many farmers were deep in debt. The state raised taxes to pay its war debts and demanded payment in gold or silver coins, which farmers rarely had. Courts began taking farms from people who could not pay.

In 1786, armed farmers began shutting down courts so that judges could not seize more farms. Their leaders included Daniel Shays, a former Continental Army captain, and the uprising became known as Shays' Rebellion. Congress had no money to send soldiers, so Massachusetts had to form its own army, and Boston merchants helped pay for it. In January 1787, more than a thousand rebels marched on the national arsenal at Springfield. The state's soldiers fired on them, and the rebels scattered. Within weeks, the uprising had mostly ended.

Afterward, Massachusetts voters elected new leaders, who lowered taxes and pardoned most of the rebels. Across the country, the uprising alarmed leaders such as George Washington. Many decided that the national government needed more power, and in May 1787, delegates met in Philadelphia to strengthen it.

1. Which statement best expresses the central idea of the passage?

A. The Articles of Confederation gave the national government too much power over the states.

B. Daniel Shays had served as a captain in the Continental Army.

C. Shays' Rebellion succeeded in taking over the government of Massachusetts.

D. The Articles left the national government weak, and Shays' Rebellion convinced many leaders that it needed more power.

2. According to the passage, why did the Articles leave most power with the states?

A. Many Americans feared that a strong central government could become as harsh as the king.

B. The Treaty of Paris required the states to stay separate.

C. Large states wanted more votes than small states.

D. The states wanted Congress to collect high taxes from every citizen.

3. What made it hard for the national government to pay its war debts?

A. Congress could ask the states for money but could not collect taxes.

B. The states sent most of their tax money to Britain.

C. Congress gave the nation's money to the new western states.

D. Congress spent most of its money on a large national army.

4. Match each feature of the Articles of Confederation to its result, as the passage describes it.

Write the letter of the matching answer on each line.

1. _____ Each state had one vote in Congress
2. _____ No leader had the power to enforce national laws
3. _____ Congress could not control trade between the states
4. _____ Changing the Articles required all thirteen states to agree

A. Congress relied on the states to carry out its decisions

B. A small state had as much say as a large state

C. Large states gained extra votes in Congress

D. One state could block any change

E. Some states taxed goods from their neighbors

5. What was one cause of Shays' Rebellion?

A. Farmers owed high state taxes and debts, and courts were taking their farms.

B. The new Constitution had taken away farmers' right to vote.

C. British troops had returned to take farms in Massachusetts.

D. Congress had placed a heavy national tax on farmland.

6. Complete the sentences with words from the word bank.

Word bank
harbor • churches • courts • assembly • arsenal

In 1786, armed farmers began shutting down _____ so that judges could not seize more farms. In January 1787, more than a thousand rebels marched on the national _____ at Springfield.

7. Which detail from the passage best supports the idea that the national government was too weak to deal with the uprising?

A. Congress had no money to send soldiers, so Massachusetts had to form its own army.

B. Many farmers in western Massachusetts were deep in debt.

C. Massachusetts demanded tax payments in gold or silver coins.

D. Armed farmers shut down courts so judges could not seize farms.

8. What happened when the rebels marched on the arsenal at Springfield?

A. The state's soldiers fired on them, and the rebels scattered.

B. Daniel Shays was elected governor of Massachusetts.

C. The rebels captured the weapons and took over the state government.

D. Congress sent a national army that arrested every rebel.

9. After the uprising ended, what happened in Massachusetts?

A. Every rebel was put to death for treason.

B. Massachusetts left the United States and formed its own nation.

C. The state raised taxes again to pay for its army.

D. Voters elected new leaders, who lowered taxes and pardoned most of the rebels.

10. A student is writing an objective summary of the passage. Which two of these sentences should the student leave out because they state opinions?

☐ A. Farmers in western Massachusetts were losing their farms to debt.

☐ B. The Articles of Confederation were a foolish plan that no one should have supported.

☐ C. Congress could not collect taxes under the Articles.

☐ D. In January 1787, state soldiers broke up the rebel march on Springfield.

☐ E. Daniel Shays was a hero, and the rebels were right to take up arms.