1828

Andrew Jackson vs John Quincy Adams

A 50-minute lesson on the 1828 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, background reading with primary source, 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 (50 min)
3. Background: key terms + source
4. Worksheet (6 questions)
5. Answer key

1828: Andrew Jackson vs John Quincy Adams

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 1828 that would produce a landslide victory for a populist challenger to an unpopular incumbent. For each, identify the specific 1825-1828 development most responsible.
15 min	**Reading + vocab**	The 1828 election was the 11th U.S. presidential election. It produced Andrew Jackson's landslide victory over John Quincy Adams, the formal founding of the modern Democratic Party, the structural transformation of U.S. presidential campaigning, and the inauguration of the Second Party System that would dominate American politics until 1854. The Jacksonian movement had been organizing since the February 1825 Corrupt Bargain. Senator Martin Van Buren of New York was the principal political architect. Van Buren built what became the modern Democratic Party by combining four groups: (1) Jackson's 1824 base of Southern and Western voters; (2) the Albany Regency political machine he controlled in New York; (3) Pennsylvania commercial interests opposed to the 1828 Tariff (also called the Tariff of Abominations) but supportive of Jackson personally; (4) Southern strict-construction Democratic-Republicans (including Vice President John C. Calhoun, who switched from running with Adams to running with Jackson). By 1828 the Democratic Party had a national organization with state-level committees, partisan newspapers in every major city, and local campaign workers at the precinct level. This was the first U.S. mass political party. The political environment had transformed dramatically since 1824. 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. The party had no real chance of winning. The Corrupt Bargain charge had dominated four years of political coverage. Adams's ambitious 1825 annual message (proposing federal funding of internal

improvements, a national university, a federal astronomical observatory) had been mocked relentlessly. Adams's personal style was cold, intellectual, and aloof - in stark contrast to Jackson's common-man populism.

The Tariff of 1828 (the Tariff of Abominations) was the year's dominant policy issue. The Tariff raised duties on imported manufactured goods to historic highs, protecting Northeastern manufacturing at the expense of Southern agricultural exporters. Vice President John C. Calhoun, technically an Adams administration officer but already aligned with Jackson, secretly drafted the South Carolina Exposition and Protest in late 1828 arguing that states could nullify federal laws they considered unconstitutional. The Tariff and nullification crisis would consume Jackson's first term.

The campaign was the nastiest in U.S. history to that point. Jacksonians attacked Adams as a corrupt elitist (the Corrupt Bargain) and (falsely) claimed he had procured a young American woman as a prostitute for the Russian tsar. National Republicans counterattacked by calling Jackson a murderer (the 1806 Dickinson duel; the Creek War deserter executions), an adulterer (Rachel Donelson had married Jackson before her divorce from Lewis Robards was finalized), and a slave trader. The personal attacks on Rachel Jackson were particularly cruel. National Republican papers called her a bigamist. 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 personally.

Jackson won 178 electoral votes to Adams's 83. The popular vote was 56% to 44% - the largest popular-vote margin since 1820. Turnout reached 57.6% of eligible voters (up from 26.9% in 1824). The geographic map was nearly the inverse of 1824 conditions: Jackson swept the South, the West, Pennsylvania, New York (with Van Buren's machine), and parts of Maine. Adams held New England plus New Jersey, Delaware, and 5 of Maryland's 11 electors.

Jackson was inaugurated March 4, 1829. The famous open-house reception at the White House drew thousands of supporters. Furniture was broken; china was smashed; Jackson reportedly escaped through a back window. The image of common-people government replacing elite politics became central to Jacksonian mythology. Adams refused to attend the 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 had refused to attend his successor's ceremony.

Jackson's first term would deliver the spoils system (federal jobs awarded to political supporters), the 1830 Indian Removal Act (forcing the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, and Seminole Nations west of the Mississippi), the 1832-33 Nullification Crisis (in which South Carolina nullified the federal tariff and Jackson threatened military force), and the 1832 veto of the Second Bank of the United States. The 1828 election was the structural inflection point that made all of these possible.

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

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, partisan newspaper networks, and precinct-level campaign workers. The direct ancestor of today's Democratic Party.

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.

Spoils system

The Jacksonian practice of awarding federal jobs to political supporters after winning an election. Replaced civil-service appointments based on experience. Lasted until the 1883 Pendleton Civil Service Act, which restored merit-based hiring for many federal positions.

National Republican Party

The 1828 name for the political faction that supported John Quincy Adams. Included Adams, Clay, former Federalists, and supporters of the American System framework. Lost the 1828 election; merged with the Whig Party in the 1830s.

Tariff of Abominations

The 1828 Tariff Act raising duties on imported manufactured goods to historic highs. Protected Northeastern manufacturing at the expense of Southern agricultural exporters. Triggered the South Carolina Exposition and Protest and the 1832 Nullification Crisis.

