1804

Thomas Jefferson vs Charles C. Pinckney

A 75-minute lesson on the 1804 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 176 total
WINNER Thomas Jefferson (Democratic-Republican) · 162 EV	RUNNER-UP Charles C. Pinckney (Federalist) · 14 EV
KEY ISSUE Louisiana Purchase and westward expansion; declining Federalist influence	TURNOUT 23.8%

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

1804: Thomas Jefferson vs Charles C. Pinckney

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 1804 map at theamericanvote.com/elections/-1804 projected, or printed as a handout.

Timing

5 min	**Warm-up**	Identify two structural conditions in U.S. politics by 1804 that would have made a Democratic-Republican landslide likely regardless of the specific Federalist candidate. For each, identify the specific 1801-1804 development most responsible.
15 min	**Reading + vocab**	The 1804 election was the fourth U.S. presidential election and the first under the Twelfth Amendment, ratified June 15, 1804. The amendment - written specifically to prevent another 1800-style tie between running mates - required electors to cast separate ballots for president and vice president. The 1804 cycle was thus simultaneously a referendum on Jefferson's first term and the inaugural test of a new constitutional procedure. The Democratic-Republican incumbent was Thomas Jefferson, 61 years old, completing his first term. Jefferson's presidency had been politically successful by almost any measure. He had cut the federal whiskey excise, reduced the national debt from $83 million to $57 million, repealed the unpopular Alien and Sedition Acts (signing pardons for Democratic-Republican editors who had been jailed under them), shrunk the federal civilian workforce, and made the Louisiana Purchase from France in May 1803 for $15 million. The Louisiana Purchase doubled the size of the United States, added the future heartland states from Louisiana to the Dakotas, and gave the U.S. control of the Mississippi River and the strategically vital port of New Orleans. Jefferson had also dispatched the Lewis and Clark Expedition in 1804 to map the new territory; admitted Ohio as the 17th state in March 1803; and successfully prosecuted the Tripoli campaign (1801-1805) against Mediterranean piracy. The Federalist nominee was Charles Cotesworth Pinckney of South Carolina, 58 years old. Pinckney had been a delegate to the Constitutional Convention, a Revolutionary War officer (captured at Charleston in 1780), and U.S. ambassador to France during the XYZ Affair in 1797-98. He had been the Federalist vice presidential candidate in 1800 and was the target of Hamilton's 1796 elevation scheme. The Federalist Party was in deep structural trouble by 1804. The 1800 election had cost

Federalists the presidency, Congress, and most state offices. Alexander Hamilton, the party's organizing genius, had been killed in a duel by Vice President Aaron Burr on July 11, 1804 - four months before the election. New England Federalists, alarmed that the Louisiana Purchase had shifted political power toward the agrarian South and West, had briefly considered secession in early 1804 (the Essex Junto plot).

The campaign was conducted through partisan newspapers without candidate participation. The Democratic-Republican organization in Pennsylvania (under Albert Gallatin), New York (under George Clinton), and Virginia (under Jefferson and Madison) far outpaced the Federalist effort. The new Twelfth Amendment running-mate procedure allowed Jefferson to select Governor George Clinton of New York as his new vice presidential running mate, replacing Burr. The Clinton selection was strategic: it locked down New York for the Democratic-Republicans and signaled distance from Burr after the Hamilton duel.

The electoral count was 162 Jefferson to 14 Pinckney - one of the largest electoral landslides in U.S. history at 92 percent of the Electoral College. Jefferson carried every state except Connecticut, Delaware, and two of Maryland's 11 electors. He won 72.8 percent of the popular vote where it was measured (most states still used legislative selection for electors). The Federalist Party would never win another presidential election. Their last credible national campaign was Rufus King's 1816 loss to Monroe.

