

## **Status of Slavery in the Territories, 1850–1854**

### **Teacher Pages**

#### Overview

Adding a visual dimension to students' understanding of the topic, the map for this lesson shows the distribution of slave and free states as a result of the Compromise of 1850 and the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. This activity begins with a whole class discussion on the overall impact of the two compromises on the balance of slave and free states. Then, the lesson provides options for individual or group work and assessment. Students should have already read about the nation's attempts to deal with slavery and the compromises devised to avoid civil war, either in their textbooks or from other sources. The activity is designed to reinforce and expand upon prior knowledge.

#### Time Required

30–50 minutes

#### National History Standards

Historical Thinking Standard 3: Historical analysis and interpretation

United States Era 5, Standard 1A: The student understands how the North and South differed and how politics and ideologies led to the Civil War

#### National Geography Standards

Standard 1: How to use maps and other geographic representations, tools, and technologies to acquire, process, and report information from a spatial perspective

Standard 13: How the forces of cooperation and conflict among people influence the division and control of Earth's surface

Standard 17: How to apply geography to interpret the past

#### Enduring Understanding

During the struggle to resolve the issue of slavery, Congress enacted compromises to avoid conflict and potential civil war.

#### Essential Question

How did the Compromise of 1850 and the Kansas-Nebraska Act try to end the conflict over slavery?

## Procedure

**Note:** The following directions are written for a whole-class activity. If you wish, you may instead use the student handout and have students work individually or in groups on the activity.

1. Ask students what people's views were of slavery ten years before the Civil War. What did the government do during this time to avoid war? How did new states and territories decide whether they would be slave or free?
2. Read the "Historical Context" section to the class to set the stage for the activity. Make sure students understand the words and terms in bold.
3. Using a whiteboard, projector, or another display device, show the class the map, but with all layers and the inset map ("Violence erupting") turned off.
4. Turn on the "States" layer. Ask students to color in the areas of the map with different colors as you review the following questions with them.
  - a. Outline or color the slave states and the free states and territories on the map in different colors.
  - b. Outline or color the new territories created by the Compromise of 1850 using another color.
  - c. Outline or color the new territories created by the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 using a third color.
5. Turn on the "Slave states" "Free states," and the "Left to territories" layer. Have students check the accuracy of their outlines on their individual maps.
6. Next, turn on the layers for the new territories of the "Compromise of 1850" and the Kansas-Nebraska Act ("Kans-Neb Act") and have students check their individual maps for accuracy.
7. Briefly discuss with students how these laws helped reduce tensions between slave and free states. If needed, refresh students' memories of what they have learned from their previous readings.
8. Ask students which territories were allowed to decide whether they would permit slavery. Why might some people have been satisfied with the policy of letting slavery be settled by a popular vote while others might not?
9. Ask students to compare and contrast the two large maps and comment on the similarities and differences.
10. Turn on the "Missouri Compromise" layer. Explain to students this line was established in 1820 as the North-South dividing line between slave and free states. Missouri was allowed to be a slave state as a compromise for allowing Maine in the Union as a free state. Ask students if they think allowing the territories of Utah and New Mexico to decide on slavery invalidated the dividing line between slave and free states.
11. Now, turn on the map inset ("Violence erupting") that shows the conflict in the Kansas-Nebraska territory. Have students read the captions on this map. Discuss with them the following:
  - a. What happened in Lawrence?
  - b. What happened in Potawatomie Creek?
  - c. Why do you think these events occurred so close to the Missouri border?

## Historical Context

In the years before the Civil War as the nation continued to expand westward, Congress repeatedly addressed the slavery issue, hoping to preserve the **Union**. As new states were added, it became increasingly necessary to create laws that would reduce the tension between slave and free states. Slave states feared Congress would pass laws banning slavery and free states feared that a law might pass that would deny **abolition**. The Missouri Compromise of 1820 tried to avoid sending the country into conflict by keeping the balance between slave and free states, but as the country continued to expand westward new compromises were needed to address different concerns. The **Compromise of 1850** and the **Kansas-Nebraska Act** both allowed citizens to decide the slavery question by **popular sovereignty** (popular vote). As the territory of Kansas prepared for statehood, it had to decide whether it would permit slavery. This led to the conflict known as “**Bleeding Kansas**” as supporters and opponents of slavery entered the territory and clashed.

## Assessment

Have students look at the map and locate the line of the Missouri Compromise. This line was established in 1820 as the dividing line between slave and free states. Missouri was allowed to be a slave state as a compromise for allowing Maine into the Union as a free state. The goal was to keep a balance between the number of slave and free states. Ask students to write a paragraph answering the following question:

Why did Congress have the Kansas-Nebraska Act invalidate the dividing line between slave and free states?

## Extensions

1. Have students re-create the map of slavery in the territories from memory, drawing in as many details as they can on a blank outline map. This activity can either be graded as a review or just used to reinforce student learning.
2. Have students write a paragraph on the following question: Do you think the violence that occurred in the Kansas Territory would have encouraged or discouraged more violence in other parts of the country? Provide reasons for your answer.