



SECESSION AND THE SENATE

Introduction

In November 1860 a deeply divided nation teetered on the brink of a civil war. In December 1860 South Carolina became the first southern state to secede from the United States. Eventually ten additional southern states left the Union. What political issues caused these states to leave the Union? Did they have the right to withdraw from the Union? What actions did the Senate take in response to the seceding states?

This activity engages students in analyzing primary sources, including a Senate Seating Chart from 1863, to determine what the Senate's responses and actions were toward the seceding states. While intended for 8th grade students, the lesson can be adapted for other grade levels.



National Standards

U.S. History National Standards

United States Era 5: Standard 1 – The Causes of the Civil War

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts, grade 8

Reading Informational Text 2, 3, 4

Speaking and Listening 1, 4

Learning Skills

Reading, building vocabulary, analyzing documents, group discussions, presenting and internet research

Essential Question

What is secession? How did the secession of the southern states from the Union affect the Senate and how did members respond?

Documents and Materials Needed

- Vocabulary Building Worksheet
- Background Information: Secession and the Senate
- Document Analysis Worksheet
- Newspaper Headline: South Carolina seceded from the Union, December 1860, followed by 10 other Southern states
- Resolution to Expel Senators July 10, 1861
- South Carolina Ordinance of Secession, December 20, 1860 and transcript
- *The Congressional Globe*, March 14, 1861: Senators from the Seceding States
- Senate Seating Chart, Congressional Directory 37th Congress, 3rd Session 1863
- Old Magazines, 8.5 x 11 white construction paper, glue, scissors and markers



Suggested Activities

Optional Warm-up Activity: Vocabulary Worksheet

Distribute a worksheet to each student. Use the worksheet as a tool to familiarize them with the words or phrases they will encounter in this activity.

Analyzing Documents

1. Begin with a general discussion on secession, based on first four paragraphs of background information. Why did states secede from the Union? What were the main issues leading to secession?
2. Divide students into three groups. Give each group a document (either Newspapers Headline: South Carolina seceded from the Union, South Carolina Ordinance of Secession, or Resolution to Expel Senators) and Document Analysis worksheet. Instruct student groups to review the document they receive, and using the Document Analysis worksheet determine what it is and how it was used. Each group should assign someone to record their group discussion.

Presentation of Document Analysis

3. Each group describes their document to the class. Does the document present a point of view? If so, how is that opinion justified?

Class discussion

4. Review the remaining three background paragraphs. What dilemma does secession pose for the Senate? Why is the resolution of the problem important? How does the solution relate to the larger issue of secession?
5. Distribute transcripts of the four highlighted portions of *The Congressional Globe*, March 14, 1861, to reinforce with students the debate that occurred in the Senate.
6. As a class study the Senate Seating Chart. Using observation and reflection, what does the seating chart reveal about the Senate membership during the Civil War?

Internet Research

7. Following this activity, students will have gained enough information to aid them in their online research of key prominent individuals during the secession of southern states. As a small group project, students conduct research on the topic at the recommended Websites:
 - Capitol Visitor Center's website, *Building a More Perfect Union*, <http://www.visitthecapitol.gov/exhibitions/civilwar>
 - U.S. House of Representatives, <http://history.house.gov/People/>
 - U.S. Senate, http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/expulsion_cases/CivilWar_Expulsion.htm



Visual Presentation

8. Students use information gathered from the Document Analysis worksheets and internet research to create a collage storyboard about the individuals they choose to research. Encourage students to use the magazines and downloaded images from recommended Web sites to create their collages.

Presentation

9. In small groups, students share their collages with each other. Follow-up this activity with a room display of their work.

Recommended Reading

Smith, Robert W. *Spotlight on America: Civil War*. Teacher Created Resources, Inc. Westminster, California, 2005.

