1816

James Monroe vs Rufus King

A 50-minute lesson on the 1816 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 217 total
WINNER James Monroe (Democratic-Republican) · 183 EV	RUNNER-UP Rufus King (Federalist) · 34 EV
KEY ISSUE Post-war nationalism; decline of the Federalist Party	TURNOUT 23.5%

CONTENTS

1. Cover
2. Lesson plan (50 min)
3. Background: key terms + source
4. Worksheet (6 questions)
5. Answer key

1816: James Monroe vs Rufus King

Standards alignment

NCSS · D2.His.4.6-8 (chronological reasoning) · D2.His.14.6-8 (causation). CCSS · CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2 (central ideas in primary sources).

Timing

5 min	**Warm-up**	List two political conditions in 1816 that would make an incumbent party's candidate likely to win by a landslide. For each, identify the specific 1814-1816 development most responsible.
15 min	**Reading + vocab**	The 1816 election was the seventh U.S. presidential election. It was held two years after the December 1814 Hartford Convention had effectively destroyed the Federalist Party and 18 months after the February 1815 end of the War of 1812. The election confirmed the structural political consequences both events had produced. President James Madison was finishing his second term and would retire to Montpelier in Virginia, following the Washington-Jefferson precedent. The Democratic-Republican congressional caucus met in Washington on March 16, 1816 to nominate the party's candidate. The two leading contenders were Secretary of State James Monroe (the Madison-Jefferson preference, representing the Virginia Dynasty's continuity) and Secretary of War William H. Crawford of Georgia (representing Southern resistance to continued Virginia dominance). The caucus chose Monroe by a 65-54 vote - much narrower than expected. The narrow margin reflected real intra-party tension: many Southern Democratic-Republicans were tired of Virginia presidents and saw Crawford as the future of the party. Daniel D. Tompkins of New York was selected as Monroe's running mate to balance the ticket geographically. Monroe was 58 years old and had the most accomplished resume of any U.S. presidential candidate to that point. He had been a Revolutionary War officer (wounded crossing the Delaware River with Washington in December 1776 and present at Valley Forge), served three terms in the Continental Congress, two terms in the U.S. Senate, four terms as governor of Virginia, U.S. minister to France (during which he and Robert Livingston negotiated the 1803 Louisiana Purchase), U.S. minister to Britain (during which he tried unsuccessfully to negotiate a Jay Treaty replacement), Secretary of State (1811-17), and briefly Secretary of War (1814-15, during the British burning of Washington and the Battle of New Orleans). He was the last member of the founding generation to seek the presidency. The Federalist Party nominated Rufus King of New York, 61. King had been a delegate to the Constitutional Convention, a Federalist senator from New York, U.S.

minister to Britain (1796-1803), and the party's vice presidential candidate in both 1804 and 1808. King's nomination was a formality. The Federalist Party had no national organization, no coherent policy platform, and no broad-based support outside its New England residual base. The Hartford Convention had destroyed the party's national standing. King privately doubted he could win and conducted essentially no campaign.

The campaign's dominant theme was Monroe's personal stature and the post-war surge of American nationalism. The 1815 Battle of New Orleans, the 1814 Star-Spangled Banner, and the subsequent territorial gains (Andrew Jackson's 1818 First Seminole War, the 1819 Adams-Onis Treaty with Spain) consolidated a sense of American achievement that bypassed Federalist critique. The April 1816 chartering of the Second Bank of the United States, the 1816 Tariff (the first explicitly protective U.S. tariff), and the federal road construction program all built on Federalist ideas while being implemented by Democratic-Republicans.

The electoral count was 183 Monroe to 34 King. Monroe carried 16 of 19 states; King carried Connecticut (9 EV), Delaware (4), and Massachusetts (22) - 35 EV minus one electoral vote that was not cast. The 1816 result was the death of the Federalist Party as a national force. They would never field another presidential candidate. Monroe was inaugurated March 4, 1817, on the East Portico of the U.S. Capitol - the first presidential inauguration held outdoors and the first held at the Capitol's East Portico (the customary location for the next century).

Monroe's presidency would be remembered for the Era of Good Feelings (1817-1825), the 1819 Adams-Onis Treaty acquiring Florida from Spain, the 1820 Missouri Compromise resolving slavery extension into the Louisiana Purchase territory, the 1820 re-election in which Monroe won 231 of 232 electoral votes (one elector defected to John Quincy Adams), and the December 1823 Monroe Doctrine declaring the Americas closed to further European colonization. The Era of Good Feelings was a misnomer - serious intra-party disputes over banking, tariffs, internal improvements, and slavery extension emerged throughout the period - but the formal two-party competition that had defined American politics since 1796 was gone. It would not return until the 1828 Adams-Jackson contest produced the Second Party System.

10 min	**Primary source**	Read aloud once. Annotate individually. Quick pair-share on the source-analysis question.
10 min	**Discussion**	Small groups (3–4). Pick one prompt; report back two sentences.
10 min	**Worksheet**	Six questions: 2 multiple-choice, 3 short-answer, 1 map-read.

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

Era of Good Feelings

The 1817-1825 period of one-party Democratic-Republican government following the Federalist collapse. James Monroe was president the entire time. The "good feelings" referred to the absence of formal two-party competition rather than to actual political agreement.

Virginia Dynasty

The 1801-1825 succession of Virginia-born Democratic-Republican presidents: Jefferson, Madison, Monroe. The longest single-state presidential run in U.S. history. Monroe's narrow 1816 caucus nomination reflected Southern resistance to its continuation.

Second Bank of the United States

The federal national bank chartered in April 1816 by President Madison's Democratic-Republican Congress. Modeled on Hamilton's First Bank (which Jefferson and Madison had originally opposed). A signal of Democratic-Republican adoption of formerly Federalist economic policies.

