

Popular Sovereignty Under the Kansas-Nebraska Act

Overview

The lesson helps the student to understand the concept of popular sovereignty as it relates to the settlement of Kansas Territory. The lesson includes background information on the Missouri Compromise, the Compromise of 1850, and the Kansas-Nebraska Act. The lesson provides students with the opportunity to read a primary source document in the form of a persuasive text. The lesson is designed for two class periods but can be altered to meet the teacher's needs.

Standards

Current standards can be found on kshs.org.

Objectives

Content:

- The student will describe how the Missouri Compromise, the Compromise of 1850, and the Kansas-Nebraska Act treat the issue of slavery in the territories.
- The student will define the concept of popular sovereignty.

Skills:

- The student analyzes a primary source in terms of purpose and point of view.
- The student identifies the author's position and the ways in which he supports his position.

Essential Questions

- Why was the issue of slavery threatening to tear the country apart?
- How does the concept of self-government apply to states' rights?
- Why did the concept of popular sovereignty make it difficult for Kansas to write a constitution?

Activities

This activity uses the following *Read Kansas* cards:

- **The Fight Over Slavery in the United States: A Series of Compromises**
- **Popular Sovereignty and the Kansas-Nebraska Act**
- **Stephen Douglas and the Kansas-Nebraska Act**

Day 1

1. Activate the student's prior knowledge of slavery in the United States.
2. As a class examine the map of the United States in 1820 (the map is on **The Fight Over Slavery in the United States: A Series of Compromises** *Read Kansas* card). Discuss the balance of power that existed in 1820 and why the states wanted to sustain that balance.
3. In small groups have the students read and discuss **The Fight Over Slavery in the United States: A Series of Compromises** *Read Kansas* card.
4. On the board have the students help you draw a timeline placing the Missouri Compromise and the Compromise of 1850.
5. As a class discuss what the students already know about the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Place the Kansas-Nebraska Act on your timeline.
6. In small groups have the students read and discuss **Popular Sovereignty and the Kansas-Nebraska Act** *Read Kansas* card.
7. As a class write a definition of popular sovereignty. Discuss why this concept might make it difficult for the state to agree on a constitution.
8. Have students fill out the **How Was the Issue of Slavery Decided?** worksheet.

Day 2

1. Review the definition of popular sovereignty.
2. As a class read the **Stephen Douglas and the Kansas-Nebraska Act** *Read Kansas* card, including Douglas' speech printed in *The Congressional Globe*. Explain that the speech is a primary source document.
3. Use the **Understanding a Primary Source** graphic organizer to discuss Douglas' speech. Complete the graphic organizer as a class with each student having his or her own copy. In discussing the speech make sure you cover the purpose and point of view, as well as the arguments Douglas makes in defense of the Kansas-Nebraska Act.
4. Have each student fill out the **Defense of the Kansas-Nebraska Act** worksheet.

Extended Activity

- Ask for volunteers in the class to debate the concept of popular sovereignty under the Kansas-Nebraska Act. This should not be a debate over slavery, but about states' rights as defined and limited in the U.S. Constitution.

Assessment

- Observe the students' ability to participate in the small group discussions.
- Evaluate the students' success at completing the graphic organizer.
- Evaluate the students' worksheets.

For the Teacher

If you are using the textbook, *The Kansas Journey*, this lesson can be used with pages 68-72 and pages 88-90. If not, the information in the readings should provide the background information needed to complete this lesson.

Several of the images used on **The Fight over Slavery in the United States: A Series of Compromises** Read Kansas cards for this lesson illustrate the feelings of the time. When the painting of the group was created, some of the individuals involved in the Compromise of 1850 already had died. This is a symbolic group brought together in the painting to eulogize the recent legislative efforts toward compromise. The political cartoon is a satire on President Taylor's attempt to balance southern and northern interests on the question of slavery. Students do not need to be able to read the text of this cartoon, but it should remind students of the balancing act involved in the Compromise of 1850.

Answer key for the "How Was the Issue of Slavery Decided?" worksheet:

- How was the issue of slavery decided by the Missouri Compromise?
The federal government, rather than the states, decided on the issue of slavery. Slavery in the northern portion of the Louisiana Territory was banned.
- How was the issue of slavery decided by the Compromise of 1850?
The Fugitive Slave Act was passed which required Americans to return run-away slaves, the selling of slaves in Washington, D.C. was banned, and Utah and New Mexico Territories were given the right to popular sovereignty so the people who lived there could decide on the issue of slavery.
- How was the issue of slavery decided by the Kansas-Nebraska Act?
The Missouri Compromise was repealed to apply the concept of popular sovereignty so that the people who lived in Kansas and Nebraska Territories would vote to decide if they wanted slavery or not.

Answer key for the "Understanding a Primary Source" worksheet:

- Douglas defines self-government as:
The people, themselves, should be allowed to decide the questions for their domestic institutions, subject to restrictions and limitations imposed by the U.S. Constitution.
- What happened to the Missouri Compromise?
The Missouri Compromise was superseded by the Compromise of 1850.
- Where does the principle of self-government in the Kansas-Nebraska Act come from?
The principle of self-government comes from the principles established by the Compromise of 1850.
- Self-government is subject to what limitations?
It is subject to the restrictions and limitations imposed by the U.S. Constitution.

Answer key for the "Defense of the Kansas-Nebraska Act" worksheet:

- What was the purpose of Stephen Douglas' speech recorded in *The Congressional Globe*?
Douglas was defending the Kansas-Nebraska Act.
- What position does Stephen Douglas take on the issue of slavery?
Douglas believes that the issue of slavery should be decided by the people living in the territory.
- How does Douglas support his position?
Douglas argues that it was the intent of the committee to use the principles established by the Compromise of 1850 as the guide for this bill.

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Resources for this lesson are from:

- Kansas State Historical Society collections
- Library of Congress

Name: _____

How Was the Issue of Slavery Decided?

Missouri Compromise



Compromise of 1850



Kansas-Nebraska Act



Name: _____

Understanding a Primary Source

The Congressional Globe, 1854

In his defense of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Stephen Douglas does not use the words “popular sovereignty.” Instead he calls it the “principle of self-government.”

Douglas defines self-government as:

What happened to the Missouri
Compromise?

Where does the principle of self-
government in the Kansas-Nebraska
Act come from?

Self-government is subject to what
limitations?