The 1804 result also marked the structural ascendancy of Virginia within the Democratic-Republican coalition. Jefferson (Virginia) had succeeded Adams (Massachusetts) in 1801. Madison (Virginia) would succeed Jefferson in 1809. Monroe (Virginia) would succeed Madison in 1817. The 1801-1825 Virginia Dynasty governed for 24 of 25 years - the longest single-state run in U.S. presidential history. 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 1804 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

Louisiana Purchase

The 1803 federal acquisition of 828,000 square miles from France for $15 million. Doubled the size of the United States; added the future heartland states from Louisiana to the Dakotas; gave the U.S. control of the Mississippi River and the port of New Orleans.

Burr-Hamilton duel

The July 11, 1804 duel in Weehawken, New Jersey, in which Vice President Aaron Burr mortally wounded Alexander Hamilton. Hamilton died July 12. Burr was indicted for murder in New York and New Jersey but never tried.

Essex Junto

The 1803-04 New England Federalist faction that briefly considered secession in response to the Louisiana Purchase. Believed the Purchase would shift political power permanently to the agrarian South and West, making New England commercial interests permanently subordinate.

Virginia Dynasty

The 1801-1825 succession of Virginia-born Democratic-Republican presidents: Jefferson (1801-09), Madison (1809-17), Monroe (1817-25). The longest single-state presidential run in U.S. history.

Twelfth Amendment

Ratified June 15, 1804. Required electors to cast separate ballots for president and vice president, ending the original two-ballot rule. The first U.S. constitutional amendment written to address specific recent electoral failures (1796 split-party and 1800 tie).

Lewis and Clark Expedition

The 1804-1806 Corps of Discovery sent by Jefferson under Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to map the Louisiana Purchase, identify a Northwest Passage, and establish U.S. claims to the Pacific Northwest. Reached the Pacific in November 1805.

Strict construction

The legal doctrine that the federal government can exercise only those powers explicitly granted by the Constitution. Jefferson's pre-1803 position; he had to set it aside to justify the Louisiana Purchase under the treaty-making power.

Second Inaugural Address

THOMAS JEFFERSON, MARCH 4, 1805

Jefferson took the oath at the new Capitol in Washington, DC. The Second Inaugural was much shorter than the famous 1801 inaugural. Jefferson used the occasion to reflect on his first-term record, particularly the Louisiana Purchase, and to acknowledge the partisan attacks his opponents had directed at him.

> *"On the question of war or peace, or of the necessary remedies for the safety of our country, we may differ in opinion. But there is one moral law which is binding upon all - that is, the law of self-preservation. The acquisition of Louisiana has been disapproved by some, from a candid apprehension that the enlargement of our territory would endanger its union. But who can limit the extent to which the federative principle may operate effectively? The larger our association, the less will it be shaken by local passions."*

Jefferson, "Second Inaugural Address" (Washington, DC, March 4, 1805). Public domain.

The 1804 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 electoral votes did Thomas Jefferson win in 1804?

( ) A. 89
( ) B. 123
( ) C. 162
( ) D. 193

QUESTION 2 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

Which constitutional amendment, ratified in 1804, required electors to cast separate ballots for president and vice president?

( ) A. Tenth
( ) B. Eleventh
( ) C. Twelfth
( ) D. Thirteenth

QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER

Identify three specific 1801-1804 accomplishments of Jefferson's first term that contributed to his 1804 landslide.

QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER

How did the Louisiana Purchase change the political balance between Federalists and Democratic-Republicans? Identify two specific consequences.

QUESTION 5 · SHORT-ANSWER

Jefferson says in his Second Inaugural that "the larger our association, the less will it be shaken by local passions." Quote one phrase from the excerpt where Jefferson directly addresses Federalist fears about the Louisiana Purchase.

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

QUESTION 6 · SHORT-ANSWER

Jefferson, a strict-construction Democratic-Republican, made the Louisiana Purchase without an explicit constitutional authorization. How did he justify the deal, and what does the episode tell you about strict-construction constitutionalism in practice?

QUESTION 7 · MAP-READ

On the 1804 election map, identify the three states (and Maryland's split) Jefferson failed to carry. What pattern do they share, and what does the pattern tell you about Federalist coalition strength in 1804?

