AP EDITION · DBQ + LEQ · CLASSROOM

1800

Thomas Jefferson vs John Adams

A 105-minute lesson on the 1800 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, DBQ pairing, 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%

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1800: Thomas Jefferson vs John Adams

AP framework alignment

AP US History · Period varies by cycle · Reasoning skills: contextualization, comparison, causation, sourcing. CCSS · CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2 (central ideas), RH.11-12.6 (point of view), RH.11-12.7 (multiple sources). NCSS · D2.His.5.9-12, D2.His.14.9-12, D2.His.16.9-12.

Timing

5 min	**Warm-up**	Identify two structural conditions in 1801 that made the peaceful transfer of power between hostile parties uncertain. For each, identify the specific actor whose choice could have produced a constitutional crisis.
15 min	**Reading + vocab**	The 1800 election was the first peaceful transfer of power between organized partisan factions under any constitutional regime in modern political history. Britain's parliamentary majorities shifted by ministerial reshuffle, not popular ouster of an incumbent administration. France was on its third constitutional regime since 1789 and would topple two more before 1815. The American republic, twelve years old when Jefferson took office, sustained the test that older systems had not faced. The partisan architecture of the contest had been forming since 1791. The Federalist Party, led by Hamilton with Adams and the New England commercial establishment behind it, supported a strong national government, a national bank, manufacturing, and conciliation with Britain. The Democratic-Republican Party, led by Jefferson and Madison with the Southern planter class and Pennsylvania artisans behind it, favored state authority, agrarian economics, the French revolutionary cause, and a strict-construction reading of Article I. The 1798 Alien and Sedition Acts, passed during the Quasi-War with France, criminalized published criticism of the federal government. Federalist district attorneys had used the Sedition Act overwhelmingly against Democratic-Republican newspaper editors. By 1800 every contested political question - foreign policy, taxation, citizenship, the federal judiciary - had been recoded as partisan. The campaign was unprecedented in personal viciousness, conducted entirely through newspapers and pamphlets. The Federalist press accused Jefferson of atheism, miscegenation, and Jacobin loyalty; the Democratic-Republican press accused Adams of monarchism and corruption. There was no in-person speech-making by candidates. The work of mobilizing voters was done by partisan committees in each state. The electoral count produced a constitutional crisis. Under the original two-ballot rule, all 73 Democratic-Republican electors named both Jefferson and Burr on both ballots, producing an exact tie. The contest moved to the lame-duck Federalist-con-

trolled House of Representatives, which would now choose between two of its enemies. Federalists divided into three camps: install Jefferson as the lesser danger; install Burr as a more manipulable opportunist; or block both, leaving the office vacant and allowing the Federalist Senate to install a successor. The House voted thirty-five times without a result.

Alexander Hamilton, in retirement but the most influential Federalist intellectual, wrote a series of private letters to Federalist congressmen arguing that Jefferson, though ideologically opposed, would respect constitutional norms and that Burr was an unprincipled opportunist who would manipulate the office. On the thirty-sixth ballot - February 17, 1801 - several Federalist delegations abstained, swinging the result to Jefferson.

Adams refused to attend the inauguration. He left Washington at 4 a.m. on March 4. The Twelfth Amendment, ratified June 15, 1804, separated presidential and vice-presidential ballots; it was the first constitutional amendment written to address a specific recent electoral failure. The 1800 election established that elections, not coups or assassinations, would determine American governance. It also established that the constitutional system could fail at the procedural level and survive only through individual restraint - an instability the country would have to learn to manage repeatedly.

20 min	**Source A**	Read aloud once; students annotate individually for tone, evidence, and audience.
20 min	**Source B**	Compare/contrast against Source A. Pair-share on the DBQ comparison question.
20 min	**Worksheet**	Eight questions: 5 short-answer, 2 stimulus-based MCQ, 1 long-essay framing.
20 min	**LEQ planning**	Students sketch a thesis + outline for the LEQ comparison prompt. Submit for next-day full essay.
5 min	**Closure**	Exit ticket: one sentence summarizing the comparison.

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

Quasi-War

The undeclared 1798-1800 naval conflict between the U.S. and France. The Adams administration's prosecution of the war drove the passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts and split the Federalist Party between Adams (peace) and Hamilton (war) factions.

