3-5 EDITION · CLASSROOM

1808

James Madison vs Charles C. Pinckney

A 35-minute lesson on the 1808 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA First Party System	ELECTORAL VOTES 175 total
WINNER James Madison (Democratic-Republican) · 122 EV	RUNNER-UP Charles C. Pinckney (Federalist) · 47 EV
KEY ISSUE Embargo Act and neutral trade rights amid the Napoleonic Wars	TURNOUT 36.8%

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1. Cover
2. Lesson plan (35 min)
3. Reading + key words
4. Worksheet (4 questions)
5. Answer key

1808: James Madison vs Charles C. Pinckney

Timing

5 min	**Warm-up**	When a country chooses a new leader, sometimes the new person is very close to the old leader. What might be the good and bad sides of replacing a popular president with their best friend?
15 min	**Reading**	The 1808 election was the fifth U.S. presidential election. Thomas Jefferson had decided to follow George Washington's precedent and retire after two terms. The Democratic-Republican Party turned to James Madison, Jefferson's longtime ally and Secretary of State. Madison was 57 years old in 1808. He had been one of the most important political thinkers in American history. He had helped write the U.S. Constitution in 1787, had written 29 of the 85 Federalist Papers defending the Constitution in 1787-88, had served four terms in the House of Representatives, and had served eight years as Jefferson's Secretary of State. He was small (about 5'4") and quiet, but his political mind was widely respected. The Federalist candidate was again Charles Cotesworth Pinckney of South Carolina, who had lost badly to Jefferson in 1804. The Federalist Party was still weak nationally, but it had gotten one major political gift: the Embargo Act of 1807. The Embargo Act was Jefferson's response to Britain and France interfering with American ships during the Napoleonic Wars. The British had been forcibly recruiting ("impressing") American sailors into the Royal Navy. The French had been seizing American ships that traded with Britain. The Embargo Act tried to punish both countries by banning U.S. ships from foreign trade entirely. The theory was that Britain and France would respect American shipping rights if they lost access to American goods. The Embargo Act backfired badly. It crippled the American shipping industry, especially in New England. Sailors lost work. Merchants went bankrupt. Smuggling exploded. By the summer of 1808, New England towns were openly defying federal customs officers. Federalists used the Embargo Act as their main campaign issue, especially in New England. The election was closer than 1804 but still a Madison win. He took 122 electoral votes to Pinckney's 47. Madison carried 12 states; Pinckney carried 5 (Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island) plus 3 of Maryland's 11 electors. The Federalist Party had recovered in New England but had not become competitive nationally. Madison was sworn in March 4, 1809. The Embargo Act was

		repealed just three days before he took office. Three years later, the United States and Britain went to war anyway. The War of 1812 lasted three years and ended in a draw. Madison was president the whole time.
10 min	**Worksheet**	Four questions: one matches key words, three are short answers.
5 min	**Closure**	One sentence: what surprised you about this election?

The 1808 Election

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Key words

Embargo Act	The 1807 federal law banning U.S. ships from foreign trade. Intended to punish Britain and France for interfering with American shipping during the Napoleonic Wars. Crippled the American shipping industry instead.
Impressment	When the British Royal Navy forcibly took American sailors and forced them to serve on British warships. Major cause of U.S.-British tension before the War of 1812.
Federalist Papers	The 85 essays written in 1787-88 by James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay defending the proposed U.S. Constitution. Still the most influential American political writings.
Secretary of State	The senior federal official responsible for foreign affairs. James Madison was Jefferson's Secretary of State for eight years before becoming president himself.
Napoleonic Wars	The 1803-1815 wars in Europe and the Americas in which Napoleonic France fought Britain and many other powers. Both sides interfered with American shipping, leading to the U.S. Embargo Act of 1807.

Four questions

QUESTION 1 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

How many electoral votes did James Madison win in 1808?

( ) A. 89
( ) B. 113
( ) C. 122
( ) D. 147

QUESTION 2 · SHORT-ANSWER

Why was James Madison especially well-prepared to be president?

QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER

What was the Embargo Act, and why did it become the Federalists' main campaign issue in 1808?

QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER

Why did the Federalists do better in 1808 than in 1804, even though they still lost?

Answer key

QUESTION 1

122. Madison 122; Pinckney 47. Madison carried 12 states; Pinckney carried 5 plus 3 of Maryland's electors.

The 1808 margin was much smaller than Jefferson's 162-14 landslide in 1804. The Embargo Act caused the Federalist mini-recovery in New England.

QUESTION 2

Madison had helped write the U.S. Constitution in 1787, had written 29 of the 85 Federalist Papers defending it, had served four terms in the House of Representatives, and had been Jefferson's Secretary of State for eight years. No earlier president had such a complete record of constitutional and diplomatic experience.

Madison's resume is one of the most accomplished of any U.S. presidential candidate, before or since. AP-level students would recognize him as the architect of the U.S. constitutional system.

QUESTION 3

The Embargo Act was a 1807 federal law banning U.S. ships from foreign trade. Jefferson hoped it would punish Britain and France for interfering with American shipping. Instead it crippled the American shipping industry, especially in New England. Sailors lost work; merchants went bankrupt; smuggling exploded. New England Federalists ran their 1808 campaign almost entirely against the Embargo Act.

The Embargo Act is one of the most consequential policy failures in early American history. It was repealed just three days before Madison took office.

QUESTION 4

The Embargo Act of 1807 had crippled the American shipping industry, especially in New England. New England voters who had largely abandoned the Federalist Party after 1800 came back to it in 1808 in protest. Pinckney carried Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island - all New England states except Vermont. The Federalists won 47 electoral votes versus 14 in 1804.

The 1808 Federalist recovery was real but regional. The party never recovered its national strength; it would never win another presidential election.