Fighting Words: Causes of the American Civil War

**Historical Background**

Events related to westward expansion led to the Civil War including the Missouri Compromise, the annexation of Texas, the Compromise of 1850, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and the *Dred Scott* decision (4-5.7). **Sectionalism** was the result of the growing cultural and economic differences between the regions (4-6.1) particularly their differences over issues of slavery in the territories. Sectionalism means that the interests of each section of the country—the North or the South was more important to the people of that region than the interests of the country as a whole.

The Northern and Southern sections of the country also had different philosophies about the power of the federal government. Southerners supported the idea of **states’ rights** because they feared that federal authorities might take away the right to own slaves as they had in the Northwest Ordinance and the Missouri Compromise north of the 36 30 (4-5.7). Southerners preferred the idea behind the Articles of Confederation (4-4.1). They argued that authority rested with the states not with the people as represented by the federal government. The North recognized the authority of the national government.

The **election of 1860** brought sectional conflict to the breaking point. The Republican Party opposed the expansion of slavery into the territories and nominated Abraham Lincoln as their candidate. The Democratic Party split their nomination between two candidates both of whom supported the rights of southerners to take their slaves into the territories. Stephen A Douglas was one of the Democratic candidates. A third party nominated a fourth candidate. The southern states feared that if Abraham Lincoln was elected they would lose power in the government as new states were admitted as free states and the balance of power in the United States Senate shifted to the free states. This loss of power might lead to the federal government outlawing slavery throughout the United States. Slavery in the territories was a key issue for the four candidates who competed for the presidency. Lincoln won the election of 1860. Many in the South mistakenly thought that Lincoln would free the slaves because he was a Republican even though he repeatedly said that he would respect the existence of slavery in the states in which it already existed. Claiming that they were protecting states’ rights, eleven southern states seceded from the Union. As a result of this **secession**, these states declared that they were a new country, the Confederate States of America, and elected Jefferson Davis president of the Confederacy. When Lincoln was inaugurated president of the United States he promised to uphold the laws and the Union. Although slavery caused the Civil War, Lincoln did not support the freeing of slaves. When the war began in 1861, neither the Union nor the Confederacy entered the war with any intention or desire to change the status of African Americans.


**South Carolina Standards** (2011)

4-6.3 Explain the specific events and issues that led to the Civil War, including **sectionalism**, slavery in the territories, states’ rights, the presidential election of 1860, and secession.
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3-4.3 Explain the reasons for South Carolina’s secession from the Union, including the abolitionist movement and the concept of states’ rights.

8-4.2 Analyze how sectionalism arose from racial tension, including the Denmark Vesey plot, slave codes and the growth of the abolitionist movement.

8-4.3 Analyze key issues that led to South Carolina’s secession from the Union, including the nullification controversy and John C. Calhoun, the extension of slavery and the compromises over westward expansion, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the Dred Scott decision, and the election of 1860.

USHC-2.4 Compare the social and cultural characteristics of the North, the South, and the West during the antebellum period, including the lives of African Americans and social reform movements such as abolition and women’s rights.

USHC-3.1 Evaluate the relative importance of political events and issues that divided the nation and led to civil war, including the compromises reached to maintain the balance of free and slave states, the abolitionist movement, the Dred Scott case, conflicting views on states’ rights and federal authority, the emergence of the Republican Party, and the formation of the Confederate States of America.

Objectives
- Students will analyze and interpret historical images.
- Students will explain the causes of the American Civil War.
- Students will summarize their findings using visual imagery.

Time Required
3-4 class periods

Recommended Grade Level
Elementary/Middle/High

Lesson Materials
- Civil War historical documents provided in this lesson packet
- Causes of the Civil War cartoon sheet
- Question Guide
- Assessment Question
- Vocabulary sheet

Lesson Preparation
- Print class copies of the question guide.
- Print a copy of the vocabulary sheet that goes along with this lesson.
- List these six causes of the Civil War on the board or post them in the room as a reminder to students.
  - Differences between the North and South
  - Abolition
  - Slavery in the Territories
  - States’ Rights
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- Election of 1860
- Secession
- Check out Two miserable presidents: Everything Your Schoolbooks Didn’t Tell You About the Civil War by Steve Sheinkin from your local library or media center.

Lesson Procedure

Phase 1
- Start the lesson by reading “How to Rip a Country Apart”, a section from the book.
- Then explain to students that they will be looking at six causes of the American Civil War. Refer to your list on the board.
- Pass out the vocabulary sheet. Definitions for each term are written. Explain each term verbally. Next, model for students how they would write their own meaning and draw a picture for the remainder of the words in the list.
- Students should then write their own meaning and draw a picture that helps them understand the term. Circle the room and give assistance where needed. You may want to allow students to work in pairs for this portion of the lesson.