Alien and Sedition Acts

Four 1798 federal laws criminalizing speech critical of the federal government and allowing the deportation of non-citizens. Used overwhelmingly against Democratic-Republican press; the central campaign issue of 1800.

Strict construction

The legal doctrine that the federal government can exercise only those powers explicitly granted by the text of the Constitution. Core Democratic-Republican commitment in 1800.

Loose construction

The doctrine that the federal government may exercise any power not explicitly forbidden if it is necessary and proper to enumerated ends. Core Federalist commitment, articulated by Hamilton in the 1791 Bank debate.

Revolution of 1800

Jefferson's own phrase for the partisan transfer of power. Used to emphasize that the regime change was as fundamental as a violent revolution, though achieved without violence.

Lame duck

A president, Congress, or official whose term has not yet ended but whose successor has already been chosen. The 1801 House that resolved the Jefferson-Burr tie was a lame-duck Federalist Congress voting on its successor.

Twelfth Amendment

Ratified 1804 in direct response to the 1800 tie. Requires electors to cast separate ballots for president and vice president. First constitutional amendment written to address a specific past electoral failure.

Marbury v. Madison

1803 Supreme Court decision establishing judicial review. Grew directly from the 1800-01 transition: William Marbury's commission was a lame-duck Adams appointment that Jefferson's Secretary of State Madison refused to deliver.

First Inaugural Address

THOMAS JEFFERSON, MARCH 4, 1801

Jefferson took the oath at the new Capitol in Washington, DC. The address is famous for its conciliatory framing of partisan difference - Jefferson knew his Federalist opponents were watching for any sign he would govern as a vengeful party leader. Adams had left the capital before sunrise rather than attend.

> *"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.

Document-based question

Source A is on the Background page; Source B is below. Use both as evidence for the worksheet's source-analysis questions and the LEQ.

SOURCE A

First Inaugural Address

THOMAS JEFFERSON, MARCH 4, 1801

“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.

SOURCE B

Letter to James A. Bayard urging support for Jefferson

ALEXANDER HAMILTON, JANUARY 16, 1801

“Mr. Burr loves nothing but himself - thinks of nothing but his own aggrandizement - and will be content with nothing short of permanent power and wealth. He is truly the Catiline of America. Mr. Jefferson, though too revolutionary in his notions, is yet a lover of liberty and will be desirous of something like orderly Government. Mr. Burr loves nothing but himself; will the wishes of the people, or any preference for him over Mr. Jefferson, in any state, justify the choice?”

Hamilton, "Letter to James A. Bayard" (New York, NY, January 16, 1801). Public domain.

The 1800 Election

Answer the eight questions below. Source A is on the Background page; Source B is on the DBQ Pair page.

QUESTION 1 · SHORT-ANSWER

Identify the key phrase in Source A (Jefferson) that frames partisan opponents as still part of one political community. Quote it verbatim.

QUESTION 2 · SHORT-ANSWER

Identify the key phrase in Source B (Hamilton) that names Burr as a specific threat to constitutional order. Quote it verbatim.

QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER

Both sources address the partisan crisis of 1800-1801, but they identify different threats. Identify the specific threat each source names.

QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER

Source B was written before Source A (January vs. March 1801). What does this temporal ordering tell you about whether Jefferson's conciliatory inaugural was a cause or a consequence of the peaceful transfer?

QUESTION 5 · SHORT-ANSWER

Source B compares Burr to Catiline. Identify what this classical reference signals about Hamilton's view of Burr, and why Hamilton chose a Roman analogy for a Federalist congressman.

QUESTION 6 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

The constitutional amendment ratified in 1804 in direct response to the 1800 tie was the:

( ) A. Tenth
( ) B. Twelfth
( ) C. Fourteenth
( ) D. Twentieth

QUESTION 7 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

Jefferson's phrase "We are all Republicans, we are all Federalists" is an example of which rhetorical strategy?

