

Reader's Theater

UNITE or DIE

How Thirteen States Became a Nation

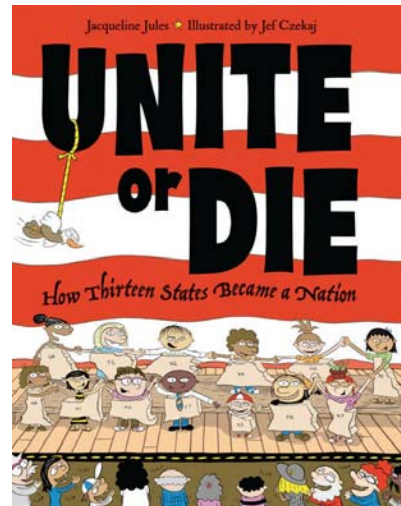
Read the book aloud to the class so that they may become acquainted with the story and vocabulary. Next, hand out copies of The Reader's Theater script to seventeen students. Ask any remaining students to be the audience. If you would like to include the entire class, increase the number of narrators or have more than one student read a role together. If time allows, rehearse several times and perform the play with props and costumes.

Roles:

<i>Narrator One</i>	<i>Rhode Island</i>
<i>Narrator Two</i>	<i>Maryland</i>
<i>Narrator Three</i>	<i>Virginia</i>
<i>Narrator Four</i>	<i>Delaware</i>
<i>Connecticut</i>	<i>North Carolina</i>
<i>New York</i>	<i>South Carolina</i>
<i>Pennsylvania</i>	<i>Georgia</i>
<i>Massachusetts</i>	<i>New Hampshire</i>
<i>New Jersey</i>	

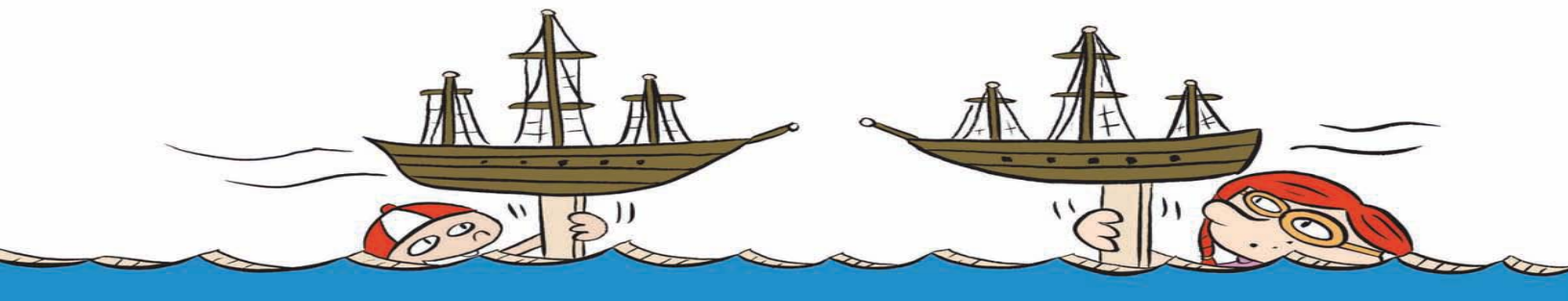
After Reading:

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ISBN 978-1-58089-189-9 \$16.95 HC
ISBN 978-1-58089-190-5 \$7.95 PB
Ages 8-11 48 pages Color Illustrations



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.

MASSACHUSETTS: Hooray!
Freedom!

MARYLAND: Now we can govern ourselves.

GEORGIA: Are we ready?

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.

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.

VIRGINIA: Who am I? A Virginian or an American?

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.

RHODE ISLAND: I love being my own boss!

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! Your money is worthless here.

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

SOUTH CAROLINA: Speaking of business, I want to sell goods to Europe.

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!

VIRGINIA: Whose ships have the right to sail on the Potomac River? Yours or mine?

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.

NEW YORK: We're like a monster with thirteen heads.

NEW JERSEY: I wouldn't go that far. We're more like a blind octopus with thirteen arms.

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.



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.

SOUTH CAROLINA: There's General George Washington! You know this meeting is important if he's here.

MARYLAND: Everybody admires the general. Let's put him in charge of this assembly.

NARRATOR THREE: As president of the convention, Washington sat in a beautiful carved chair. He had a front-row seat for all the arguments.

NORTH CAROLINA: I feel like a prisoner. There's a guard outside.

GEORGIA: Stop complaining! Do you want the whole country to know we're changing the government?

NARRATOR FOUR: There were no meetings with the press. The delegates voted to keep their conversations private, behind locked doors.

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NARRATOR ONE: 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.

NARRATOR TWO: The Virginia plan called for a new way of thinking. The states would have to give up some of their individual power in favor of a strong national government.

NEW JERSEY: Did you see how the votes in Congress will be decided?

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!

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.

VIRGINIA: But this country should be governed by the people. That means states with more people should have more say in Congress.

NEW JERSEY: My citizens are just as important as yours!

SOUTH CAROLINA: My ears hurt!

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?



Scene Four

NARRATOR THREE: The big states and small states argued for weeks. George Washington and many of the delegates became discouraged. Finally, the Connecticut delegation had an idea.

CONNECTICUT: If we have a congress with two houses, we can have two kinds of representation.

NORTH CAROLINA: What do you mean? Tell us more!

CONNECTICUT: Let's compromise. 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?

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

PENNSYLVANIA: We need a way to make changes 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 THREE: The Constitution says changes become law if ratified by three-fourths of the states.

NARRATOR FOUR: 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!

