1824

John Quincy Adams vs Andrew Jackson

A 50-minute lesson on the 1824 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, background reading with primary source, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA Era of Good Feelings	ELECTORAL VOTES 261 total
WINNER John Quincy Adams (Democratic-Republican) · 84 EV	RUNNER-UP Andrew Jackson (Democratic-Republican) · 99 EV
KEY ISSUE Sectional rivalries; tariff policy; internal improvements	TURNOUT 26.9%

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2. Lesson plan (50 min)
3. Background: key terms + source
4. Worksheet (6 questions)
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1824: John Quincy Adams vs Andrew Jackson

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 that would cause an established one-party system to fragment into multiple regional candidates. For each, identify the specific 1820-1824 development most responsible.
15 min	**Reading + vocab**	The 1824 election was the most chaotic in U.S. history to that point. The one-party Era of Good Feelings (1817-1825) had reached its expiration. Four Democratic-Republicans ran for president, each with a distinct regional and ideological base. None reached an Electoral College majority. The House contingent election produced the Corrupt Bargain that mobilized the Jacksonian movement and produced the Second Party System. The four candidates: (1) General Andrew Jackson of Tennessee, 57, the hero of the 1815 Battle of New Orleans, popular across the South and West, framed as the people's champion against Eastern political elites. (2) Secretary of State John Quincy Adams of Massachusetts, 57, son of the second president, last Secretary of State (Madison and Monroe had used the position as their stepping stone), popular in New England and among former Federalists. (3) Secretary of Treasury William H. Crawford of Georgia, 52, the official Democratic-Republican congressional caucus nominee, popular among Southern strict-construction Republicans, partially incapacitated by a September 1823 stroke. (4) Speaker of the House Henry Clay of Kentucky, 47, architect of the Missouri Compromise and the 1824 American System (protective tariff + federal internal improvements + Second Bank), popular in the West and the upper South. Vice President John C. Calhoun decided not to run for president and accepted the vice presidency on whichever winning ticket would have him. The Democratic-Republican congressional caucus met in February 1824 in the Capitol's House chamber. Only 66 of 240 eligible members attended - a sign of the caucus system's deepening illegitimacy. The caucus nominated Crawford. The other three candidates rejected the caucus's authority and ran anyway. The caucus system - which had nominated every Democratic-Republican president since 1804 - was effectively dead. State legislatures (Tennessee for Jackson; Kentucky for Clay; Massachusetts for Adams) substituted state-level nominations.

The campaign was conducted through partisan newspapers, regional political organizations, and increasingly through public events (especially Jackson's western tour). Jackson's campaign emphasized populism: he was the people's champion against the Washington establishment of caucus politicians. Adams's campaign emphasized his diplomatic credentials and continuity with the Monroe administration. Crawford's campaign was hampered by his September 1823 stroke that left him partially paralyzed and unable to travel. Clay's campaign emphasized the American System framework.

The popular vote in 18 of 24 states (the other six used legislative selection) went to Jackson 151,271 (41.4%), Adams 113,122 (30.9%), Clay 47,531 (13.0%), Crawford 40,856 (11.2%). The electoral count was Jackson 99, Adams 84, Crawford 41, Clay 37. Nobody had the 131 EV needed for a majority. Jackson's 99 - the largest plurality - was structurally concentrated in the South and West. Adams's 84 was concentrated in New England plus New York. Crawford's 41 came from Virginia, Georgia, and a handful of other Southern states. Clay's 37 came from Kentucky, Ohio, and Missouri.

Under the Twelfth Amendment, when no candidate has an Electoral College majority, the U.S. House of Representatives picks the president from the top three candidates. Clay was eliminated. The House contingent election votes by state delegation - each state casts one vote, with 13 of 24 state delegations needed to win. Clay was still Speaker of the House. He could not vote for himself, but he could influence others. Clay had personal reasons to oppose Jackson: Jackson had publicly criticized Clay's 1821 vote against Jackson's 1818 First Seminole War conduct, and Clay considered Jackson's military background dangerous to constitutional government. Clay also had policy reasons to support Adams: both believed in federal investment in internal improvements, protective tariffs, and the Second Bank (the American System framework).

Clay threw his support to Adams. The House voted February 9, 1825. Adams won on the first ballot with 13 state delegations to Jackson's 7 and Crawford's 4. Three days later, Adams announced his Cabinet. Clay would be Secretary of State - the position that had become a traditional stepping stone to the presidency (every Secretary of State since 1801 had become president: Madison under Jefferson, Monroe under Madison, Adams under Monroe). Jackson's supporters immediately denounced the appointment as a "corrupt bargain."

The Corrupt Bargain charge would dominate U.S. politics for the next four years. Adams's presidency would be effectively a four-year campaign rally for Jackson 1828. Adams himself was a poor politician - his policy proposals (federal funding of internal improvements, a national university, a federal astronomical observatory) were widely mocked as impractical. The 1828 rematch would produce Jackson's landslide victory, the formal end of the Era of Good Feelings, and the Second Party System (Democrats vs. Whigs) that would dominate American politics until 1854.

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

Corrupt Bargain

The name Jackson's supporters gave to the 1824-25 deal in which Speaker Henry Clay helped John Quincy Adams win the House contingent election. Adams then named Clay Secretary of State. The charge dominated U.S. politics for four years; Adams and Clay both denied any explicit deal.

American System

Henry Clay's 1824 economic-development framework. Combined a protective tariff, federal internal improvements (roads, canals), and the Second Bank of the United States. Adopted by the National Republican / Whig Party tradition.

