

INTERACTIVE MAP LESSON:

BALANCING POLITICAL POWER

RECOMMENDED TIME

90 minutes

OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, students should be able to:

- Summarize how the entry of new states into the Union affected the balance of power between the free and slave states.
- Discuss how the increase in population in the North changed the balance of power between the free and slave states.
- Report on why the Compromise of 1850 was so important.
- Explain how the presidential election of 1860 sparked a national crisis.

LEARNING CONNECTIONS

- **Learning Styles:** linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial
- **Skills Mastery:** defining/clarifying problems, solving problems, understanding cause and effect

RESOURCE

- **Interactive Map:** [Balancing Political Power](#)

CONTEXT

During the late 1700s and throughout the 1800s, the United States expanded its territory as never before. In the late 1700s the United States gained the Northwest Territory—which would become the states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin—from Great Britain. In the early 1800s the United States bought the Louisiana Territory, which would become 13 future states, from France. During the mid-1800s conflicts with Mexico led to the annexation of Texas and won the United States a vast southwestern territory that stretched to the Pacific coast. By the 1850s the United States had expanded its continental territory to its present-day boundaries.

As these territories began to be settled and were admitted to the Union as states, tensions began to build between the antislavery North and the pro-slavery South. As new states entered the Union and as the population increased in existing states, the balance of power in Congress shifted. For example, slavery was banned in the entire Northwest Territory by the terms of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. All five states that were created from that territory sent antislavery representatives to Congress. As more states were admitted, and the balance of power began to shift subtly and gradually to the free states, southerners felt their way of life being threatened as their votes seemed to count less against an antislavery majority. When the antislavery Republican candidate Abraham Lincoln was elected president in 1860 without winning a single southern state, many southerners felt that they no longer had any power in the federal government. Southern states began to secede, and war loomed on the horizon.

Developing Geographic, Historical, and Sociopolitical Literacy. In this lesson, students will learn about how the entry of new states into the Union affected the balance of power between the free and slave states; how the increase in population in the North changed the balance of power between the free and slave states; why the Compromise of 1850 was so important; and how the presidential election of 1860 sparked a national crisis.

OPEN

1. Present the information from the Context section to students in the form of a brief lecture. Tell students that they will be learning more about the shifting balance of power between free and slave states between 1820 and 1860.

TEACH

2. Have students explore the Balancing Political Power Interactive Map on a computer. Students may work individually or in small groups, depending on the number of computers available.
3. Have students complete the online review at the end of the interactive map. Check their scores to confirm their overall understanding of the material presented in the interactive map activity. If time permits, allow students who received low scores on the review to explore the interactive map further. Encourage them to take notes on the electronic notepad that is available to them throughout the activity.

If many students in the class experience difficulty with the interactive map activity and review, you may wish to have them complete one or more of the optional activities below to ensure mastery of the learning objectives.

CLOSE

4. **Defining and Clarifying Problems, Solving Problems, and Understanding Cause and Effect.** Tell students that, despite extremely tense emotional involvement in the issue of slavery, many members of Congress seemed to be genuinely trying to keep the balance of power intact from 1820 to 1860.

The compromises they enacted did much to accomplish this for many years. Ask the class to consider whether representatives in Congress did enough to prevent secession and eventual war. Ask volunteers from among those who think that preventive measures existed to tell the class what they think might have preserved the peace. Then ask volunteers from among those who think secession and war were inevitable to explain their stance.

OPTIONS

- **Understanding Cause and Effect.** Have students work in small groups to create balancing scales from two cans or plastic containers, a ruler, and some string. Tell them to label the two sides of the scale “free” or “slave.” Then have them create weights that represent the states that entered the Union between 1820 and 1860. Using the information from the Balancing Political Power Interactive Map, have each group place their weights, in order of the states’ admission to the Union, into the appropriate sides of the scale. Have each group create a simple chart of their choice to record the results. To assess students’ work or to guide students, use the [Creating a Chart Rubric](#).
- **Synthesizing Information.** Have each student create a time line representing the shifting balance of power between free and slave states from 1820 to 1860. Tell students to include any significant events, conflicts, compromises, or new states that affected the balance. Have them

use the Balancing Political Power Interactive Map or the library to complete the assignment. Encourage students to illustrate or otherwise enhance their time lines before they submit them. To assess students' work or to guide students, use the [Time Lines Rubric](#).