1828

Andrew Jackson vs John Quincy Adams

A 75-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%

CONTENTS

1. Cover + overview
2. Lesson plan (instructor, 75 min)
3. Background: key terms + primary source
4. Student worksheet (7 questions)
5. Answer key + discussion prompts

1828: Andrew Jackson vs John Quincy Adams

Standards alignment

NCSS · D2.His.4.9-12 (chronological reasoning) · D2.His.14.9-12 (causation in U.S. history). CCSS · CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2 (key ideas/details in primary sources).

Materials

One copy of the student worksheet per student. Optional: the 1828 map at theamericanvote.com/elections/-1828 projected, or printed as a handout.

Timing

5 min	**Warm-up**	Identify two structural conditions in U.S. politics by 1828 that would produce a populist landslide against the incumbent. For each, identify the specific 1819-1828 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 (1828-1854). 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 combined four constituencies into the new Democratic Party: (1) Jackson's 1824 base of Southern and Western voters who had felt cheated by the House contingent election; (2) the Albany Regency political machine Van Buren personally controlled in New York; (3) Pennsylvania manufacturing interests opposed to the 1828 Tariff 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, becoming the only person in U.S. history to serve as VP under two consecutive presidents from opposing factions). The Democratic Party emerged with a national organization including state-level committees, partisan newspaper networks in every major city, and local campaign workers at the precinct level. It was the first U.S. mass political party. The political environment had transformed since 1824. Universal white-male suffrage had been substantially achieved across the U.S. between 1820 and 1828, with most states dropping property requirements for voting. The presidential electorate roughly tripled between 1824 and 1828 - from about 365,000 popular voters to 1,148,018. 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 campaigning: mass rallies, partisan

newspapers, parades, badges, and slogans replaced elite-caucus politics. Jackson's common-man populism was the campaign style most adapted to the new electorate.

Adams ran as the candidate of the National Republican Party - the new name for the faction that had supported him in 1824. The party included Adams, Clay (Adams's Secretary of State), former Federalists, and supporters of the American System framework. 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, federal scientific exploration, and uniform federal weights and measures - had been mocked relentlessly by Jacksonians and produced almost no enacted legislation. Adams's personal style was cold, intellectual, and aloof.

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. The South Carolina Exposition and Protest, secretly drafted by Vice President Calhoun in late 1828, argued that states could nullify federal laws they considered unconstitutional. The Tariff and the resulting 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 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 had married Jackson before her divorce from Lewis Robards was finalized), and a slave trader. The personal attacks on Rachel Jackson - she was called a bigamist in National Republican papers - were particularly cruel.

Jackson won 178 electoral votes to Adams's 83. The popular vote was 642,553 (56%) to 500,897 (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 the founding map of the Second Party System: 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.

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 March 4, 1829 inauguration - the third time in U.S. history a sitting president had refused to attend his successor's ceremony. The famous open-house reception at the White House drew an estimated 20,000 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.

		Jackson's first term would deliver the spoils system (federal jobs awarded to political supporters; the 1832 Pendleton Civil Service Act would not arrive for fifty years), the 1830 Indian Removal Act (forcing the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, and Seminole Nations west of the Mississippi - the Trail of Tears), the 1832 veto of the Second Bank of the United States (the Bank War), and the 1832-33 Nullification Crisis (in which South Carolina nullified the federal tariff and Jackson threatened military force). The 1828 election was the structural inflection point that made all of these possible. Then review the Key Terms on the background page so students share vocabulary before the primary-source work.
15 min	**Primary source**	Read the excerpt aloud once. Students annotate individually (3 min), then pair-share on worksheet questions 6 and 7 (5 min).
15 min	**Discussion**	Small groups (3–4). Pick one of the three prompts at the back of this packet (or assign one). Each group reports back two sentences.
20 min	**Assessment**	Student worksheet. Seven questions, mixed format (5 about the reading, 2 about the primary source). Answer key in the instructor section at the back.
5 min	**Closure**	One-sentence exit ticket — see Closure section below.

Closure

One-sentence exit ticket: "What is one thing the 1828 election tells you about the Second Party System era that the textbook didn't?"

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. Substantially achieved across the U.S. between 1820 and 1828. The presidential popular vote roughly tripled between 1824 and 1828 (365,000 to 1,148,018).

Spoils system

The Jacksonian practice of awarding federal jobs to political supporters after winning an election. The phrase comes from Senator William Marcy's 1832 remark "to the victor belong the spoils." Replaced civil-service appointments based on experience. Lasted until the 1883 Pendleton Civil Service Act restored merit-based hiring for many federal positions.

