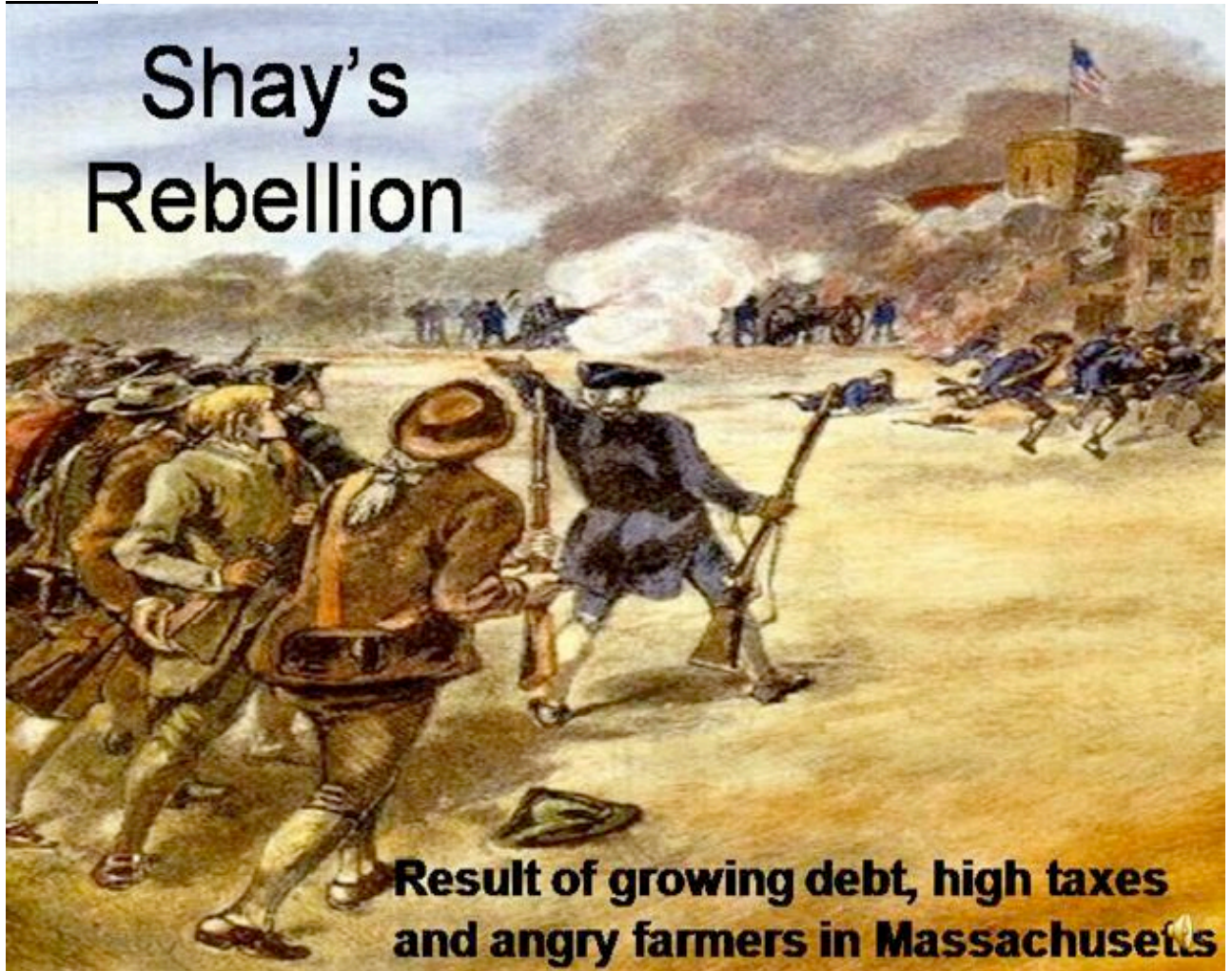


Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Shay's Rebellion: The Story Behind the Revolt



In Massachusetts, in 1786, a rebellion broke out when the government of Massachusetts decided to raise taxes. Farmers were having a hard time as they were in a lot of debt. They wanted to government to issue paper money instead of raising the taxes, so they could pay off those debts. Most of the taxes were actually placed onto the farmers, especially the poor ones in the western parts of the state. Many of

them found it impossible to pay their taxes as well as their mortgages and any other bills that they happened to have. They were then faced with the loss of their farms.

In August, 1786, the angry farmers decided to rebel. They went straight to the county courthouses and shut them down so they were unable to take away their farms. **Daniel Shays** was a former

captain of the Continental Army and was now one of the bankrupt farmers in the rebellion. He emerged as one of the rebellion's leaders. In January, 1787, he gathered over 1,000 farmers to march onto the state **arsenal** in Boston to seize weapons.

The governor of the state sent 4000 soldiers to defend the arsenal and stop the rebellion. But, before they arrived, Shays and his men attacked. Fires were shot, four farmers died, and the rest of the farmers scattered.

The rebellion was ended by the next day but new fears had developed. A call for change was loud and clear. The rebellion, **inflation**, and unstable **currency** of the nation showed that the new republic was at risk of failure. The nation had to be able to deal with problems like rebellions, trading, **diplomacy**, etc. in order to be successful. Although people were still afraid that if the government got too powerful, citizens of the country may have their voting and property rights weakened, a change had to be made for the United States to remain a free and independent nation.

Read the primary resource below, written by Thomas Jefferson, about Shays Rebellion. He was in France during the rebellion, but wrote this letter to one of his friends.....

Paris, November 13, 1787

The British ministry have so long hired their gazetteers to repeat, and model into every form, lies about our being in anarchy, that the world has at length believed them, the English nation has believed them, the ministers themselves have come to believe them, and what is more wonderful, we have believed them ourselves. Yet where does this anarchy exist? Where did it ever exist, except in the single instance of Massachusetts? And can history produce an instance of rebellion so honorably conducted? I say nothing of its motives. They were founded in ignorance, not wickedness. God forbid we should ever be twenty years without such a rebellion. . . .

What country before, ever existed a century and a half without a rebellion? And what country can preserve its liberties, if its rulers are not warned from time to time, that this people preserve the spirit of resistance? Let them take arms. The remedy is to set them right as to facts, pardon and pacify them. . . .

The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time, with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its natural manure. Our convention has been too much impressed by the insurrection of Massachusetts; and on the spur of the moment, they are setting up a kite to keep the hen yard in order.

QUESTIONS:

1. How does Thomas Jefferson feel about the rebellion?
2. What does he think needs to be done, now that a rebellion took place?
3. What can the government do in order to fix the problems that Shays Rebellion was about?