CLASSROOM EDITION · GRADES 9 — 12

1800

Thomas Jefferson vs John Adams

A 75-minute lesson on the 1800 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, background reading with primary source, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA First Party System	ELECTORAL VOTES 138 total
WINNER Thomas Jefferson (Democratic-Republican) · 73 EV	RUNNER-UP John Adams (Federalist) · 65 EV
KEY ISSUE Federalist power vs. Democratic-Republican principles; Alien and Sedition Acts	TURNOUT 32.3%

CONTENTS

1. Cover + overview
2. Lesson plan (instructor, 75 min)
3. Background: key terms + primary source
4. Student worksheet (7 questions)
5. Answer key + discussion prompts

1800: Thomas Jefferson vs John Adams

Standards alignment

NCSS · D2.His.4.9-12 (chronological reasoning) · D2.His.14.9-12 (causation in U.S. history). CCSS · CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2 (key ideas/details in primary sources).

Materials

One copy of the student worksheet per student. Optional: the 1800 map at theamericanvote.com/elections/-1800 projected, or printed as a handout.

Timing

5 min	**Warm-up**	Before reading: write one sentence describing what a peaceful transfer of power means. Then list one thing that could prevent it.
15 min	**Reading + vocab**	The 1800 election broke the Federalist hold on national office and brought Thomas Jefferson's Democratic-Republican Party to power. Jefferson and his running mate Aaron Burr each received 73 electoral votes — a tie produced by the original Constitution's rule that every elector cast two ballots without specifying president and vice president. The contest then moved to the House of Representatives, where a deadlock lasted 35 ballots before Burr lost support and Jefferson was selected on the 36th. The Federalists, led by John Adams, accepted the result; the transfer of power between hostile parties is often called the Revolution of 1800. The crisis produced the Twelfth Amendment (1804), which separated presidential and vice-presidential ballots and ended the tie scenario. Then review the Key Terms on the background page so students share vocabulary before the primary-source work.
15 min	**Primary source**	Read the excerpt aloud once. Students annotate individually (3 min), then pair-share on worksheet questions 6 and 7 (5 min).
15 min	**Discussion**	Small groups (3–4). Pick one of the three prompts at the back of this packet (or assign one). Each group reports back two sentences.
20 min	**Assessment**	Student worksheet. Seven questions, mixed format (5 about the reading, 2 about the primary source). Answer key in the instructor section at the back.
5 min	**Closure**	One-sentence exit ticket — see Closure section below.

Closure

One-sentence exit ticket: "What is one thing the 1800 election tells you about the First Party System era that the textbook didn't?"

Background

Before the worksheet, review the key terms below and then read the primary source carefully. The two source-analysis questions on the worksheet (questions 6 and 7) ask you to quote from the excerpt.

Key terms

Federalists
Political party led by Hamilton and Adams, supporting a strong national government, federal bank, and friendly relations with Britain. Lost decisively in 1800.

Twelfth Amendment
Ratified 1804 in direct response to the 1800 Jefferson-Burr tie. Requires electors to cast separate ballots for president and vice president.

Revolution of 1800
Jefferson's phrase for the 1800 election result. The transfer of power between bitterly hostile parties without violence was, contemporaries argued, more revolutionary than 1776 because no precedent existed for losers giving up authority.

Democratic-Republicans
Jefferson-led party that opposed Federalist centralization, favored states' rights, agrarian interests, and France. Won the 1800 presidential election.

Alien and Sedition Acts
Four 1798 laws passed by Federalists that restricted immigration and criminalized criticism of the federal government. A major 1800 campaign grievance.

First Inaugural Address

THOMAS JEFFERSON, MARCH 4, 1801

After 35 deadlocked House ballots and weeks of political crisis, Jefferson took office. His inaugural was designed to quiet Federalist fears that the Democratic-Republicans would dismantle the constitutional order.

> *"But every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle. We have called by different names brethren of the same principle. We are all Republicans, we are all Federalists. If there be any among us who would wish to dissolve this Union or to change its republican form, let them stand undisturbed as monuments of the safety with which error of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it."*

Jefferson, "First Inaugural Address" (Washington, DC, March 4, 1801). Public domain.

The 1800 Election

Read the background page (key terms and primary source), then answer the seven questions below. Questions 6 and 7 ask you to quote from the primary source.

