

Activity 2

Document-Based Activity

Debating the Constitution

DOCUMENT 6

Before You Read The following words in the document below may be new to you: *enumerated*, *equivocal*, *dissent*, *sophistry*. You may want to use a dictionary to look them up.

Congratulations on the acceptance of the new constitution by the State of Massachusetts. Had this been done . . . by a larger majority, the stroke would have been more severely felt by the antifederalists in other States. As it is, it operates as a damper to their hopes, and is a matter of disappointment and chagrin to them all.

Under the circumstances enumerated in your letters, the favorable decision, which has taken place in that State, could hardly have been expected. Nothing less than the good sense, sound reasoning, moderation, and temper of the supporters of the measure could have carried the question. It will be very influential on the equivocal States. In the two, which are next to convene, New Hampshire and Maryland, there can be no doubt of its adoption, and in South Carolina but little, which will make nine States without a dissentient. The force of this argument is hardly to be resisted by local sophistry. Candor and prudence, therefore, it is to be hoped will prevail; and yet I believe there are some characters among us, who would hazard everything rather than cease their opposition.

—George Washington
Letter to Henry Knox, Secretary of War
March 3, 1788

1. How does George Washington account for the decision in Massachusetts to ratify the Constitution?

2. What does Washington predict will happen regarding the Constitution?
