

History
UNFOLDING

THE CIVIL WAR



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MindSparks
CHALLENGING STUDENTS TO THINK HISTORICALLY

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Introduction

The Civil War

The story of the Civil War is history at a high point of drama, intensity, and importance. It was a turning point for the nation every bit as significant as the American Revolution itself—which in some ways it simply completed. For four years, this bloody conflict divided regions, communities, even families. It dominated every aspect of life. And its impact lingered for many decades. In fact, we still live in its aftermath.

The key issue at the heart of the conflict was slavery. And the nation paid a heavy price for this great flaw in its republican creed and institutions. In the midst of the struggle, Lincoln perhaps summed it up best. In his Second Inaugural Address, he told the nation:

Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may pass away. Yet if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled by the bond-man's two-hundred-and-fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn by the lash shall be paid with another drawn by the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said 'the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.'

It is impossible to tell the entire story of the Civil War with just twelve illustrations. But the twelve we have chosen focus on many of the central themes in the history of the Civil War. The illustrations are presented in four lessons. Each lesson uses three of the illustrations to explore one broad topic in the overall story. Briefly, the four lessons are as follows:

The Divided Nation

The illustrations here call attention to the immediate political causes of the final split between the North and South. And they look at the very first military clashes between the two sides.

Warriors and Warfare

The focus here is on the terribly violent character of Civil War fighting, the high quality of military leadership on both sides, and the growing role of black soldiers in the Union ranks as the conflict wore on.

Behind the Lines

Political and economic trends behind the lines were just as important to the Civil War as the military battles themselves. Here we focus on two key aspects of the war behind the lines—Lincoln's leadership and the role of industrial technology and economic power in giving the North its decisive advantage.

The Bitter End

The consequences of the war were huge: the enormous suffering, the disruption of every aspect of social and economic life (especially in the South), the continuing legacy and memory of the war. All of these factors kept the war alive as a force in American life for many decades.

Using Photos, Cartoons, and Other Visuals to Teach History

Many textbooks are full of colorful visuals. However, all too often these visuals function primarily as window dressing. They make the text more entertaining, or at least more palatable. Only occasionally do the visuals in textbooks do more than offer simple pictorial reinforcement of ideas already presented in the text. In many cases, they pander to the visual orientation of the young while doing little to help young people master the challenges of the visual media that dominate their lives.

By way of contrast, our approach to using visual materials emphasizes their unique strengths as historical documents. The lessons in this booklet focus students on the visual symbols and metaphors in editorial cartoons, the dramatic qualities of certain photographs, the potential of many images to make abstract ideas more specific and concrete, the implicit biases and stereotypes in certain images, their emotional power, and their ability to invoke the spirit of a time and place. In the process, we make every effort to strengthen students' visual literacy skills in general, as well as their ability to think critically and engage in spirited but disciplined discussions.

How to Use This Booklet

The booklet is divided into four lessons, with three illustrations per lesson. Each lesson consists of the following:

A BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET This page provides brief summaries explaining the three illustrations on which the lesson is based and their relevance to the lesson's objectives.

DIGITAL IMAGES The booklet's PDF allows you to project the images for use in your class discussions.

DISCUSSION-ACTIVITY SHEETS

Each sheet displays one illustration. It includes a sequence of questions to help you plan an all-class discussion while using the projected images. The questions take students step by step through an analysis of the illustration. If you wish, you may reproduce these pages and hand them out. In addition to the discussion questions on the illustration itself, one or two follow-up activities are suggested. Some of these can be made into individual assignments. Others will work best as small-group or all-class activities.

*The Civil War***OBJECTIVES**

1. Students will better understand how Americans experienced the break-up of the nation in 1861.
2. Students will better appreciate how hard it is for people to act in the face of uncertain knowledge of the future.

The Divided Nation

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION**Illustration 1**

In the 1850s, bitter arguments over slavery split the nation apart. First, these arguments divided and destroyed the Whig Party. Then in 1860, it was the Democratic Party's turn. Democratic Senator Steven Douglas had worked hard to find compromises that would satisfy both Northern and Southern Democrats. But by 1860, compromise no longer worked. As the 1860 Democratic convention prepared to nominate Douglas for president, most Southern Democrats walked out. Later, they chose Vice President John Breckinridge as their candidate. This cartoon shows Douglas and his running-mate in the wagon on the left pulling against Breckinridge and his running-mate on the right. Meanwhile Abraham Lincoln and the on-rushing Republican train are about to sweep the Democrats (and the whole era of compromise) off the tracks.

