

## Key Ideas to Guide Your Reading of *Miracle at Philadelphia*

- The United States wasn't so United during the period after the Revolutionary War. The country then abided by the Articles of Confederation. There was no strong central government, the government had no power to tax, coin money, create an army, or make treaties. Famously, an uprising known as Shays' Rebellion, led by Daniel Shays, of Revolutionary War vets who were protesting foreclosures, among other things, exposed the weakness of the confederation of states. The Congress, in New York City, the current US capital, was a unicameral, or one house legislature at this point, and authorized a group of gentlemen selected by their states to reform the Articles. The delegates quickly realized they could and must do better than mere reforms.
- They met in Philadelphia and were not in agreement at all. Many plans were put forth and many were shot down. It was hot, it was sticky, and they wore wigs and stockings. This was largely the "who's who" of American politicians and political thinkers at this time. Most were lawyers and they were highly educated.
- Madison is referred to as "The Father of the Constitution"
- The dance regarding how much power to give to any one branch gave them fits and arguments. As Hamilton observed on p.112, "Give all power to the many, they will oppress the few. Give all power to the few, they will oppress the many." James Wilson took this further with regard to the government, stating that "there were only two kinds of governments - the one which does too much and oppresses, the one which does too little and is weak" (p. 129). However, many felt the Senators should be wealthy, while the President (who they all knew would first be George Washington) was supposed to be absorbed back into the people after their term was up (though no term limits were yet set - we'll get there in the 1950s) regardless of wealth. Senators being elected by state legislatures changes with the 17th amendment.
- Not everybody stayed the whole time. People came and went as they needed.
- Happiness, as mentioned in the Declaration of Independence, is what John Adams concludes most people want from their government. Keep them safe and keep them free. This is the balance that the Constitution is trying to strike.
- People were frustrated that the convention was so secret
- The problem of what to do with the West and how to allow states in vexed the convention for awhile, as many of them were themselves engaged in land speculation and wanted a strong government to guarantee their money
- Some delegates wanted a monarch or life terms for the president, because that's what they were used to, but ultimately democracy concentrated power in the hands of the people and politicians as their servants.
- The fight to ratify the Constitution was ugly in some places, and so many think-pieces, that we will read this year, known as the Federalist Papers and the Anti-Federalist papers were written. Ultimately 9 of the 13 states said Yea and had a movie-ending sounding parade. Then the real work began, that we will learn all about this year!
- PLEASE MAKE SURE TO READ THE CONSTITUTION AT THE BACK OF THE BOOK TO SEE HOW IT ALL COMES TOGETHER