

**The Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798**  
**Denise Whitten, Boone Middle School**  
**Document Based Question: Grade 8**

**Part 1**

**Historical Context:**

In the 1790's two dominant political parties emerged. The Federalist Party, headed by George Washington and Alexander Hamilton, was nicknamed the "Friends of Government." They favored a strong, centralized government. The Republican Party, headed by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, was nicknamed the "Friends of the People." They feared a powerful, distant government.

John Adams became the second Federalist U.S. President in 1797. In an attempt to improve diplomatic relations with France (which had been attacking American ships), Adams sent two diplomats to negotiate a treaty with France. The trip was a failure because the French agents refused to negotiate unless they were paid a bribe. When the Federalists in Congress were unformed, they wanted a war with France. Many Americans liked this idea, too. Adams and Congress increased the size of the military and created a navy. The military build-up continued, but Adams never asked Congress to declare war on France. Soon, Republicans and Federalists were publicly criticizing Adams.

**Directions:** Read the documents below. After each document, answer the questions that follow. You will use your answers to the questions to help you write an essay that answers the prompt in Part 2.

**Document 1A**

The Alien and Sedition Acts (1798)

An Act Concerning Aliens (excerpt)

SECTION 1. Be it enacted by the Senate and the House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That it shall be lawful for the President of the United States at any time during the continuance of this act, to order all such aliens as he shall judge dangerous to the peace and safety of the United States, or shall have reasonable grounds to suspect are concerned in any treasonable or secret machinations against the government thereof, to depart out of the territory of the United States, within such time as shall be expressed in such order, which order shall be served on such alien by delivering him a copy thereof, or leaving the same at his usual abode, and returned to the office of the Secretary of State, by the marshal or other person to whom the same shall be directed. And in case any alien, so ordered to depart, shall be found at large within the United States after the time limited in such order for his departure, and not having obtained a license from the President to reside therein, or having obtained such license shall not have conformed thereto, every such alien shall, on conviction thereof, be imprisoned for a term not exceeding three years, and shall never after be admitted to become a citizen of the United States.

SECTION 3. And be it further enacted, That every master or commander of any ship or vessel which shall come into any port of the United States after the first day of July next, shall immediately on his arrival make report in writing to the collector or other chief officer of the customs of such port, of all aliens, if any, on board his vessel, specifying their names, age, the place of nativity, the country from which they shall have come, the nation to which they belong and owe allegiance, their occupation and a description of their persons, as far as he shall be informed thereof, and on failure, every such master and commander shall forfeit and pay three hundred dollars, for the payment whereof on default of such master or commander, such vessel shall also be holden, and may by such collector or other officer of the customs be detained. And it shall be the duty of such collector or other officer of the customs, forthwith to transmit to the office of the department of state true copies of all such returns.

1) What authority does this act give the President? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2) What groups of people are being targeted by this act? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Document 1B

### An Act in Addition to the Act, Entitled "An Act for the Punishment of Certain Crimes Against the United States (excerpt)

SECTION 2. And be it farther enacted, That if any person shall write, print, utter or publish, or shall cause or procure to be written, printed, uttered or published, or shall knowingly and willingly assist or aid in writing, printing, uttering or publishing any false, scandalous and malicious writing or writings against the government of the United States, or either house of the Congress of the United States, or the President of the United States, with intent to defame the said government, or either house of the said Congress, or the said President, or to bring them, or either of them, into contempt or disrepute; or to excite against them, or either or any of them, the hatred of the good people of the United States, or to stir up sedition within the United States, or to excite any unlawful combinations therein, for opposing or resisting any law of the United States, or any act of the President of the United States, done in pursuance of any such law, or of the powers in him vested by the constitution of the United States, or to resist, oppose, or defeat any such law or act, or to aid, encourage or abet any hostile designs of any foreign nation against United States, their people or government, then such person, being thereof convicted before any court of the United States having jurisdiction thereof, shall be punished by a fine not exceeding two thousand dollars, and by imprisonment not exceeding two years.

3) What does this act prohibit? \_\_\_\_\_

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4) Which groups of people are being targeted by this act? \_\_\_\_\_

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## Document 2

### First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of people to peaceably assemble, and to petition the Government for redress of grievances.

5) What rights do this documents guarantee? \_\_\_\_\_

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6) Who are the beneficiaries of these rights? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Document 3**  
Thomas Cooper's Broadside (excerpt)

SIR, I SHOULD not condescend to answer *anonymous* slander, but the information on which falsehoods contained in the following paragraph are grounded, must have been originally derived from the President himself. I cannot believe *him* capable of such gross misrepresentation, for I still think well of his intentions, however I may disapprove of his conduct: but the following narrative will show that some of his underlings are capable of anything. From the Reading Weekly Advertiser of Oct. 26, 1799

[View: [Thomas Cooper's Broadside](#) ]

7) What is Cooper's stated purpose for writing this broadside? \_\_\_\_\_

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8) Describe Cooper's tone in the excerpt. What does the excerpt reveal about Cooper's opinion of Adam's?

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**Document 4**  
Table 1 Naturalizations

Court Location	# Naturalized, 1796 – 1798 (Under the Act of 1795)	# Naturalized, 1800 – 1802 (Under the Act of 1798)
3 courts, N.Y. County	288	0
3 courts, Baltimore County, MD	444	0
1 court, Frederick County, MD	66	0
3 courts, Charleston Co., S.C.	195	4
<b>Totals</b>	<b>993</b>	<b>4</b>

9) What effect did the Act concerning Aliens have on the rate of naturalization in the U. S.? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

10) Which part of the country offered a slight chance for immigrants to become naturalized citizens? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Document 5  
Image



AS GAG-RULERS WOULD HAVE IT.

—Satterfield in the *Jersey City Journal*.

11) What does the snake represent in this cartoon? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

12) Who is the snake attacking? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## **Part 2**

### **Essay**

Using your answers to the previous questions (and your recollection of class discussions,) write an essay to answer the prompt below.

**The Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 are examples of federal legislation that feverishly divided the nation.**

**Think about the reasons to support or repeal the Acts.**

**Now write to explain your position regarding the Acts.**