Battle of New Orleans

Andrew Jackson's January 8, 1815 victory over British forces. The lopsided U.S. victory made Jackson a national hero and the most popular general of his generation - the political foundation of his 1824 and 1828 candidacies.

Contingent election

When no candidate wins an Electoral College majority, the U.S. House of Representatives picks the president from the top three candidates. Each state gets one vote in the House contingent election (regardless of population). 13 of 24 state delegations were needed to win in 1825.

Congressional caucus

A meeting of a party's congressional members to choose the party's presidential nominee. The 1824 Democratic-Republican caucus nominated Crawford but only 66 of 240 members attended. Rejection of the caucus by three of the four 1824 candidates effectively ended the caucus system.

Jacksonian Democracy

The political movement organized by Jackson and his supporters between 1824 and 1828. Emphasized expanded white-male suffrage, rotation in office (the spoils system), opposition to the Second Bank, and Indian removal. Founded the modern Democratic Party.

Inaugural Address

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS, MARCH 4, 1825

Adams took the oath at the East Portico of the U.S. Capitol just three weeks after the House contingent election. The address was politically constrained: Adams faced four years of Jacksonian opposition built around the Corrupt Bargain charge. Adams's strategy was to elevate the office above partisan dispute by emphasizing constitutional continuity and the practical work of governance.

> *"Less possessed of your confidence in advance than any of my predecessors, I am deeply conscious of the prospect that I shall stand more and more in need of your indulgence as I proceed. I can promise nothing but justice in my purposes, integrity in my pursuit of them, and a continual exertion to discharge the duties of the high station to which the will of the people has called me. To the same Divine power who, in the course of His providence, has made me the instrument of conferring this distinction upon me, I commit my future course."*

Adams, "Inaugural Address" (Washington, DC, March 4, 1825). Public domain.

The 1824 Election

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

QUESTION 1 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

How many electoral votes did Andrew Jackson win in 1824?

( ) A. 67
( ) B. 84
( ) C. 99
( ) D. 131

QUESTION 2 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

In a House contingent election, how many state delegations were needed to win in 1825?

( ) A. 10
( ) B. 13
( ) C. 17
( ) D. 24

QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER

Identify all four 1824 candidates and the regional base each represented.

QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER

Why did Henry Clay throw his support to John Quincy Adams rather than Andrew Jackson in the House contingent election?

QUESTION 5 · SHORT-ANSWER

Adams's inaugural says he is "less possessed of your confidence in advance than any of my predecessors." Explain what political situation he was acknowledging, and why his framing was strategically necessary.

QUESTION 6 · MAP-READ

On the 1824 election map, identify the regional bases of all four candidates. What does the geographic pattern tell you about the breakup of the Democratic-Republican coalition?

Answer key

QUESTION 1

99. Jackson 99; Adams 84; Crawford 41; Clay 37. Nobody had a majority (131 needed).

Jackson won the most electoral votes AND the most popular votes but did not become president.

QUESTION 2

13. The 1824 Union had 24 states, so 13 state delegations were needed for a majority. Adams won 13 to Jackson's 7 and Crawford's 4 on the first ballot, February 9, 1825.

The House contingent election uses state-delegation voting, not individual House member voting. Each state gets one vote regardless of population.

QUESTION 3

(1) Jackson of Tennessee (South + West, populist hero of New Orleans). (2) Adams of Massachusetts (New England + former Federalists). (3) Crawford of Georgia (South + Democratic-Republican strict-construction). (4) Clay of Kentucky (West + upper South + American System framework).

The four-way regional split is one of the most-cited examples of how one-party government can mask sectional alignments that become explicit once the party fragments.

QUESTION 4

Clay had two reasons. (1) Personal: Jackson had publicly criticized Clay's 1821 House vote against Jackson's 1818 First Seminole War conduct; Clay considered Jackson's military background dangerous to constitutional government. (2) Policy: Adams and Clay both believed in federal investment in internal improvements, protective tariffs, and the Second Bank (the American System framework). Jackson opposed all three. Throwing support to Adams gave Clay an ally on his core policy agenda. Jackson supporters denounced the arrangement as a "Corrupt Bargain" when Adams subsequently named Clay Secretary of State.

The Clay-Adams alignment on policy was substantively real; the Corrupt Bargain charge nevertheless dominated U.S. politics for four years because of the appearance of explicit quid pro quo.

QUESTION 5

Adams was acknowledging that he had won the presidency despite finishing second in the popular vote and second in the Electoral College. The House contingent election had given him the office, but he lacked the popular mandate normally associated with the presidency. The framing was strategically necessary because attempting to claim ordinary mandate would have intensified the Corrupt Bargain charge. By admitting his political weakness directly, Adams positioned himself as a constitutional servant rather than a populist victor.

Adams's 1825 self-deprecating framing is one of the most-discussed inaugural addresses. It was strategically necessary but politically inadequate - Jackson supporters used the admission against him for four years.

QUESTION 6

Jackson: Tennessee, the trans-Appalachian South (Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina), Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Indiana. Adams: New England (Massachusetts, Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont), New York. Crawford: Virginia, Georgia, Delaware, parts of North Carolina. Clay: Kentucky, Ohio, Missouri. Pattern: each candidate had a distinct regional base. The geographic split shows that the Democratic-Republican coalition was held together by personality and historical inheritance rather than by shared ideology. Once the party stopped agreeing on a single nominee, regional and ideological differences immediately produced four separate candidates.

The 1824 map is one of the clearest examples of how a one-party system can mask sectional alignments. AP students should be able to read it analytically.