1808

James Madison vs Charles C. Pinckney

A 20-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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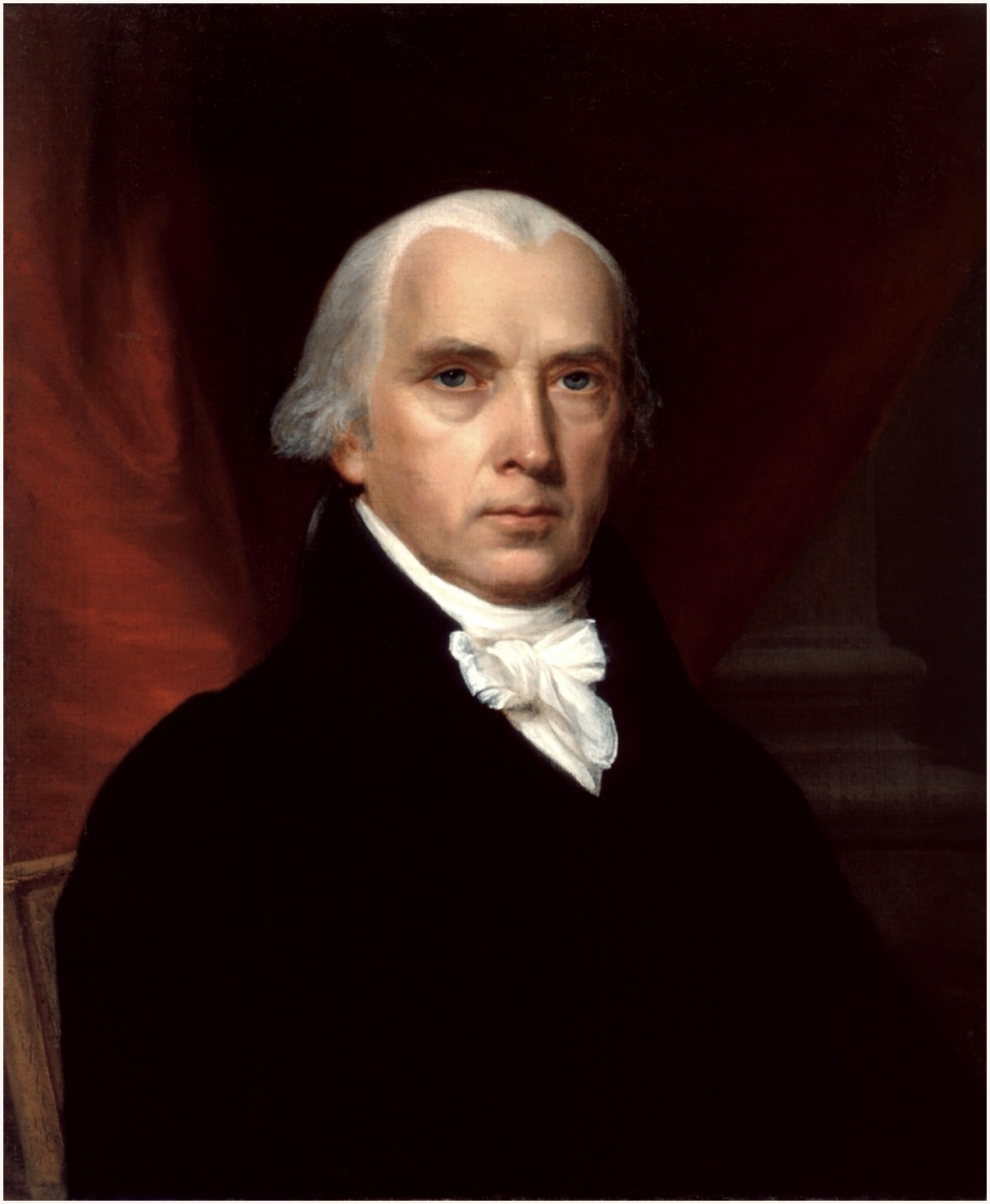
1808

By 1808 Thomas Jefferson had been president for eight years. Just like George Washington before him, he chose to go home after two terms. The country needed a new president.

Jefferson's friend James Madison wanted the job. Look at his picture. Madison was a tiny man - only about five feet four inches tall - but he was one of the smartest men in the country. He had helped write the U.S. Constitution. He had also written many of the famous papers that helped convince states to approve it.

Things were not easy for America in 1808. Britain and France were fighting a huge war in Europe. Both countries were stopping American ships and stealing American sailors. To protest, Jefferson had passed a law called the Embargo Act. The Embargo Act said American ships could not trade with foreign countries at all. This was supposed to hurt Britain and France. But it hurt American sailors and merchants even more.

The Federalist Party - the party of John Adams - was much weaker now. But the Embargo Act was so unpopular that the Federalists did better than they had in 1804. James Madison still won easily, with 122 electoral votes to 47 for the Federalist candidate Charles Pinckney. Madison became the fourth president.



James Madison, the fourth U.S. president. He was the smallest president in American history but one of the most important political thinkers.
JOHN VANDERLYN (1775-1852), VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Let's talk about the story

1.

Who became the fourth president of the United States after the 1808 election?

2.

Why was James Madison sometimes called the Father of the Constitution?

3.

What was the Embargo Act, and why did it hurt American sailors?

Warm-up (5 min)

Look at the man in the picture. His name is James Madison. He helped write the U.S. Constitution years before. People sometimes call him the Father of the Constitution.

Answer key

1.

James Madison became the fourth president. He started his job on March 4, 1809.

Madison won 122 electoral votes to Pinckney's 47. He was Jefferson's Secretary of State and chosen successor.

2.

Because Madison played a key role in writing the U.S. Constitution in 1787. He had also written many of the Federalist Papers, the essays that helped convince states to approve the Constitution.

Madison kept the detailed notes of the Constitutional Convention that are still used today. His framework for separation of powers shaped the entire document.

3.

The Embargo Act was a 1807 law that said American ships could not trade with any foreign country. President Jefferson hoped this would force Britain and France to treat American ships fairly. But it hurt American sailors and merchants because they suddenly had no work and no income.

The Embargo Act was repealed three days before Jefferson left office in March 1809. It is widely considered one of the biggest failures of his presidency.