



### Ask Yourself

Do you think your classroom has a government? If so, what kind does it have?

## Thirteen Nations or One?

**Focus** *What happened to the 13 states after the Revolution?*

Before the Revolution, the colonists had been British subjects. Who were they afterwards? We now speak of them as Americans, but back then people in the 13 former colonies didn't think of themselves that way. They thought of themselves as Virginians or New Yorkers first, and Americans second.

In fact, the former colonists had never had a real national government. During the war, people knew they had to work together to defeat Britain. However, Congress had limited powers. It didn't even have the power to tax. It could only ask the states for money, but the states could refuse. Remember the hard winter Washington and his army spent at Valley Forge? Part of the reason for the ragged uniforms and empty stomachs was that the Continental Congress couldn't raise enough money to support the army.

After the war, the former colonies saw even less need to give Congress much power. They were afraid Congress might meddle in their affairs as Parliament had. Each state had its own **constitution**, a written plan of how its government worked. In 1781 the states finally approved the Articles of Confederation, a national constitution that Congress had passed in 1777. However, the Articles gave most powers to the states.

Most of the states had their own navies. At the end of the war, some of those navies were larger than the Continental navy. Even the nation's money had little value. In fact, when people wanted to say something was worthless, they said it was "not worth a Continental" — referring to the paper money the Continental Congress issued. In its place, people used gold or silver coins from other countries.

Without a strong national government, the states began to act like 13 different countries. Maryland and Virginia both claimed the right to control the Potomac River. New Jersey placed a tax on goods brought into it from New York. And New York taxed goods from New Jersey. When John Adams went to London in 1785 as an ambassador, the British made fun of him. Do you represent one nation, they asked, or 13?