

Springfield Armory Student Handout

Name: _____

Date: _____



In the space below, write down what you see, what assumptions you might make about this image, and what questions you have about the illustration.

See

Assumptions

Questions

Springfield Armory Student Handout

Shays' Rebellion

In the summer of 1786, only three years after the end of the Revolutionary War, Shays' Rebellion began in Massachusetts. Merchants who had lent money to the Continental Congress to fund the Revolution began to call in their debts and insist upon payment in cash. The credit of the young United States was at risk, which threatened the country's reputation abroad and its ability to take out future loans—a nightmare for economic growth. With no power under the Articles of Confederation to collect taxes or regulate trade, the federal government had to rely on the states to pay for their own portion of the enormous war debt. Some states, like Massachusetts, raised taxes dramatically to pay these debts and avoid ruining their credit.

Meanwhile, farmers throughout western Massachusetts, many of whom were Revolutionary War veterans who had never been paid fully for their services, were struggling with their own financial hardships after the war. They did not have the cash to pay the taxes, but **James Bowdoin**, the governor of Massachusetts, did not sway. Debt collectors took people to court for not paying their taxes. Many individuals lost their land and property, and asked the government for debt relief, but it never came.

Then, in August 1786, tensions boiled over. Under the leadership of Revolutionary War veteran **Daniel Shays**, a group of 1,500 farmers in western Massachusetts began an uprising to protest what they believed were unfair land taxes. They called themselves "Regulators," and during the fall and winter, they marched on the courts, forcing them to delay trials. To return order, a group of merchants from eastern Massachusetts funded a private militia to put down the rebels. In January 1787, Shays and his followers tried to capture the weapons stored in the federal arsenal at Springfield, but the militia ultimately stopped them, opening fire on the rebels. Four men died, and the Regulators scattered, but the militia pursued them. Finally, in February, the resistance ended. The militia had captured most of the Regulators, although the Massachusetts government eventually pardoned most of them in exchange for signed confessions, including Shays.

This event forced many Founding Fathers to reconsider the laws of the country and the power balance between federal and state governments. National figures like **George Washington** were horrified by the events in Massachusetts, and regretful that they couldn't act sooner to avoid the conflict. Within the year, delegates from all thirteen states gathered at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia to decide on a new course for the nation, resulting in the U.S. Constitution that we have today.