



Nullification!

Thematic Unit

Introduction

What is the balance of power between the federal and state governments? This question was a constant issue from the creation of the Constitution to the Civil War – the most famous conflict over states' rights and power. The Nullification Crisis of 1832-33 was a prelude to Civil War, and the seeds of discord were sewn as South Carolina threatened to nullify the Tariffs of 1828 and 1832 and secede from the Union. How did President Andrew Jackson – a South Carolina-born plantation owner – deal with the issue of states' rights and try to hold the fragile Union together?

Objectives

- A. Examine historical information from a variety of sources, including museum and library collections, letters, maps, government documents, oral histories, firsthand accounts, and credible web sites.
- B. Analyze domestic policy in the early years of the United States
- C. Understand how the Nullification Crisis shaped America's future, and how a Civil War was averted in the 1830s.

Background

In order to protect American goods from being negatively impacted by lower prices of foreign goods, Congress created a protective tariff in order to prop up American industry, and lessen the demand for imports. When John Quincy Adams signed the Protective Tariff of 1828, the bill was seen to favor the Northern economy at the expense of the South. Southern states had to pay higher taxes because they mostly imported their

manufactured goods from Northern states, and were also taxed on the exports they produced. South Carolina, led by Vice President John C. Calhoun, passed a resolution nullifying the Tariff and threatening to secede from the Union. Andrew Jackson, through the threat of force and compromise, was able to save the Union and, for the time being, avert a Civil War.

Vocabulary

Alien & Sedition Acts
American System
Domestic goods
Exports
Federalists
Force Bill of 1833
Foreign goods
Imports
Insurrection
Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions of 1798
Nullification
Ordinance of Nullification
Panic of 1819
Precedent
Protective Tariff
Secession
South Carolina Exposition & Protest
States' Rights
Tariff
Tariff of Abominations
Tax

Suggested Pre-Program Activities

1. Give students a blank map of the United States and a list of agricultural and industrial products. Have them fill in where they think they belong.
2. Create an economic system for your class. Task your students with raising revenue for the classroom without an income tax. How would they bring in money for the classroom?

Presentation Outline

Note to classroom instructor: this will be covered with in the education class. There is no need to cover this information prior to education program.

1. Discuss the importance of setting a precedent. In what instances have students seen a precedent set, and followed?

2. Briefly cover why America fought for independence from Great Britain. What were the reasons for breaking away? How do these reasons foreshadow the political battle between federal and state governments in the future?
3. Cover the major instance in American history (prior to the Nullification Crisis) of states challenging federal law – the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions of 1798. What precedent was set, and why were they nullifying the Alien & Sedition Acts?
4. What is the difference between a tariff and a tax? How would the government raise revenue without an income tax? What is a protective tariff? Discuss the details of the Protective Tariff of 1828 – and its pros and cons.
5. Discuss why the South was upset with the Tariff of 1828 – how did their economic system differ from the North, and why did this matter? Why was the Tariff of 1828 seen to penalize South Carolina most of all?
6. Cover how the Panic of 1819 affected the Tariff of 1828, and why did the South call the Tariff of 1828 the “Tariff of Abominations?”
7. How did the politics of the Tariff of 1828 affect the presidential election later that year, and who were the major players?
8. Introduce John C. Calhoun’s role in the Nullification Crisis – what was the importance of the South Carolina Exposition and Protest? How did this affect his relationship with Jackson?
9. Discuss how a celebration in honor of Thomas Jefferson’s birthday create a rift between Jackson and Calhoun – and where were the battle lines drawn?
10. Analyze steps taken by Jackson and Congress to appease the South (introducing the Tariff of 1832) – and discuss South Carolina’s increasingly militant response to the Tariff.
11. Discuss how state elections in South Carolina in 1832 affected the course of nullification in the state. What was Calhoun’s new role?
12. As South Carolina became a hot-spot in America, discuss how Jackson took steps to prepare for an impending attack by South Carolina militants on federal outposts and stations in Charleston. Examine why Charleston was so important to the nullifiers, and to Jackson.
13. Analyze how South Carolina saw the federal government as a threat to their state and way of life (meaning slavery). If the government can pass laws that tax them “unfairly,” where would the government stop, and what impact would it have on slavery?
14. Examine the differences between Calhoun’s political theory and Jackson’s – why was there friction between the two?
15. Ask for ways that Jackson could both flex federal muscle, while at the same time trying to placate South Carolina. How did the Force Bill of 1833 and the revised tariff achieve relative peace with South Carolina? What sort of precedent did these bills set? What was Henry Clay’s role in this, and why was he known forever after as the Great Compromiser.
16. Discuss how the actions of Andrew Jackson affected Abraham Lincoln’s treatment of the South almost 30 years later – and how South Carolina used the Nullification Crisis to prepare for nullification’s reappearance.

Suggested Post-Program Activities

1. Divide the class into North and South and hold a class debate on the validity of the position of nullification and states' rights. Have the class vote on the issue. Have students write a position paper explaining their reasoning for their vote.
2. Return to #2 of the pre-program activities. Now how will the class raise revenue without an income tax?
3. Have students draw a political cartoon caricaturing the issue of nullification.

Web Links & Resources

[1798 petition to Congress](#) objecting to the Alien & Sedition Acts

Jackson's [Message to Congress](#) on December 10, 1832, regarding South Carolina's Nullification Ordinance

The [Kentucky Resolution of 1798](#).

[Letter from Jackson to Martin Van Buren](#) on the Nullification Crisis

[The Avalon Project](#) on the Alien & Sedition Acts

The [South Carolina Exposition and Protest](#)

Video – Learning on the [Tariff of Abominations](#)

The [Virginia Resolution of 1798](#).

Selected Bibliography

Meacham, Jon. "American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House." Random House, 2008.

The Library of Congress Civil War Desk Reference. Ed. Margaret E. Wagner, Gary W. Gallagher, Paul Finkelman, James M. McPherson. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002. (pg. 107-108)