( ) A. Confrontation
( ) B. Conciliation
( ) C. Concession
( ) D. Condemnation

QUESTION 8 · SHORT-ANSWER

Sketch your thesis sentence for the LEQ (next page). State your position: did the peaceful 1801 transfer depend more on constitutional norms or on the specific choices of Adams, Hamilton, and Jefferson? Identify one piece of evidence from each source you will use.

Long-essay-question

LEQ PROMPT

Jefferson's First Inaugural (Source A, 1801) frames partisan difference as reconcilable within a shared republican project. Hamilton's letter to Bayard (Source B, 1801) treats partisan choice as the difference between an unprincipled tyrant and a tolerable ideological opponent. Using BOTH sources and your knowledge of the 1798-1804 period, evaluate the extent to which the peaceful transfer of power in 1801 depended on constitutional norms versus the specific choices of individual actors. Defend a clear thesis.

GRADING RUBRIC

Thesis (1 pt): must take a defensible position on the norms-vs-individuals axis. Contextualization (1 pt): mention at least two of the Alien and Sedition Acts, the Quasi-War, the lame-duck Federalist Congress, the Twelfth Amendment, Marbury v. Madison. Evidence (2 pts): must quote at least one phrase from each source. Analysis (1 pt): must explicitly evaluate the extent - norms vs. individuals - rather than treating them as equivalent. Total 5 points.

Answer key

QUESTION 1

Accept any of: "every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle", "We are all Republicans, we are all Federalists", "brethren of the same principle". Each phrase frames opposition as legitimate disagreement within shared commitments.

Jefferson's opening was carefully calibrated to suggest that the Republic could absorb partisan difference rather than be destroyed by it.

QUESTION 2

Accept any of: "thinks of nothing but his own aggrandizement", "will be content with nothing short of permanent power and wealth", "the Catiline of America", "loves nothing but himself". The Catiline comparison is the most explicit naming.

Catiline was the Roman senator who conspired to overthrow the Republic in 63 BCE. Hamilton's readers were classically educated and would have recognized the comparison instantly.

QUESTION 3

Source A addresses the threat of partisan vengeance - the worry that the winning party (Democratic-Republicans) would punish the losers and turn ideological difference into legal persecution, replicating the Federalists' own Sedition Act practices. Source B addresses the threat of individual tyranny - the worry that an unprincipled Aaron Burr would manipulate the constitutional system for personal aggrandizement regardless of party.

The two threats are different in kind. Jefferson worries about partisan persecution; Hamilton worries about personal corruption. Both fears were live in early 1801.

QUESTION 4

Source B was the precondition for Source A. Hamilton's January 1801 letters helped tip Federalist congressmen against Burr; without that, the House deadlock might have produced no president by March 4 and a constitutional crisis. Jefferson could deliver a conciliatory inaugural only because Hamilton had already done the partisan work of clearing his path.

This ordering is structurally important for AP students: the conciliation appears AFTER the individual choices that made it possible.

QUESTION 5

Catiline was the Roman senator who conspired to overthrow the Republic in 63 BCE. Hamilton's comparison signals that Burr's threat was constitutional - a danger to republican government itself - not merely a question of policy disagreement. Hamilton chose a Roman analogy because Federalist congressmen, like Hamilton himself, were classically educated; the comparison would carry instant authority.

The Catiline reference is a fixed feature of late-eighteenth-century elite political vocabulary. It signals that the speaker is appealing to shared republican values, not partisan calculation.

QUESTION 6

Twelfth.

The Twelfth Amendment, ratified June 15, 1804, requires electors to cast separate ballots for president and vice president. It is the first constitutional amendment written to address a specific past electoral failure.

QUESTION 7

Conciliation.

Conciliation - the rhetorical strategy of reframing opposition as shared commitment - is the operative pattern. Confrontation would name enemies; concession would yield substantive ground; condemnation would attack the opposition's motives.

QUESTION 8

Open-ended thesis sketch. Acceptable answers should: (1) state a clear position on the norms-vs-individuals axis, (2) avoid treating norms and individuals as equivalent or interchangeable, (3) signal at least one specific piece of evidence from each source. Award credit for any defensible thesis that meets these three conditions.

The thesis sketch is preparatory. Full credit at the worksheet level requires only a clear position with two pieces of source evidence. The LEQ rubric on the next page evaluates the full essay.