

Title: Analyzing Congressional Passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act

Author: John Kerr

Course: American History

Time Frame: This will be a homework assignment for which students will be given one week.

Subjects:

Civil War

Grade Levels:

PS

Classroom/Homework Activity to be performed:

- Individually, students will read be given (1) the official description of what became known as the Kansas-Nebraska Act and (2) a list of all the Representatives and Senators in Congress at the time, indicating their home state, political party affiliation and how they voted on the bill. They will then be asked to analyze the vote based upon political party affiliation and geographic considerations.

Rationale:

To help students understand that while political party affiliation often has a profound impact upon Congressional voting, geographic considerations—especially during the ante bellum era—can have an even bigger impact.

Lesson objectives - the student will:

- Analyze the voting patterns in Congress with respect to political party affiliation and geographic considerations, recognizing that both play a role in determining what type of vote is ultimately cast.
- Assess, with regards to the Kansas-Nebraska Act, whether political party affiliation or geographic considerations weighed more heavily in determining how senators and representatives voted.

District, state, or national performance and knowledge standards/goals/skills met:

- National Standards for U.S. History: Era 5 (Civil War and Reconstruction), Standard 1, Causes of the Civil War.

Standard 1A, Analyze how the disruption of the second American party system frayed durable bonds of union, leading to the ascent of the Republican Party in the 1850s.

Standard 1B, Explain how events after the Compromise of 1850 and the Dred Scott decision in 1857 contributed to increasing sectional polarization.

Primary materials (book, article, video documentary, etc.) needed:

- Kansas-Nebraska Act, as described in the Congressional Record.
- List of Senators serving at the time of the final vote on the Kansas-Nebraska Act, their political party affiliation, home state and voting decision on the bill. (Congressional record)
- List of Representatives serving at the time of the final vote on the Kansas-Nebraska Act, their political party affiliation, home state and voting decision on the bill. (Congressional Record)

Full description of activity or assignment:

A description of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, along with the lists of senators and representatives—including their political party affiliation, home state and how they voted on the final bill—will be passed out in class. Students will then be told to analyze the results of the final vote, looking for voting tendencies in regard to political party affiliation and/or geographic considerations.

An in-class discussion, led by the teacher, will follow approximately a week later.

The teacher will ask for conclusions the students arrived at by analyzing the data, and then the class will speculate—drawing upon their knowledge of the era up to that point—why these certain voting patterns emerged.

Full explanation of the assessment method and/or scoring guide:

Since this will be a homework assignment, followed by a general in-class discussion, the assignment itself will not be evaluated, however, students will be responsible for the fruits of the in-class discussion on the subsequent exam.

Specifically, they'll need to demonstrate an understanding of the fact that . . .

. . . southern Democrats almost unanimously supported the Kansas-Nebraska Act.

. . . most northern Democrats opposed the Kansas-Nebraska Act, as did most northern Whigs.

. . . one of the major political consequences of the Kansas-Nebraska Act was to help bring about a split in the Democratic Party, giving rise to the new Republican Party.