QUESTION 1 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

How many ballots did it take the House of Representatives to break the tie in 1800?

( ) A. 7
( ) B. 12
( ) C. 36
( ) D. It was never broken

QUESTION 2 · SHORT-ANSWER

Explain in two sentences why Jefferson and Burr tied at 73 electoral votes when they were running together rather than against each other.

QUESTION 3 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

Which constitutional amendment was adopted in 1804 in direct response to the 1800 crisis?

( ) A. Tenth
( ) B. Twelfth
( ) C. Fourteenth
( ) D. Twenty-Second

QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER

List two arguments Jefferson's Democratic-Republicans made against the Federalists during the campaign.

QUESTION 5 · MAP-READ

On the 1800 state map, identify the regional pattern of Federalist vs. Democratic-Republican support. Which two regions held strongest for each side?

SOURCE ANALYSIS — QUESTIONS 6 AND 7 REFERENCE THE PRIMARY SOURCE ON THE BACKGROUND PAGE.

QUESTION 6 · SHORT-ANSWER

Jefferson uses the phrase "We are all Republicans, we are all Federalists" in this excerpt. In two sentences, explain what political message he was trying to send and to whom.

QUESTION 7 · SHORT-ANSWER

The 1800 election came close to constitutional crisis. How does Jefferson's tone in this excerpt try to lower the temperature, and what specific words or images does he use to do that? Cite one phrase from the source.

Answer key

QUESTION 1

36

The House deadlocked for six days. Alexander Hamilton's lobbying against Burr is widely credited with shifting the final ballots toward Jefferson.

QUESTION 2

Each elector cast two ballots without distinguishing president and vice president. Democratic-Republican electors all named Jefferson and Burr, producing identical totals.

The two-vote rule assumed elite, non-partisan electors. Once parties coordinated, a running-mate tie was the predictable outcome.

QUESTION 3

Twelfth

The Twelfth Amendment (ratified 1804) requires electors to cast separate ballots for president and vice president, ending the tie scenario.

QUESTION 4

Accept two of: opposition to the Alien and Sedition Acts, lower federal taxes, smaller standing army, less centralized federal power, hostility toward Federalist judicial appointments.

The campaign was an early example of partisan ideological contest. The Alien and Sedition Acts were the most concrete grievance, having jailed Democratic-Republican newspaper editors.

QUESTION 5

Federalists held New England (especially Connecticut and Massachusetts). Democratic-Republicans dominated the South (especially Virginia and the Carolinas) plus New York.

New York's swing under Aaron Burr's organizing in NYC was decisive. The sectional pattern roughly tracks commercial-seaboard vs. agrarian-southern interests.

QUESTION 6

Accept: Jefferson was telling defeated Federalists that he would not govern as a partisan, that the two parties shared a common commitment to the Constitution, and that his administration would not retaliate against political opponents. The audience was Federalist members of Congress, newspaper editors, and the broader electorate uncertain about the transfer of power.

The phrase has often been read as conciliation. Jefferson did still reverse Federalist policies (e.g., Sedition Act prosecutions), but the rhetoric was carefully nonconfrontational.

QUESTION 7

Accept any of: "brethren of the same principle" (Jefferson denies the parties are structurally opposed, not merely rhetorically united); "monuments of the safety with which error of opinion may be tolerated" (Federalist dissent is reframed as proof of constitutional strength, not threat); or "where reason is left free to combat it" (commits the new administration to argument rather than prosecution, an implicit repudiation of the Sedition Act). Award credit for any exact quotation paired with a defensible reading of the phrase as conciliatory.

The 1800 crisis was real; the Hamilton-Burr correspondence shows how close the Federalists came to refusing the result. Jefferson's rhetoric had to do real work, especially around toleration of dissent — the Sedition Act had jailed Democratic-Republican editors only two years earlier.

Discussion prompts

1. The Federalists surrendered power to a party they viewed as a threat to the republic. Why was that decision so consequential, and what alternative paths could history have taken?

2. The Twelfth Amendment was a direct response to the 1800 tie. Identify one other constitutional rule we still live under today that was written specifically because of a near-disaster, and explain the parallel.

3. Aaron Burr did not concede the tie immediately and was widely suspected of negotiating for the presidency. What does that episode suggest about the difference between legal rules and political norms?