3-5 EDITION · CLASSROOM

1828

Andrew Jackson vs John Quincy Adams

A 35-minute lesson on the 1828 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA Second Party System	ELECTORAL VOTES 261 total
WINNER Andrew Jackson (Democratic) · 178 EV	RUNNER-UP John Quincy Adams (National Republican) · 83 EV
KEY ISSUE Revenge for the 'Corrupt Bargain'; democratic reform; tariff policy	TURNOUT 57.3%

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

1828: Andrew Jackson vs John Quincy Adams

Timing

5 min	**Warm-up**	When voters feel that the system has cheated them, sometimes a leader emerges who promises to fight for "the common people." What kind of message would such a leader give? How might other leaders react?
15 min	**Reading**	The 1828 election was the rematch from 1824. Andrew Jackson and his supporters had spent four years organizing for revenge against John Quincy Adams and the "Corrupt Bargain." Senator Martin Van Buren of New York was the political organizer behind Jackson. Van Buren built what became the modern Democratic Party by combining four groups: (1) Jackson's base of Southern and Western voters who had favored him in 1824; (2) New York and Pennsylvania political machines that Van Buren personally controlled; (3) anti-tariff Southerners angry about the 1824 Tariff (later strengthened in 1828); (4) state-rights conservatives opposed to Clay's American System framework. By 1828 the Democratic Party had a national organization with state-level committees, newspaper networks, and local campaign workers. The political environment had changed dramatically. Most states had moved to universal white-male suffrage between 1820 and 1828, dropping property requirements for voting. The electorate roughly tripled between 1824 and 1828. Most states had also moved from legislative selection to popular election of presidential electors - by 1828 only South Carolina and Delaware still used legislative selection. The new mass electorate transformed presidential campaigning. Adams ran as the candidate of the National Republican Party - the new name for the faction that had supported him in 1824 (Adams, Clay, and former Federalists). He had no real chance. The Corrupt Bargain charge had dominated four years of political coverage. Adams's ambitious 1825 annual message (the national university, the federal astronomical observatory) had been mocked relentlessly. Adams's personal style was cold and aloof - in stark contrast to Jackson's common-man populism. The campaign was the nastiest in U.S. history to that point. Jacksonians attacked Adams as a corrupt elitist who had bought his presidency. They claimed Adams had procured a young American woman as a prostitute for the Russian tsar during his time as U.S. minister to Russia (the charge was false). National Republicans counterattacked by calling Jackson a murderer (he had killed Charles Dickinson in an 1806 duel and had executed six militia deserters during the Creek War), an adulterer

(Jackson had married Rachel Donelson before her divorce from her first husband was finalized), and a slave trader. The personal attacks on Rachel were particularly cruel.

Jackson won 178 electoral votes to Adams's 83. He won 56 percent of the popular vote to Adams's 44 percent - the largest popular-vote margin since 1820. Turnout reached 57.6 percent of eligible voters (up from 26.9 percent in 1824). The geographic map was nearly the inverse of 1828: Jackson swept the South and West and added Pennsylvania, New York, and parts of Maine. Adams held New England plus New Jersey, Delaware, and parts of Maryland.

Two weeks after the election, Rachel Jackson died of a heart attack. Jackson blamed her death on the National Republican attacks and never forgave Adams or Clay personally. Adams refused to attend Jackson's inauguration - the third time in U.S. history (after his father in 1801 and Madison's eventual no-show in some receptions) that a sitting president refused to attend his successor's ceremony.

Jackson was inaugurated March 4, 1829. The famous "reception" at the White House drew thousands of supporters from across the country; furniture was broken, china smashed, and Jackson reportedly escaped through a back window. The image of common-people government replacing elite politics became central to Jacksonian mythology.

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 1828 Election

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Key words

Democratic Party	The political party Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren built between 1825 and 1828. The first U.S. mass political party with state-level committees, newspaper networks, and local campaign workers. The direct ancestor of today's Democratic Party.
National Republican Party	The 1828 name for the political faction that supported John Quincy Adams: Adams, Clay, former Federalists, and supporters of the American System. Lost the 1828 election; merged with the Whig Party in the 1830s.
Universal white-male suffrage	Voting rights for all adult white men regardless of property ownership. Most U.S. states had moved to this rule between 1820 and 1828. The expanded electorate roughly tripled the U.S. presidential popular vote between 1824 and 1828.
Martin Van Buren	Senator from New York and the political organizer behind Andrew Jackson. Built the Democratic Party as a national organization. Became Jackson's Secretary of State, then Vice President, and finally President (1837-41).
Spoils system	The Jacksonian practice of awarding federal jobs to political supporters after winning an election. Replaced civil-service appointments based on long-term experience. Lasted until the 1883 Pendleton Civil Service Act.

Four questions

QUESTION 1 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

How many electoral votes did Andrew Jackson win in 1828?

( ) A. 147
( ) B. 163
( ) C. 178
( ) D. 212

QUESTION 2 · SHORT-ANSWER

Who organized the Democratic Party as a national organization between 1824 and 1828?

QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER

How did universal white-male suffrage change the 1828 election compared to 1824?

QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER

Why is the 1828 campaign considered the nastiest in U.S. history to that point?

Answer key

QUESTION 1

178. Jackson 178; Adams 83. The 95-vote margin was the largest non-incumbent landslide since 1804.

Jackson won 56% of the popular vote to Adams's 44%. Turnout reached 57.6% of eligible voters (up from 26.9% in 1824).

QUESTION 2

Senator Martin Van Buren of New York. He combined Jackson's 1824 base with New York and Pennsylvania political machines, anti-tariff Southerners, and state-rights conservatives. The Democratic Party emerged as the first U.S. mass political party with state-level committees, newspaper networks, and local campaign workers.

Van Buren is the most important political organizer of the early-19th-century U.S. He invented many of the techniques that would dominate American politics for the next century.

QUESTION 3

Universal white-male suffrage dramatically expanded the electorate between 1824 and 1828. Most states dropped property requirements for voting. The presidential popular vote roughly tripled (from about 365,000 in 1824 to about 1.15 million in 1828). The expanded electorate transformed political campaigning - mass appeals replaced elite-caucus politics. Jackson's common-man populism worked precisely because the new electorate was responsive to it.

Universal white-male suffrage was largely complete by 1828. The expanded electorate is one of the main structural reasons Jackson's populist message succeeded.

QUESTION 4

Jacksonians attacked Adams as a corrupt elitist who had bought his presidency through the 1824 Corrupt Bargain. They claimed (falsely) that Adams had procured a young American woman as a prostitute for the Russian tsar during his time as U.S. minister to Russia. National Republicans counterattacked by calling Jackson a murderer (the 1806 Dickinson duel, the Creek War deserter executions), an adulterer (Rachel Donelson Jackson had married Jackson before her divorce was finalized), and a slave trader. The personal attacks on Rachel Jackson - she was called a bigamist in National Republican newspapers - were particularly cruel. Two weeks after the election, Rachel died of a heart attack. Jackson blamed her death on the National Republican attacks and never forgave Adams or Clay.

The 1828 campaign's personal attacks set a low-water mark for U.S. political discourse that would not be matched until the late 19th century.