Illustration 2

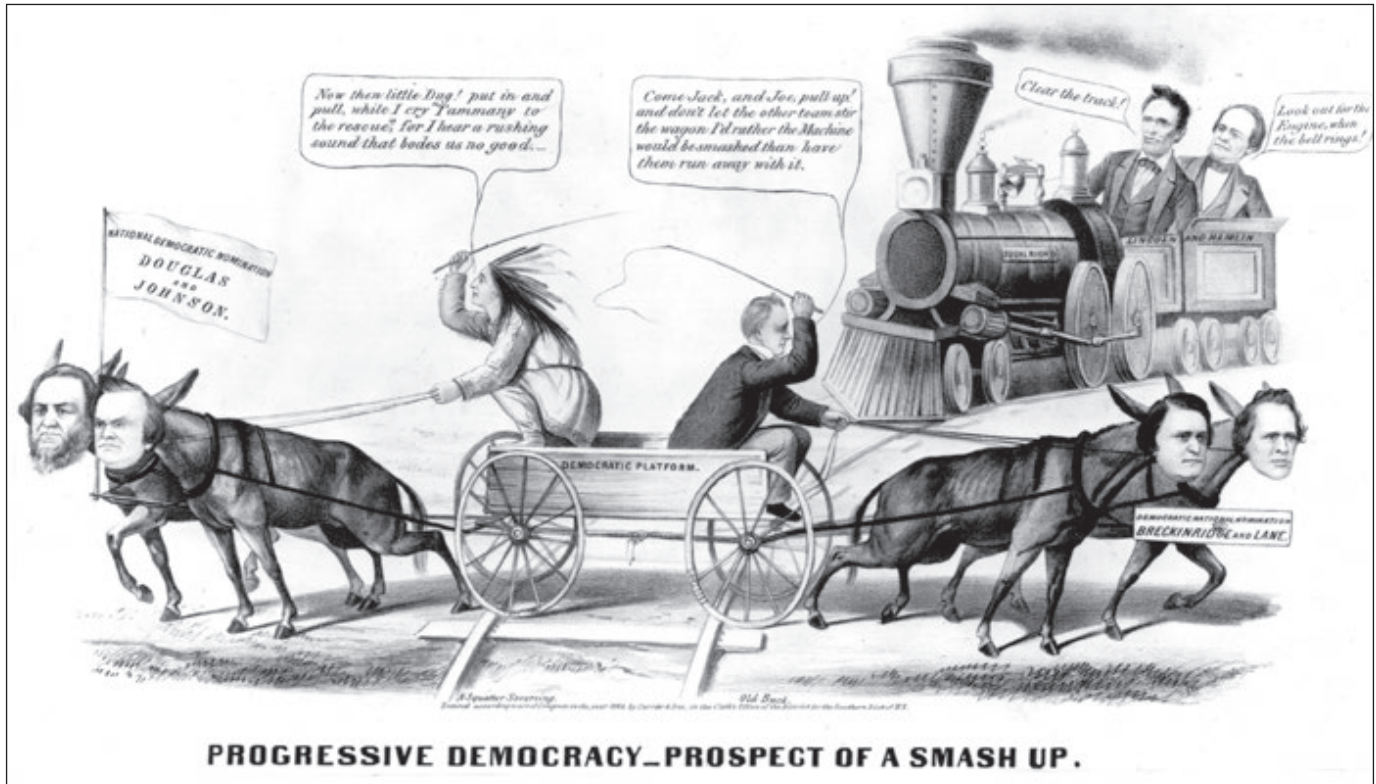
Lincoln's election led several Southern states to secede and form the Confederate States of America. Lincoln refused to accept this without a fight. But he also had no idea of how long such a war would last. At first, he called on state militias and volunteers to help fight the rebels. And calls for volunteers continued throughout the war. But they soon had to be supplemented with a draft—a measure that was very unpopular in certain parts of the North, such as New York City. This photo shows volunteers joining the army in New York in 1864. For many, it was the offer of money, not just appeals to patriotism, that got them to sign up.

Illustration 3

Early in 1861, the Confederates began seizing federal forts and other federal military facilities in the South. Soon, Confederate forces were on the march in Virginia and elsewhere. On both sides, most people expected the war to be over quickly. But then in July 1861, Union and Confederate forces faced off near the railroad center at Manassas Junction. People from nearby Washington D.C. flocked out to see what they were sure would be an easy victory for the Union. Instead, they watched in horror as Confederates, dug in near a little stream called Bull Run, held off and then routed their attackers. Union soldiers fell back in confusion and terror, as this drawing shows dramatically. This first Battle of Bull Run made it clear that a long and bloody conflict lay ahead.

Lesson 1 — The Divided Nation

Illustration 1



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustration

1. This cartoon is about the election of 1860. It shows a train about to destroy a wagon labeled "Democratic Platform." Explain what the train is supposed to stand for and identify the locomotive's "engineer."
2. Now also explain what the wagon is supposed to stand for. Why are donkeys shown pulling the wagon?
3. For a while in 1860, it seemed as though only the team of "Douglas and Johnson" would be pulling this wagon. Who is the "Douglas" shown on this team?
4. From what you know about the campaign of 1860, explain briefly why Douglas is not shown to be in complete control of the whole wagon.
5. The train in this cartoon might not have been as powerful as it seems if the wagon in the cartoon had not already become divided in the way shown here. Can you explain this point?

Follow-up Activities

1. Stephen Douglas is in the wagon on the left in the cartoon shown here. Many historians say he wound up in this position in part because of his "Freeport Doctrine." Read the portions of the Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858, in which Douglas describes this Freeport Doctrine. In a brief talk to the class, explain how that exchange in the famous Lincoln-Douglas debates helped put Douglas in the position he is in here in this cartoon.
2. What if the Democrats had united to support Douglas for president in 1860? And what if he then defeated Lincoln in the election of 1860. What would President Douglas have been able to do about the nation's big fight over slavery? Read more about Steven Douglas and his views about slavery in 1860. Then pretend you are Douglas and write an Inaugural Address, the speech you will give when you take over as President in March 1861. In this address, explain in detail what you think Douglas would have proposed to do about the slavery issue.

The Bitter End

Illustration 2



The National Archives