Phase 2
- First, use the “Young America” and “Innocent Cause” images to model how students should gather information from documents. Allow time for student feedback and interaction with the documents.
  *Note: Depending on your class, you may want to introduce each cartoon, one by one and analyze them as a group. For more advanced learners follow the next steps.
- Divide students into five groups. Each group will explore a different cause by analyzing primary documents. Assign causes as you divide students.
  - Distribute the remainder of the primary documents and question guide to groups. Allow sufficient time for analysis. Let students know that they will need to report their findings and ideas when they are finished.
- Direct one student in each group to place their image under the appropriate cause.
- Images go along with pictures as follows. Please note that images are subject to interpretation. If a student gives a rational explanation for a choice that does not match the ones below, they may not be wrong but simply interpreting the information differently.
  - Differences between the North and South – Young America; Innocent Cause
  - Abolition – Uncle Tom; Dred Scott
  - Slavery in the Territories - Map
  - States’ Rights – Throne; Slave Cabin; Cotton Yard
  - Election of 1860 – Star of North; Electoral Votes
  - Secession – Tree, Union Dissolved

Phase 3
- Have one student from each group act as reporter after analysis. This student will need to share the following:
  - What was your image about?
Which of the six causes that we have talked about does your image match? Explain why you chose this cause.

- After all groups have reported, distribute the cartoon sheet to each student. Explain to students that they are to draw a picture or cartoon that represents each cause of the Civil War.
- When students finish their cartoon, they will share their cartoon panel with 3 people outside of their group.

Assessment
- Essay question evaluation: What were the main causes of the American Civil War? Explain each cause.

Digital Collections Information
This lesson plan is based on images and/or documents from several institutions including the University of South Carolina Libraries, The National Archives, and The Library of Congress. See individual images for institution information.

To see other collections that may be helpful to your search, visit the Digital Collections homepage or visit SCDL’s collections.
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Vocabulary Sheet

Directions: Read the definitions for the following words. Create your own meaning for the words based on the definition given. Draw a picture that represents your understanding of the word.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term and Definition</th>
<th>Your Meaning</th>
<th>Your Drawing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>civil war – a war between people of the same country</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>territory – an area of land without a formal government</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>abolition – doing away with something</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sectionalism – having concern for your region</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agrarian – having many farms or land</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>industrial – having many factories</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>secede – breaking away</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>election – the process of voting someone into a position</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question Guide

**Directions:** Analyze your image(s) by answering the following questions. Be prepared to share when you are finished.

1. Describe what you see.

2. What people or objects are shown?

3. What, if any, words do you see?

4. What do you see that might be a symbol?

5. What’s happening in the picture?

6. What is the picture about?

7. Which of the six causes that we have talked about does your image match?
   a. Differences between the North and South
   b. Abolition
   c. Slavery in the Territories
   d. States’ Rights
   e. Election of 1860
   f. Secession
8. Explain why you chose this cause.

9. Place your picture under the appropriate cause in the classroom.
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Causes of the Civil War: A Cartoon by: __________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Differences Between North &amp; South</th>
<th>Abolition</th>
<th>Slavery in the Territories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>States’ Rights</th>
<th>Election of 1860</th>
<th>Secession</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Written by Connie Geer

See this lesson and more at SC Digital Academy
The innocent Cause of all the trouble.

Designed and Published by
Stimson & Co., 79 Cedar-street, N.Y.
Gray = Slave States
Pink = Free States
Green = Territory (not yet a state; question of slavery undecided)
Image courtesy of the South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>States</th>
<th>President</th>
<th>For Vice President</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island and Providence</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
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<td>Louisiana</td>
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<td>Mississippi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
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<td>Illinois</td>
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<td>Alabama</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>363</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The whole number of Electors appointed to vote for President and Vice President of the United States is 363, of which a majority is 182.

I now announce to the two Houses of Congress, the state of the vote for President of the United States, to be:

For Abraham Lincoln of Illinois, 180
For John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky, 72
For John Bell of Tennessee, 39
For Henry S. Clay of Kentucky, 12

And the state of the vote for Vice President of the United States, to be:

For Hannibal Hamlin of Maine, 180
For Joseph Lane of Oregon, 72
For Edward Everett of Massachusetts, 30
For Herschel V. Johnson of Georgia, 12

I therefore declare that Abraham Lincoln of Illinois having received a majority of the whole number of Electoral votes, is duly elected President of the United States, for four years, commencing on the fourth day of March, 1861.

And that Hannibal Hamlin of Maine having received a majority of the whole number of Electoral votes, is duly elected Vice President of the United States for four years, commencing on the fourth day of March, 1861.

The business for which this two Houses were assembled having been finished, the Senate will now return to its Chamber.

Passed unanimously at 1:15 o'clock, P. M. December 20th, 1860.

AN ORDINANCE

To dissolve the Union between the State of South Carolina and other States united with her under the compact entitled "The Constitution of the United States of America."

We, the People of the State of South Carolina, in Convention assembled, do declare and ordain, and it is hereby declared and ordained,

That the Ordinance adopted by us in Convention, on the twenty-third day of May, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty-eight, whereby the Constitution of the United States of America was ratified, and also, all Acts and parts of Acts of the General Assembly of this State, ratifying amendments of the said Constitution, are hereby repealed; and that the union now subsisting between South Carolina and other States, under the name of "The United States of America," is hereby dissolved.

THE UNION IS DISSOLVED!