

The Missouri Compromise Teacher Pages

Overview

Students will examine and answer questions about a map showing the Senate votes for and against the Missouri Compromise, and the free and slave areas that existed after the Missouri Compromise was enacted. They'll write paragraphs explaining what the map reveals about the country's stability during this time and predicting future events and debates related to the slavery question.

Time Required

30–50 minutes

National History Standards

Historical Thinking Standard 1: Chronological thinking
Historical Thinking Standard 2: Historical comprehension
Historical Thinking Standard 3: Historical analysis and interpretation
Historical Thinking Standard 4: Historical research capabilities
United States History Era 4, Standard 3: The extension, restriction, and reorganization of political democracy after 1800

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

The Missouri Compromise temporarily solved the question of how to balance the number of free states with the number of slave states, and of whether slavery should be permitted in the Louisiana Purchase territory.

Essential Question

What was the Missouri Compromise, and what did it accomplish?

Procedure

Note: The following directions are for doing this lesson as 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. Review the Missouri Compromise by reading the “Historical Context” section to the class and making sure students understand the words and terms in bold.
2. Using a whiteboard, projector, or another display device, show the class the Missouri Compromise map with only the two “State, territory, and country” layers and all bodies of water layers turned on.
3. Ask students to identify Missouri on the map, then, ask if they can identify the free and slave states in 1820, when the Missouri Compromise was enacted. Have volunteers point out these states on the map.
4. Turn on the “Free states and territories” and “Slave states and territories” layers to show which states were free and which allowed slavery. Ask students to shade these states on blank outline maps.
5. Pose these questions to the class, and facilitate a discussion based on what students see on the map and on their prior knowledge:
 - a. Which other state was admitted the same year as Missouri, as a result of the compromise? Where is this state on the map? (Maine)
 - b. What does the latitude line 36°30' mean in the context of the Missouri Compromise? Can you identify where this line is? (This is the Missouri Compromise line.)
6. Turn on the “Missouri Compromise line” layer and ask students to label Missouri and Maine on their maps. Also, have them label the Missouri Compromise line.
7. Ask students if they can identify the boundaries of the territory that the Missouri Compromise explicitly prohibited from allowing slavery. They might remember that the Missouri Compromise prohibited slavery in the Louisiana Purchase territory north of the Missouri Compromise line, except in the new state of Missouri itself. Ask students to draw lines in light pencil on their maps predicting the boundaries of this territory.
8. Turn on the “Territory closed to slavery” and “Territory opened to slavery” layers. Have students correct the boundaries on their maps, as necessary.
9. Pose these questions to the class, and facilitate a discussion based on what students see on the map and on their prior knowledge:
 - a. Why didn’t the Missouri Compromise line extend farther west? (The territory to the west was controlled by Spain.)
 - b. Was more territory opened or closed to slavery as a result of the Missouri Compromise? Why do you think this was the case? (More territory was closed to slavery; this was “Unorganized Territory.”)

- c. When Arkansas became a state in 1836, did it become a free or a slave state? (Slave)
- d. Which part of the country voted in favor of the Missouri Compromise, and which part voted against? Why do you think this was the case? (The North voted in favor, and the South voted against.) Turn on the “For” and “Against” layers.
- e. Which states’ senators split the vote? What would have happened to the compromise if both of these states’ senators had voted in line with other senators from their region? (North Carolina and South Carolina; if their senators had voted “no,” the Senate vote would have been tied.) Turn on the “Split vote” and “Title/legend” layers.

Historical Context

As the United States acquired new territories, the question of whether slavery should be allowed in the new areas became increasingly pressing. This question proved especially controversial with regard to the enormous territory acquired in the **Louisiana Purchase**. The **Missouri Territory**, which permitted slavery, applied for statehood in 1818. At this time, there was an even balance in Congress between free and slave states. Eleven states allowed slavery, and 11 did not. If Missouri were admitted to the Union as a slave state, the balance would be tilted in favor of slavery. The **Mason-Dixon Line** and the **Ohio River** had traditionally formed the boundaries between free and slave territories and states. Missouri, however, was west of the **Mississippi River** and was in the middle of the country from north to south. It therefore did not have a well-recognized boundary by which the country could decide whether it should be a free or a slave state. In 1820, Congress approved the **Missouri Compromise** as a solution to these problems.

Assessment

Have students write paragraphs answering the following questions:

What does this map tell you about the stability of the country in 1820? If you had studied this map in 1820, without knowing what events came next, what challenges might you predict the country would face in the future?

Extensions

1. Have students create timelines of the events and debates leading up to the Missouri Compromise. As an option, have them continue their timelines to include related events that occurred after the Missouri Compromise, such as the Kansas-Nebraska Act.
2. Ask students to research and report on the developing antislavery movement at this time. What influence did the antislavery movement have on the national debate over slavery in the early 19th century?