

CIVIL WAR EDUCATION



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ELECTION OF 1864 | HIGH SCHOOL

Election of 1864

Comparing two presidential candidates

THE CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM: Goal 7

NCSS GOALS: II, III, V, VI

GRADES: High school

APPROXIMATE LENGTH OF TIME: 1-2 class days

GOALS:

1. To learn the basic issues and candidates in the Presidential election of 1864.
2. To understand how the fall of Atlanta acted as a turning point in the 1864 election.
3. To understand the significance of the 1864 election in the continued prosecution of the Civil War.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Provided a historical background of the 1864 election the students will analyze in written form what happened and what could have happened if the situation had worked out to the contrary.
2. Given a historical document students will be able to answer four comprehension questions with well argued answers.

MATERIALS USED:

Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address

ANTICIPATORY SET/HOOK:

Provide thought-provoking questions:

Have you ever voted or gone with your parents to vote?

Have you ever seen commercials for individuals running for office?

How do you think people choose who they vote for?

Do you have concerns or beliefs as a citizen of the United States? Would you vote based on these concerns and beliefs?

PROCEDURE:

Activity 1

Tell your students that you are taking a poll for an upcoming Presidential election (don't mention the Civil War to them yet). Give them the following two candidate profiles and let them vote for the candidate they think is most likely to win.

Candidate 1

This candidate is the incumbent. He is a lawyer and former Congressman. His election four years ago brought on a war that the country has been fighting ever since. The war is not going well but he is determined to keep fighting until one side or the other has won. If your country wins, he has no plans to punish your enemy, but instead wants to help them recover economic stability as soon as possible. He is strongly in favor of civil rights.

Candidate 2

Formerly the general commanding your forces in this war until Candidate 1 dismissed him. He was very popular with your troops and many people say that if he were still in command the war would not be going so badly. Still, he is campaigning on a peace platform. If he wins, his party wants to negotiate a truce with your enemy and stop the war. He is not against civil rights, but he is not as strongly in favor of it as Candidate 1. Now tell your students that you just heard some important news. Your country has just won a big battle and it looks like you could win this war after all. Ask them if they would consider changing their vote.

Candidate 1 is Abraham Lincoln as many people saw him in the summer of 1864. Republicans in his own party thought that he was not prosecuting the war vigorously enough. His opponent in the 1864 Presidential race was Peace

Democrat George McClellan. The Peace Democrats wanted to negotiate peace with the Confederacy and end the war. The summer of 1864 was one of the darkest seasons of Lincoln's presidency - the war was not going well and he was at odds with Congress over Reconstruction policy. Lincoln wanted a lenient policy that would reintegrate the Confederate states into the Union as quickly as possible.

Have your students write a journal entry or essay using the question: What do you think might have happened had Lincoln not been re-elected?

On August 23, 1864 Lincoln wrote in a memorandum, "This morning, as for some days past, it seems exceedingly probable that this Administration will not be re-elected. Then it will be my duty to so cooperate with the President-elect as to save the Union between the election and the inauguration; as he will have secured his election on such grounds that he cannot possibly save it afterwards."

The fall of Atlanta in September 1864 changed the political picture overnight. Headlines blazoned the news across the North. Dissidents within the Republican party abandoned plans to nominate an alternate Republican candidate and threw their political clout into the effort to defeat McClellan. When the election was held only two months later, Lincoln won with 212 electoral votes, and beat McClellan by more than 500,000 popular votes. His support was especially strong among Union soldiers.

Activity 2

Have students read Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address and discuss or journal on the following questions:

1. What emotion is Lincoln evoking in his address?
2. What are Lincoln's general feelings toward the war?
3. What would Lincoln like to see happen at the end of the war?
4. As a citizen of the U.S. in 1864 how would you have responded to this speech?

CLOSURE:

View Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address at the Library of Congress.

ASSESSMENT:

Go back to the objectives, and make sure that each of your students has met the objectives.