

Reader's Theater

UNITE or DIE

How Thirteen States Became a Nation

Grades 3–5

Read the book aloud to the class so that they may become acquainted with the story and vocabulary. Next, handout copies to sixteen students. (For challenged readers, consider assigning them the part of Rhode Island or New Jersey). Ask any remaining students to be the audience. Or if you would like to include the entire class, increase the number of narrators. If time allows, let the students practice their parts individually or as a group, and perform the play with props and costumes. If time is limited, simply have each person read their parts on the first run-through.

Roles:

Narrator One

Narrator Two

Narrator Three

Narrator Four

Connecticut

New York

Pennsylvania

Massachusetts

Rhode Island

Maryland

Virginia

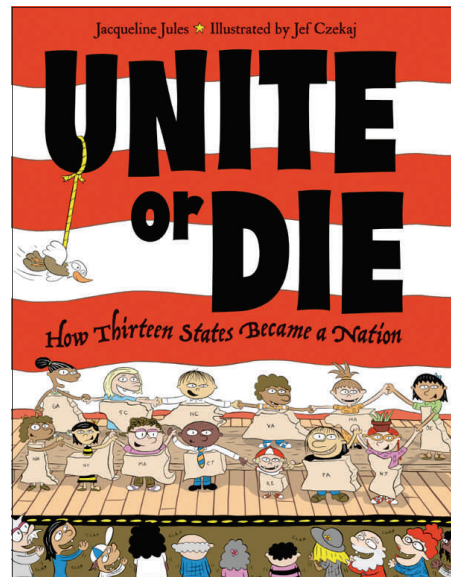
Delaware

New Jersey

North Carolina

Georgia

New Hampshire



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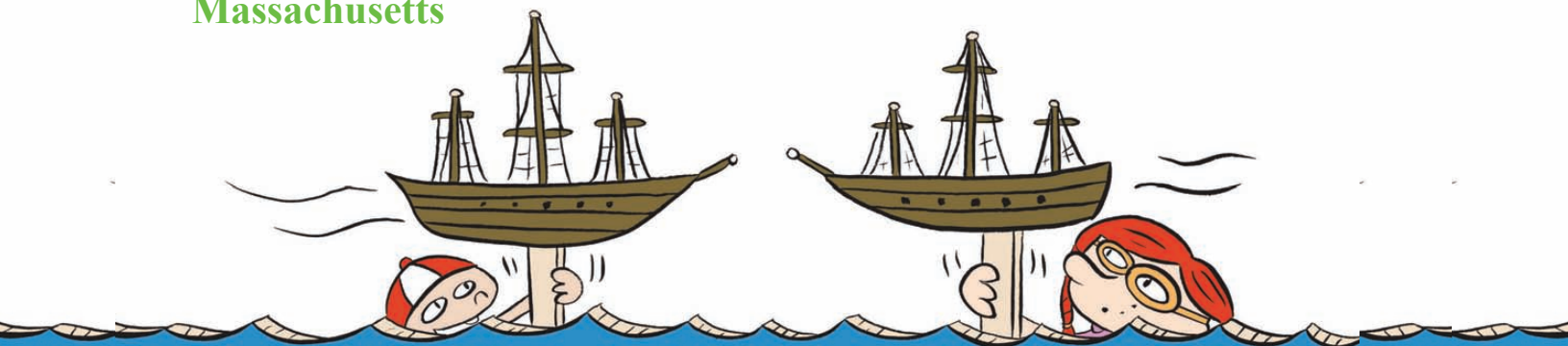
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After Reading:

Visit www.jacquelinejules.com to view a video of the book.

Visit www.charlesbridge.com to read an interview with the author.



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Scene One

Narrator One: On September 3, 1783, the Treaty of Paris was signed, officially ending the American Revolution. Thirteen colonies had won their independence from England. A new country was born.

Narrator Two: The new country was called the United States of America—but it was not united. Each state had its own leaders and its own government. The states were like thirteen separate countries.

Connecticut: We're on our own now!

New York: Shouldn't someone be in charge?

Pennsylvania: We just got rid of King George. We don't want anyone telling us what to do.

