

“Was It Something I Said?” - Multiple Causes of the Civil War

By Anne Stemmerman - Westwood Middle School

I. Lesson Summary

Summary: This lesson examines the multiple causes and events that led to the American Civil War. Emphasis will be placed on the issue of popular sovereignty or states' rights (South) versus strong sense of federalism (North), a belief that ultimately divided the country into the North and the South and led to Civil War

Objectives: Students will

1. Identify the multiple causes and events that led to the Civil War;
2. Examine those causes within their historical perspective, and;
3. Prioritize and debate the causes to gain an understanding that wars typically have multiple causes
(Optional: you may wish to include current events discussion of the current US military presence in Afghanistan and Iraq)

Curriculum Map: Middle School “A Divided Nation” - High School “Civil War and Reconstruction”

United States History Event or Era: Antebellum (pre-Civil War) period between 1820-1860

Grade Level: This lesson is appropriate for middle school students and regular level high school students.

Materials:

1. Research materials including approved textbooks, internet access, and supplemental readings
2. Writing materials
3. Seven FCAT Short Response “Read, Think, Explain” answer “boxes” per student (these are found in the “Activities” section of this lesson. Please copy as many of these pages as needed.

Lesson Time:

60-120 minutes (additional time needed for DBQ assessment)

II. Lesson Procedures

Procedures:

A. Prior to the beginning of class, the teacher should write on the whiteboard or on an overhead transparency the following: Class discussion:

- “Fact: by 1840 approximately 66% of white southerners did not own a slave... If the Civil War was not fought over slavery, what was it fought over?”

(source: www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/database/article_display.cfm?HHID=653 - 20k May 13, 2007)

Underneath this question, write the next question as well:

- “What are wars fought over?”

Allow a brief time for class discussion of these two questions.

B. Students are to read (assigned middle school textbooks: Call to Freedom and/or History Alive!) and summarize the following causes/events by answering an FCAT format Short Response (included in the Activities section of this lesson) for each topic/event:

“How was this event a contributing cause of the Civil War?” Use at least three details from the text to support your answer.

- The Missouri Compromise (1820)
- Compromise of 1850
- *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* published, 1851
- The Kansas-Nebraska Act, 1854
- The Dred Scott decision, 1857
- John Brown and Harper’s Ferry, 1859
- Lincoln-Douglas Debates, 1858-1859

C. For each of the seven listed causes, divide the class into heterogenous groups of 3-4 students each, and then have each group complete the following tasks in the given order:

- Have them prioritize each of the causes in order from “Most Important” to “Least Important”.
- Assign each group one of the topics and ask them to prepare a defense on why their assigned cause was significant.
- Have each group select a spokesperson, then present an oral argument regarding the importance of their cause towards the Civil War. Other spokespersons should be prepared to debate.

D. Alternate/Supplement

- Using an internet search engine (i.e., Google), have students (individually or in groups) type in a search for “Causes of the Iraq War”; ask them to use primarily media/university/government websites;
- Have students write down any mentioned causes of the Iraq War;
- Debrief with a class discussion regarding their findings. Suggested questions might include:
 - “How will this conflict be viewed 100 years from now?”
 - “What were the causes?”
 - “Are the causes readily identifiable?”

III. Activities

Read
Think
Explain

Read
Think
Explain

IV. Assessment

Please link to DBQ: "Changes in Latitude, Changes in Attitude."

V. Resources

Middle School:

Call to Freedom

History Alive!

"Digital History – The Pre-Civil War South"

(www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/database/article_display.cfm?HHID=653)

High school: the current assigned textbook