



The Corrupt Bargain

Thematic Unit

Introduction

Drama! Intrigue! Scandal! The Presidential Election of 1824 was the most hotly-contested election in American history to that time. Join Andrew Jackson's Hermitage, Home of the People's President, in an interactive look at the election that changed the course of American history, examining the question of whether or not our nation is a republic, or a democracy. By referencing primary source documents such as the diary of John Quincy Adams, the official record of the electoral vote, the vote in the House of Representatives and personal letters from Andrew Jackson, students will be able to see a Revolutionary nation come into its own.

Objectives

- A. Examine historical information from a variety of sources, including museum and library collections, letters, maps, government documents, oral histories, firsthand accounts, and web sites.
- B. Analyze documentation to uncover the events of the Presidential Election of 1824.
- C. Understand, through dialogue and discussion, how the Presidential Election of 1824 reflected the political climate of the era, its effect on John Quincy Adams' presidency, and the future of American politics.

Background

A former cabinet member and Senator. The Speaker of the House of Representatives. A well-travelled international diplomat and the son of a Founding Father. An Indian-fighter, duelist, and powerhouse in Western politics. The Election of 1824 was the first

election to that time in which there was not a majority of votes earned by a candidate. As a result, the election moved to the House of Representatives, where each state received one vote. John Quincy Adams, despite being outgained by almost 40,000 votes, won the presidency, and the campaign for the election of 1828 began almost immediately after claims from Jackson supporters alleged a “corrupt bargain” between Adams and Speaker of the House Henry Clay. This election had a major impact on politics in a growing nation as America tried to navigate between its roots as a republic and future as a democracy.

Vocabulary

Candidate
Constituency
Corrupt Bargain
Democracy
Electoral College
Electorate
Militia
Nationalist
Political cartoon
Popular vote
Republic
States’ rights
Suffrage

Suggested Pre-Program Activities

1. Ask students to pick a candidate, research their platforms, and create a campaign poster for their candidate.
2. Divide students into groups for each of the four candidates and create a political campaign.
3. Select four students and assign them the background of each candidate. Have them make a speech highlighting why they should earn the vote of their classmates, then hold an election.
4. Ask students to create a political cartoon based on one of the candidates, either for or against.

Presentation Outline

Note to classroom instructor: this information will be covered within the education program.

1. Begin program by discussing how the election of 1824 was different from a constituency point of view. Who was eligible to vote? How was the voting process carried out (speak candidate’s name aloud)?
2. Who were the four candidates for the presidency in 1824?

- a. Introduce William Crawford and his background and experience. What effect did his stroke have on his candidacy?
 - b. Introduce Henry Clay, his background and experience.
 - c. Introduce John Quincy Adams, his background and experience.
 - d. Introduce Andrew Jackson, his background and experience.
3. Discuss Andrew Jackson's two big advantages in the campaign of 1824 (The American tour of the Marquis de Lafayette, and the virtually nationwide presence of the Militia).
4. Show students the political cartoon, "A Foot-Race." How does this cartoon view the campaign for the presidency shaping up?
5. Examine a map of the United States in 1824. Discuss how the country was different from today.
6. Look at a map of the popular vote results in the 1824 election. How many states did each candidate win?
7. Discuss the results of the popular vote in the election. Does this mean that we have our 6th president?
8. Examine the official record of the electoral vote in the presidential election. Who received the most electoral votes? How many total electoral votes were available? How many electoral votes were needed to secure the presidency? What's the difference between a plurality and a majority?
9. What happens if there is not a majority of electoral votes won in an election? Do we have a precedent in the Constitution (12th Amendment)?
10. So who moves on to a runoff in the House of Representatives? What role does Henry Clay now play in the election?
11. Discuss the evening meeting between John Quincy Adams and Henry Clay on January 9, 1825. What effect *could* this meeting have on the election?
12. What was Jackson's reaction to the rumors swirling around Washington regarding the vote in the House of Representatives?
13. Examine the results of the vote in the House of Representatives. How many states did each of the three candidates win? Did any of the Representatives vote against the results of the popular vote in their state?
14. Who did John Quincy Adams name his Secretary of State? Why would this be such an attractive post?
15. Discuss the reaction across the political landscape – what famous term did Andrew Jackson Donelson coin from this?
16. Examine the political fallout from the Adams/Clay agreement. How did politicians react?
17. Discuss Jackson's reaction to the outcome of the 1824 election.
18. Examine how John Quincy Adams addressed the controversy surrounding his election in his inaugural address.
19. Begin discussion on whether the United States is a republic or a democracy. How would students define each term? How does the definition change the view of what transpired in the vote in the House?

20. Discuss the idea of the United States having Electors came from – a compromise between the legislature electing a leader, and the general public electing a leader. If you're an Elector who believes the US is a republic, which candidate is more attractive as president?
21. So was the bargain "corrupt?"
22. How did the election of 1824 shape the election of 1828 and the future of American politics?

Suggested Post-Program Activities

1. Create a fictional entry in Henry Clay's diary for the evening of January 9, 1825. How will they imagine the conversation between Clay and Adams? Allow students to perform conversation, if desired.
2. Have students research the voting history of their, or a selected, state. Are there any trends they see in the candidate that the majority of the constituency votes for? Was there a shift in how their state voted from 1824 to 1828, and beyond?
3. Ask students to create a chart of the total number of popular votes counted from 1824-2008. What is the percentage in difference?
4. Have students pretend they are John Quincy Adams, and write their inaugural address in 1825. What would it say? How would they address this controversy?

Selected Bibliography

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Eaton, Clement. *Henry Clay and the Art of American Politics*. Little, Brown and Company, 1957.

Garraty, John A. and Mark C. Carnes. *American National Biography*, vol. 5, "Crawford, William Harris". Oxford University Press, 1999.

McMillan, Richard. "Election of 1824: Corrupt Bargain or the Birth of Modern Politics?". *New England Journal of History* 58 (2): 24-37. (2001).

Remini, Robert V. *Andrew Jackson: Volume Two, The Course of American Freedom*. Johns Hopkins, 1981.

Schlesinger, Arthur M. *History of American Presidential Elections: Election Years, 1789-1824*. Chelsea House, 1985.

Web Links

[The Diaries of John Quincy Adams](#)

Electoral College – [Votesmart.org](https://votesmart.org)

[A Foot-Race](#) (political cartoon)

[John Quincy Adams' Inaugural Address](#)

[1824 Election results](#) – National Archives and Records Administration

United States' [Secretaries of State](#)