Delaware: I'll make my own decisions, thank you very much.

Narrator Three: The country operated under a document called the Articles of Confederation. This political system gave the national government very little power. Each state took care of its own business.

Narrator Four: But without a strong national government, the states had problems.

Massachusetts: When I go to Rhode Island they won't take my money!

Rhode Island: Of course not! You're money is worthless here.

Massachusetts: Then how can we do business with each other?

North Carolina: Don't we need a treaty to trade? Who can negotiate for all of us?

New York: How can we decide once and for all who owns what? New Hampshire is trying to claim land that belongs to me.

New Hampshire: Not true! That land belongs to me!

Maryland: Maybe it's time we sat down to talk about things.

Scene Two

Narrator One: In September 1786, delegates from Pennsylvania, Delaware, Virginia, New Jersey, and New York gathered in Annapolis, Maryland. They discussed the problems among the states and identified what had to be done.

Virginia: The Articles of Confederation make the national government helpless and hopeless. We need a government that works!

Delaware: But we only have five states represented here. What can we do?

Virginia: We can call another convention. We can ask everyone to come and help revise the Articles of Confederation.

Pennsylvania: That's an excellent idea! Let's meet in Philadelphia in the same hall where the Declaration of Independence was signed.



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Reader's Theater



Scene Three

Narrator Two: The convention began on May 25, 1787. Twelve states sent delegates.

Rhode Island: But not me! I don't want anything to do with this suspicious nonsense.

Narrator Three: Virginia had an idea—an idea so different, it would have to replace the Articles of Confederation, rather than revise them.

Virginia: I am proud to propose the Virginia Plan. It's a government with three branches: executive, legislative, and judicial.

New Jersey: I see the plan also calls for a two-house legislature. Is that a good idea?

Pennsylvania: Sure, the number of delegates will be based on population. What's wrong with that?

Delaware: If you have more delegates, you'll have more votes than I do!

North Carolina: But you're not even half my size. Why should you have the same number of votes?

Connecticut: Without equal representation, my vote will be ignored.

Narrator Two: The big states and small states argued for weeks. Delegates became discouraged.

New York: If we can't agree on anything, how can we stay one country?

Georgia: But we could have even bigger problems if we break apart!

Pennsylvania: Will the United States of America survive?

Narrator Three: Fortunately, the Connecticut delegation came to the rescue.

Connecticut: I have an idea! The House of Representatives can be based on population. The Senate can have two delegates for every state!

Maryland: So every state, no matter how small, will have two votes in the Senate.

Massachusetts: But states with more people will have more delegates in the House of Representatives.

Delaware: I can live with that.

New York: I can, too.

Narrator Four: A major hurdle had been overcome. The delegates now had a framework for a new constitution. But there were still many other decisions to be made.

New York: How long should the president's term in office be?

North Carolina: What should Congress be in charge of?

UNITE or DIE

Reader's Theater

Connecticut: What about power? Who will have the most? The president, Congress, or the Supreme Court?

Georgia: What if Congress passes bad laws? How will we stop them?

New Hampshire: Hold on! If someone has too much power, we're right back where we started—fighting tyranny!

Narrator One: The powers among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches were carefully separated and balanced in the new constitution.

New Jersey: I won't sign this document if you take away all my power!

New Hampshire: What about my state government?

Georgia: Calm down! The Constitution still allows us to make laws to meet the local needs of our people.

Maryland: But the Constitution will be the supreme law of the land and we won't be allowed to pass a law that conflicts with it.

Narrator Four: The delegates worried about many details of the new government. In the end, they realized that no document could be made perfect for all generations.

Pennsylvania: We need a way to make amendments to the Constitution to take care of problems that don't exist yet.

Massachusetts: True! But if we all have to agree on each change, we could be in for big trouble.

Narrator One: Because it would be nearly impossible to get unanimous approval for all changes, the Constitution says amendments become law if ratified by three-fourths of the states.

Narrator Two: On September 17, 1787, the United States Constitution was signed by representatives of twelve states. The ratification process was lengthy, but eventually all thirteen states approved the Constitution. A new government was born.

All: The United States of America! United at last and ready to govern ourselves!