Answer key

QUESTION 1

162. Jefferson 162; Pinckney 14. One of the largest electoral landslides in U.S. history at 92 percent of the Electoral College.

Jefferson carried every state except Connecticut, Delaware, and two of Maryland's 11 electors. He won 72.8 percent of the popular vote where it was measured.

QUESTION 2

Twelfth. The Twelfth Amendment was ratified June 15, 1804. The 1804 election was the first held under it.

The amendment was a direct response to the 1796 split-party result and the 1800 Jefferson-Burr tie. It is the first U.S. constitutional amendment written to address specific recent electoral failures.

QUESTION 3

Accept any three of: (1) The Louisiana Purchase (1803, $15 million, doubled the country). (2) Federal whiskey excise repealed (1802). (3) National debt reduced from $83M to $57M. (4) Alien and Sedition Acts repealed; Democratic-Republican editors pardoned. (5) Federal civilian workforce shrunk. (6) Ohio admitted as 17th state (March 1803). (7) Tripoli campaign successfully prosecuted (1801-05). (8) Lewis and Clark Expedition dispatched (May 1804). (9) Marshall Court accepted Marbury v. Madison (1803).

Jefferson's first term was unusually successful by 1804 standards. AP students should be able to identify multiple specific accomplishments.

QUESTION 4

Two consequences: (1) The Purchase shifted political power toward the agrarian South and West, undermining New England commercial Federalist dominance. (2) The Purchase was so popular that Federalists could not credibly oppose it - the party was forced into a defensive constitutional critique (the deal exceeded federal authority) that voters perceived as nitpicking against a deal that doubled the country at low cost. The Essex Junto secession plot is the structural expression of the first consequence; the Federalist 1804 collapse is the structural expression of the second.

The Louisiana Purchase is one of the key inflection points of early American political alignment. AP students should be able to identify both the geographic and the electoral consequences.

QUESTION 5

Accept: "The acquisition of Louisiana has been disapproved by some, from a candid apprehension that the enlargement of our territory would endanger its union." The phrase directly names Federalist objection.

Jefferson's rhetorical move - acknowledging the objection by name, then refuting it with the "federative principle" argument - is one of the most-cited examples of his presidential rhetoric.

QUESTION 6

Jefferson initially worried the deal exceeded federal constitutional authority. He briefly considered proposing a constitutional amendment to authorize the purchase but abandoned the idea when France's offer seemed about to expire. He eventually justified the purchase under the treaty-making power (Article II) and the implied powers of national self-preservation. The episode tells you that strict-construction constitutionalism is highly context-dependent: even its leading theoretician set it aside when practical political stakes were high enough. Strict construction is a useful principle for opposing the other side's programs but tends to be flexible when applied to one's own.

Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase reasoning is the textbook example of how constitutional principles bend in practice. AP students should be able to engage the point analytically.

QUESTION 7

Connecticut (9 EV), Delaware (3 EV), and 2 of Maryland's 11 electors. Pattern: all three are commercial-seaboard states with strong Federalist Party organizations. They represent the residual core of Federalist strength in 1804. The pattern tells you the Federalist Party had been reduced to a New England rump by 1804; the broader middle-state, Southern, and Western coalition was now solidly Democratic-Republican. The pattern foreshadows the 1816 Federalist collapse and the 1820 Era of Good Feelings (Monroe's 231-1 reelection).

The 1804 map is a structural snapshot of the First Party System mid-collapse. AP students should be able to read it as a geographic-political indicator.

Discussion prompts

1. Jefferson won 92 percent of the Electoral College in 1804, one of the largest landslides in U.S. history. Identify two structural reasons for the margin and one structural cost the landslide masked.

2. The Louisiana Purchase doubled the size of the United States but raised serious constitutional questions. Identify the specific constitutional concern Jefferson himself acknowledged, and explain how he eventually justified the purchase. What does the episode tell you about strict-construction constitutionalism in practice?