Hartford Convention

The December 1814 - January 1815 secret New England Federalist meeting in Hartford, Connecticut. Considered secession over the War of 1812; demanded constitutional amendments. Destroyed the Federalist Party as a national force just before the war ended victoriously.

Congressional caucus

A meeting of a party's congressional members to choose the party's presidential nominee. The 1816 caucus narrowly nominated Monroe; the 1824 caucus would be widely rejected, producing the four-way 1824 election.

Adams-Onis Treaty

The February 1819 treaty between the U.S. and Spain, negotiated by Secretary of State John Quincy Adams and Spanish minister Luis de Onis. Acquired Florida for the U.S., set the western boundary of the Louisiana Purchase, and renounced U.S. claims to Texas.

First Inaugural Address

JAMES MONROE, MARCH 4, 1817

Monroe took the oath outdoors at the East Portico of the U.S. Capitol - the first presidential inauguration held at this location, which would become customary for the next century. The address was strikingly nationalist and confident. Monroe positioned the United States as a successful constitutional experiment that had now matured into a stable republic. The contrast with Madison's wartime 1813 Second Inaugural was deliberate.

> *"During a period fraught with difficulties and marked by very extraordinary events the United States have flourished beyond example. Their citizens individually have been happy, and the nation prosperous. Under this Constitution our commerce has been wisely regulated with foreign nations and between the States. New States have been admitted into our Union. Our territory has been enlarged by fair and honorable treaty, and with great advantage to the original States; the States, respectively protected by the National Government under a mild paternal system against foreign dangers, and enjoying within their separate spheres, by a wise partition of power, a just proportion of the sovereignty."*

Monroe, "First Inaugural Address" (Washington, DC, March 4, 1817). Public domain.

The 1816 Election

Read the background page, then answer the six questions below.

QUESTION 1 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

How many electoral votes did James Monroe win in 1816?

( ) A. 142
( ) B. 167
( ) C. 183
( ) D. 231

QUESTION 2 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

Which three states voted for Rufus King in 1816?

( ) A. Connecticut, Massachusetts, Delaware
( ) B. Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont
( ) C. Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Hampshire
( ) D. Delaware, New Jersey, Maryland

QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER

Why was the Monroe-Crawford 1816 caucus contest closer than expected (65-54)?

QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER

Identify three of James Monroe's previous positions before becoming president.

QUESTION 5 · SHORT-ANSWER

Monroe says in his inaugural that "our territory has been enlarged by fair and honorable treaty." Identify two specific 1803-1819 treaties that fit this framing.

QUESTION 6 · MAP-READ

On the 1816 election map, identify the 16 states Monroe carried and the 3 that voted for King. What pattern do King's three states share?

Answer key

QUESTION 1

183. Monroe 183; King 34. Monroe carried 16 of 19 states; King carried 3 (Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts).

The 1816 result was the death of the Federalist Party as a national force.

QUESTION 2

Connecticut, Massachusetts, Delaware. All three are Federalist residual-strength states. CT 9 EV, MA 22 EV, DE 3 EV = 34 EV total.

The three Federalist states had been the party's residual base since 1804. Even there, the Federalist popular vote shares were not overwhelming.

QUESTION 3

The narrow margin reflected real intra-party tension. Many Southern Democratic-Republicans (especially in Georgia and the Carolinas) were tired of Virginia presidents. Monroe would be the third consecutive Virginia president (after Jefferson and Madison) - the so-called Virginia Dynasty. William Crawford of Georgia represented the alternative: a Southern non-Virginian. The Madison-Jefferson preference for Monroe carried the caucus, but the underlying factional split would resurface in the 1824 four-way election.

The 1816 caucus split is one of the earliest signs of the intra-Democratic-Republican factionalism that would produce the 1824 collapse of the caucus system and the eventual emergence of the Second Party System.

QUESTION 4

Accept any three of: (1) Revolutionary War officer. (2) Three terms in the Continental Congress. (3) Two terms in the U.S. Senate. (4) Four terms as governor of Virginia. (5) U.S. minister to France (negotiated the 1803 Louisiana Purchase with Robert Livingston). (6) U.S. minister to Britain. (7) Secretary of State (1811-17). (8) Secretary of War (briefly, 1814-15).

Monroe was the most-credentialed presidential candidate of the founding generation. AP students should be able to identify multiple specific positions.

QUESTION 5

Accept any two of: (1) Louisiana Purchase (1803, with France, $15M, 828,000 sq mi). (2) Pinckney Treaty (1795, with Spain, opened Mississippi). (3) Convention of 1818 (with Britain, fixed 49th parallel boundary west of Lake of the Woods). (4) Adams-Onis Treaty (February 1819, with Spain, acquired Florida). Most of these would be from the future at the time of the inaugural, but the Louisiana Purchase and the Convention of 1818 negotiations were in progress.

Monroe's "fair and honorable treaty" framing was strategic. It positioned U.S. territorial expansion as legitimate diplomatic acquisition rather than military conquest - a framing that became central to American self-understanding for the next century.

QUESTION 6

Monroe states: 16 of 19 states - everyone except Connecticut, Massachusetts, Delaware. King states: 3 - Connecticut, Massachusetts, Delaware. Pattern: King's three states are the residual Federalist core. Two are New England commercial-shipping states (Connecticut and Massachusetts); one is a small mid-Atlantic state with strong Federalist organization (Delaware). The pattern shows the Federalist Party had been reduced to a tiny regional rump by 1816.

The 1816 map is a structural snapshot of the First Party System's death. AP students should be able to read it as a geographic-political endpoint indicator.