**The United States Constitution: Strict or Broad Construction?**

**Subject area/course**: Social Science, U.S. History

**Grade level/band**: 11–12

**STUDENT PROMPT SECTION**

1. **Task context**:

The way in which we interpret and apply the United States Constitution defines and guides our lives as Americans. If we believe, as Thomas Jefferson did, that the Constitution was written in order to strictly limit the power and influence of the national government, and to enhance personal freedom and civil liberty, we probably consider ourselves conservatives or even libertarians today. If we believe, as Alexander Hamilton did, that the Constitution was written in 1787 to provide a basic outline of government, granting broad general powers that would allow the national government to change, grow, and adjust to the needs of a growing nation, we most likely consider ourselves liberals or progressives.

Many people today believe that the Founding Fathers – those who wrote the Constitution and established the United States during the Federalist Era – were basically “cut from the same cloth” and were striving for the same goals in the early development of the nation. As our study of this period clearly shows, nothing could be further from the truth.

Specifically, our first Secretary of State (Thomas Jefferson) and our first Secretary of the Treasury (Alexander Hamilton) disagreed and fought about almost everything: assumption of state debts, foreign policy issues, the public lands, a national bank, protective tariffs, internal improvements, Indian policy, and even the location of the United States capital! From these intense disagreements, rival political factions formed, followed by political parties. To some extent, we can still see these powerful influences affecting our politics, and our lives, today.

Your task is to assess your own personal political philosophy through first analyzing the political and personal philosophies of Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton. Conduct research to determine what led these two early leaders to their views on the purpose of the Constitution and how, in turn, that document shaped their political philosophy on the issues of their day. Then decide which view of the Constitution’s construction and purpose best conforms to your own personal and political belief system, applying the principles of Jefferson or Hamilton to current events and issues. You should begin to determine which political label fits you best, and be able to defend yourself as a “good Jeffersonian” or a “good Hamiltonian” in a classroom discussion. Perhaps you will discover that you reflect the philosophy of Jefferson on some issues and Hamilton on others. Be able to explain and defend your amalgamated version of Jefferson and Hamilton’s political philosophies.

1. **The task**:

After reading and considering several secondary and primary accounts of the Federalist Era which stress the political and personal issues that divided Jefferson and Hamilton, write a 3 page paper that:

* Analyzes the two men’s positions on the power and purpose of the Constitution.
* Compares the issues of that era with contemporary issues that raise similar constitutional questions today.

Ultimately, you should argue for strict construction or broad construction. Your goal is to defend yourself as a modern day “Jeffersonian” or “Hamiltonian.”

Your paper should:

* Demonstrate understanding of the positions of Jefferson and Hamilton on the Constitution
* Connect ideas of Hamilton/Jefferson to contemporary issues.
* Evaluate the positions of Hamilton/Jefferson and choose a position.
* Present a thesis and understanding concepts.
* Explain and support your position with evidence from your research (both primary and secondary sources).
* Be organized, coherent and neat.
* Employ standards of English grammar, punctuation and usage.
* Use discipline‐specific vocabulary.
* Cite your sources correctly in the text of your paper and create a Works Cited page using MLA format or another style that your teacher selects.

1. **Materials/resources:**

You are free to use any valid source, both print and Internet, but be sure to achieve a reasonable balance among types of sources. You must utilize at least three primary sources in your paper, in addition to any secondary sources used.

1. **Time requirements:**

You will have approximately 2 weeks to complete this task. Your teacher will provide details regarding timelines and due dates.