Stanchak, John. *The Eyewitness Book Series: The Civil War*. Dorling Kindersley Publishing, New York, New York, 2000



Background Information

On January 21, 1861, in a scene of high drama, Mississippi Senator Jefferson Davis and four southern colleagues rose on the Senate floor to offer final remarks before withdrawing from the body and returning home to their states. Officials from the South had long supported states' rights as protection against the central government. During the previous decades, southern senators had frequently used the threat of secession to encourage northern states to compromise on such issues as the spread of slavery into new territories. Believing that the election of Abraham Lincoln to the presidency threatened the institution of slavery and that there was no longer any hope of compromise, southern states began to act on the principle they had so often supported—that states were sovereign bodies that had a right to withdraw from the Union or nullify offensive acts of Congress.

Southerners were adamant about preserving their way of life and economy. Prior to the Civil War, southern states were the world's largest supplier of cotton. Northern industries purchased the raw cotton and turned it into finished goods like clothing. Slaves provided the labor that made the South's economy rich in the production of cotton.

In November 1860, a deeply divided nation teetered on the brink of a civil war. In December 1860, South Carolina declared independence from the United States. Immediately, the Senate established a committee to examine plans to save the Union, including a proposed compromise that would have extended the 1820 Missouri Compromise line to the Pacific. With the exception of Missouri, slavery was prohibited north of this line that followed the 36th parallel.

In January 1861, Mississippi became the second state to secede. Following his state's secession, Senator Jefferson Davis addressed the Senate, imploring his colleagues to allow for peaceful secession of the southern states. Soon five senators from Florida, Alabama and Mississippi, led by Davis, left the Senate. The secession of southern states and the withdrawal of their elected representatives forced an unprecedented constitutional crisis in Congress.

In March 1861, the Senate debated the question; did the states or their senators have the right to leave the Union? Some senators insisted that the southern states did not have the right to withdraw from the Union. By leaving, the southern senators had effectively resigned their seats. Others believed states did have the right to secede and that seats held by southern secessionists no longer existed. Therefore, the Senate should not declare their seats vacant but simply strike their names from the roll. After a heated exchange, the Senate passed a resolution declaring the seats of their departed colleagues "vacant" and authorized the Secretary of the Senate to strike their names from the Senate roll.

After the war began and hope of reconciliation faded, ten Senators were expelled in July 1861 for disloyalty to the Union. That number reached fourteen on by February 1862 when Jesse Bright of Indiana became the last senator expelled for supporting the Confederacy.



A few states, such as Missouri and Kentucky, elected new members to replace those who were expelled. The Unionist government in Virginia sent two senators to Capitol Hill. Many desks remained unoccupied in the Senate Chamber throughout the war years and into the Reconstruction era, serving as painful reminders of the nation's disunion. The Senate continued to admit southern members from reconstructed states to representation through the early 1870s.

Source:

U.S. Senate webpage

http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/expulsion_cases/CivilWar_Expulsion.htm



Vocabulary Building Worksheet: Secession and the U.S. Senate

Name _____

Word or Phrases	I know the word.	If you know the word, use it in a sentence.	I don't know the word and need to research its meaning. Record the meaning below.
Secession			
Sovereign			
Ordinance			
Conspiracy			
Confederacy			
Resolution			



Written Document Analysis Worksheet

1. TYPE OF DOCUMENT (Check one):

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Newspaper | <input type="checkbox"/> Map | <input type="checkbox"/> Advertisement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Letter | <input type="checkbox"/> Telegram | <input type="checkbox"/> Congressional record |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Patent | <input type="checkbox"/> Press release | <input type="checkbox"/> Census report |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Memorandum | <input type="checkbox"/> Report | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |

2. UNIQUE PHYSICAL QUALITIES OF THE DOCUMENT (Check one or more):

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Interesting letterhead | <input type="checkbox"/> Notations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Handwritten | <input type="checkbox"/> "RECEIVED" stamp |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Typed | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Seals | |

3. DATE(S) OF DOCUMENT:

4. AUTHOR (OR CREATOR) OF THE DOCUMENT:

POSITION (Title):

5. FOR WHAT AUDIENCE WAS THE DOCUMENT WRITTEN?

6. DOCUMENT INFORMATION (There are many possible ways to answer A-E.)

A. List three things the author said that you think are important:

B. Why do you think this document was written?

C. What evidence in the document helps you know why it was written? Quote from the document.

D. List two things the document tells you about life in the United States at the time it was written:

E. Write a question to the author that is left unanswered by the document:

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