

The Federalist Challenge to Civil Liberties: The Sedition Act of 1798
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8th Grade American History

Summary:

During the late 1700s, the Federalist Party was under attack from the Democratic-Republican newspapers. In response to all the criticism, the Federalist Congress passed the Sedition Act which limited the ability of the opposition to criticize the government. The law was used to silence the Democratic-Republican press. Approximately twenty-five individuals were arrested under the Sedition Act. Fifteen were indicted; ten cases went to trial and all ten resulted in convictions.

Directions:

Students will read each document in Part A and answer the questions that follow each document.

In Part B, students will write an essay on the given topic, incorporating prior knowledge and the information obtained from the documents.

Essay:

Did the Sedition Act threaten the first amendment rights of freedom of speech and press? Support your opinion with information from the any prior knowledge and the accompanying documents.

Document Based Question
The Federalist Challenge to Civil Liberties

Name _____
Part I

The Federalist Challenge to Civil Liberties
The First Amendment to the Constitution

Document A

Read the following quote from the Bill of Rights and answer the questions.

“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 the people to peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

1. Explain the phrase “congress shall make no law respecting ...”
2. List the protections of the First Amendment.
3. Who is the First Amendment protecting?
4. The First Amendment is designed to prevent the abuse of power on the part of the _____.

The Sedition Act of 1798
Document B

Read the following quote from the Sedition Act of 1798 and answer the questions.

Sedition Act 1798

“That if any person shall write, print, utter or publish ... any false scandalous, and malicious writing or writings against the government of the United States, either house of the Congress of the United States, or the President of the United States with the intent to defame, or to bring them contempt or disrepute; or to excite against them the hatred of the good people of the United States, ... then such person .. shall be punished by a fine not exceeding two thousand dollars, and by imprisonment not exceeding two years.”

<http://www.earlyamerica.com/earlyamerica/milestones/sedition/s-text.html>

6. Use a dictionary to define the following vocabulary words:
scandalous -

malicious -

defame -

7. Explain how a person could violate the Sedition Act.
8. Identify the government positions that the Sedition Act was designed to protect.
9. Identify the major executive branch position which was not mentioned in the Sedition Act. Why was this office excluded?
10. What was the punishment for violation of the Sedition Act?
11. Do you see any conflict between the Bill of Rights and the Sedition Act of 1798? Explain your answer.

The Sedition Act of 1798 Document C

Analyze the cartoon of John Adams and answer the questions.



<http://ericarensen.com/colophon/wp-content/01.John-Adams.jpg>

12. According to the cartoonist, what John Adam's opinion on freedom of the press?
13. How did the Sedition Act protect John Adams?
14. Who do you think the people in the window represent?
15. What are the people in the window doing?
16. Why are the people acting in that manner?

Essay

Write an FCAT style essay answer the following questions.

Did the Sedition Act threaten the first amendment rights of freedom of speech and press? Did the Sedition Act violate the first amendment?

Support your opinion with information from the any prior knowledge and the accompanying documents.

1. Explain the phrase “congress shall make no law respecting ...”
This phrase means that congress does not have the power to restrict the freedoms that are listed.
2. List the protections of the First Amendment.
Freedom of religion, freedom of speech and press, freedom to peaceful assemble, and the right to petition the government to correct wrongs.
3. Who is the First Amendment protecting?
The First Amendment was designed to protect the people
4. The First Amendment is designed to prevent the abuse of power on the part of the
___federal government_____.

The Sedition Act of 1798
Document B

Answer Key

Read the following quote from the Sedition Act of 1798 and answer the questions.

Sedition Act 1798

“That if any person shall write, print, utter or publish ... any false scandalous, and malicious writing or writings against the government of the United States, either house of the Congress of the United States, or the President of the United States with the intent to defame, or to bring them contempt or disrepute; or to excite against them the hatred of the good people of the United States, ... then such person .. shall be punished by a fine not exceeding two thousand dollars, and by imprisonment not exceeding two years.”

<http://www.earlyamerica.com/earlyamerica/milestones/sedition/s-text.html>

6. Use a dictionary to define the following vocabulary words:
scandalous --- outrageous, shameful, or appalling

malicious --- hateful, spiteful, or wicked

defame --- insult, slander, or disparage
7. Explain how a person could violate the Sedition Act.
A person could violate the Sedition Act by criticizing the government or government officials. Any ridicule of a government official or challenge to the authority of the government could be viewed as sedition.
8. Identify the government positions that the Sedition Act was designed to protect.
The House of Representatives, the Senate and the President of the United States
9. Identify the major executive branch position which was not mentioned in the Sedition Act.
Why was this office excluded?
The Vice-President of the United States was excluded because the Vice-President was Thomas Jefferson, a Democrat-Republican. The Sedition Act was designed to protect the Federalists.
10. What was the punishment for violation of the Sedition Act?
The fine was two thousand dollars plus two years imprisonment
11. Do you see any conflict between the Bill of Rights and the Sedition Act of 1798? Explain your answer.
The Sedition Act prevented people from speaking their minds or printing their opinions. This is a direct violation of the first amendment.

**The Sedition Act of 1798
Document C**

Answer Sheet

Analyze the cartoon of John Adams and answer the questions.



<http://ericarensen.com/colophon/wp-content/01.John-Adams.jpg>

12. According to the cartoonist, what was John Adam's opinion on freedom of the press?
The cartoonist believes Adams was opposed to freedom of the press because it interferes with his ability to government.
13. How did the Sedition Act protect John Adams?
The Sedition Act would prevent people from criticizing Adams or publishing any materials critical of the President.
14. Who do you think the people in the window represent?
The people in the window represent the American citizens.
15. What are the people in the window doing?
They are booing President Adams.
16. Why are the people acting in that manner?
The people acting like this because they are opposed to the Sedition Act

Document Based Question
The Federalist Challenge to Civil Liberties
The Sedition Act of 1798
Part II

Essay

Rubric

Write an FCAT style essay answer the following questions.

Did the Sedition Act threaten the first amendment rights of freedom of speech and press? Did the Sedition Act violate the first amendment?

Support your opinion with information from the any prior knowledge and the accompanying documents.

Student essays should include:

FCAT style essay

Student's opinion

Supportive evidence from the First Amendment, Sedition Act and the Adams political cartoon