Albany Regency

The Democratic Party political machine controlled by Martin Van Buren in New York. The first organized U.S. state-level political machine; the model for subsequent machines in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and elsewhere.

First Inaugural Address

ANDREW JACKSON, MARCH 4, 1829

Jackson took the oath at the East Portico of the U.S. Capitol before an estimated 15,000 spectators - the largest inauguration crowd to that point. The address was strikingly brief by inaugural standards and emphasized democratic legitimacy through popular election. Jackson's political stance was that the 1828 result restored constitutional government by returning power to the people from whom Adams and Clay had stolen it in 1824.

> *"About to undertake the arduous duties that I have been appointed to perform by the choice of a free people, I avail myself of this customary and solemn occasion to express the gratitude which their confidence inspires and to acknowledge the accountability which my situation enjoins. While the magnitude of their interests convinces me that no thanks can be adequate to the honor they have conferred, it admonishes me that the best return I can make is the zealous dedication of my humble abilities to their service and their good."*

Jackson, "First Inaugural Address" (Washington, DC, March 4, 1829). Public domain.

The 1828 Election

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

QUESTION 1 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

How many electoral votes did Andrew Jackson win in 1828?

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

QUESTION 2 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

The 1828 Tariff Act was widely called:

( ) A. Tariff of Antagonism
( ) B. Tariff of Abominations
( ) C. Tariff of Embarrassment
( ) D. Tariff of Atrocities

QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER

Who organized the Democratic Party as a national organization between 1825 and 1828, and what techniques did the party use that were new in 1828?

QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER

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

QUESTION 5 · SHORT-ANSWER

Why was the 1828 campaign the nastiest in U.S. history to that point? Identify two specific examples of personal attack.

QUESTION 6 · MAP-READ

On the 1828 election map, identify the regional pattern of Jackson vs. Adams support. How does the map compare to 1824?

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. Turnout reached 57.6% of eligible voters (up from 26.9% in 1824).

QUESTION 2

Tariff of Abominations. The 1828 Tariff Act raised duties on imported manufactured goods to historic highs, protecting Northeastern manufacturing at the expense of Southern agricultural exporters. Triggered the South Carolina Exposition and Protest and the 1832-33 Nullification Crisis.

Vice President Calhoun secretly drafted the Exposition and Protest in late 1828, arguing that states could nullify federal laws they considered unconstitutional.

QUESTION 3

Senator Martin Van Buren of New York organized the Democratic Party. New techniques included: (1) state-level committees coordinating local campaign activity; (2) partisan newspaper networks in every major city; (3) precinct-level campaign workers conducting voter mobilization; (4) the spoils system promise of federal jobs as reward for political support; (5) mass rallies and public events instead of elite caucus politics; (6) coordinated national messaging through partisan press.

Van Buren's organizational innovations would dominate U.S. political organization for the next century. Most modern political-party features were invented or refined in the 1820s.

QUESTION 4

Universal white-male suffrage dramatically expanded the electorate. Most states dropped property requirements for voting between 1820 and 1828. The presidential popular vote roughly tripled (from about 365,000 in 1824 to about 1.15 million in 1828). Most states also moved from legislative selection to popular election of presidential electors - by 1828 only South Carolina and Delaware still used legislative selection. The expanded mass electorate transformed campaigning: mass appeals replaced elite-caucus politics. Jackson's common-man populism succeeded precisely because the new electorate was responsive to it.

The 1828 turnout-vs-1824 jump is one of the structural transformations of U.S. political history.

QUESTION 5

Accept any two of: (1) Jacksonians attacked Adams as a corrupt elitist (the 1824 Corrupt Bargain) and falsely claimed he had procured an American woman as a prostitute for the Russian tsar. (2) National Republicans called Jackson a murderer (the 1806 Dickinson duel; the Creek War deserter executions). (3) National Republicans called Jackson an adulterer (Rachel Donelson had married Jackson before her divorce was finalized). (4) Rachel Jackson was called a bigamist in National Republican papers. (5) Jackson was called a slave trader. The personal attacks on Rachel were particularly cruel; she died of a heart attack two weeks after the election. Jackson blamed her death on the attacks.

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

QUESTION 6

Jackson swept the South, the West, Pennsylvania, New York (Van Buren's machine), and parts of Maine. Adams held New England (Massachusetts, Connecticut, Maine majority, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont) plus New Jersey, Delaware, and 5 of Maryland's 11 electors. Compared to 1824: Jackson kept his Southern and Western base, added Pennsylvania (which he had won in 1824) and New York (which had been split). Adams held his New England base and lost everywhere else. The 1828 map is the founding map of the Second Party System: the South + West + Pennsylvania + New York became the Democratic coalition; New England plus parts of the middle Atlantic became the National Republican (later Whig) coalition.

The 1828 map is one of the founding moments of modern American electoral geography. AP students should be able to trace its coalitions through the Second Party System.