South Carolina Exposition and Protest

The document secretly drafted by Vice President John C. Calhoun in late 1828 in response to the Tariff of Abominations. Argued that states could nullify federal laws they considered unconstitutional. Articulated the theoretical foundation for the 1832-33 Nullification Crisis.

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 1832-33 Nullification Crisis.

Albany Regency

The Democratic Party political machine controlled by Martin Van Buren in New York between approximately 1820 and 1840. 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. Jackson's political stance was that the 1828 result had restored constitutional government by returning power to the people from whom Adams and Clay had stolen it in 1824. The "choice of a free people" framing was deliberate - it positioned Jackson's presidency as legitimate by virtue of popular sovereignty rather than congressional contingent procedure.

> *"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 (key terms and primary source), then answer the seven questions below. Questions 6 and 7 ask you to quote from the primary source.

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 political machine Martin Van Buren controlled in New York was called the:

( ) A. Tammany Hall
( ) B. Albany Regency
( ) C. Empire State Caucus
( ) D. New York Junto

QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER

Identify three specific organizational techniques the Democratic Party used in 1828 that were new in U.S. political history.

QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER

How did universal white-male suffrage and the move to popular election of electors transform U.S. presidential campaigning between 1824 and 1828?

QUESTION 5 · SHORT-ANSWER

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

SOURCE ANALYSIS — QUESTIONS 6 AND 7 REFERENCE THE PRIMARY SOURCE ON THE BACKGROUND PAGE.

QUESTION 6 · SHORT-ANSWER

Jackson says in his inaugural that he was "appointed to perform by the choice of a free people." What political message was he sending, and how did the framing contrast with Adams's 1825 inaugural?

QUESTION 7 · MAP-READ

On the 1828 election map, identify the regional pattern of Jackson vs. Adams support. How does the map compare to 1824, and what does the comparison tell you about the structural emergence of the Second Party System?

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.

QUESTION 2

Albany Regency. The Democratic Party political machine controlled by Van Buren between approximately 1820 and 1840. The first organized U.S. state-level political machine; the model for subsequent machines.

The Albany Regency invented many of the political-machine techniques that would dominate American urban politics for the next century.

QUESTION 3

Accept any three of: (1) State-level committees coordinating local campaign activity across an entire state. (2) Partisan newspaper networks in every major city, coordinated for unified messaging. (3) Precinct-level campaign workers conducting door-to-door voter mobilization. (4) The spoils system promise of federal jobs as reward for political support. (5) Mass rallies, parades, and public events. (6) Badges, slogans, songs, and branded materials. (7) Coordinated national messaging through partisan press. (8) Direct mail and pamphleteering at a scale not previously seen.

Van Buren's organizational innovations defined U.S. political organization for the next century. Modern political-party features were largely invented or refined in the 1820s.

QUESTION 4

Universal white-male suffrage and popular electoral selection both expanded the electorate dramatically. The presidential popular vote tripled (365,000 in 1824 to 1.15 million in 1828). Most states moved from legislative selection of electors to popular election. The new mass electorate transformed campaigning: mass rallies and partisan press replaced elite-caucus politics; populist appeals to "the common man" became politically effective; campaign visibility shifted from Washington to states and cities. Jackson's style - public, populist, dramatic - was uniquely suited to the new electorate. Adams's style - intellectual, aloof, elite - was not.

The 1828 surge is one of the most-cited structural transformations of U.S. political history.

QUESTION 5

Accept any three of: (1) Jacksonians attacked Adams as a corrupt elitist via the Corrupt Bargain charge. (2) Jacksonians falsely claimed Adams had procured a young American woman as a prostitute for the Russian tsar. (3) National Republicans called Jackson a murderer (the 1806 Dickinson duel; the Creek War deserter executions). (4) National Republicans called Jackson an adulterer (Rachel Donelson had married Jackson before her divorce was finalized). (5) Rachel Jackson was called a bigamist in National Republican papers. (6) Jackson was called a slave trader. (7) National Republicans circulated the Coffin Handbills depicting Jackson's executed deserters. The personal attacks on Rachel Jackson were particularly cruel - she died of a heart attack two weeks after the election.

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 was framing his presidency as legitimate through popular sovereignty - he had been chosen by "a free people," not by elite procedure. The "choice of a free people" framing was deliberate: it positioned Jackson's 1828 victory as restoring constitutional government by returning power to the people from whom Adams and Clay had stolen it in 1824. The contrast with Adams's 1825 inaugural was direct: Adams had acknowledged he was "less possessed of your confidence in advance than any of my predecessors" - admitting weak mandate. Jackson positioned himself as the opposite: maximally possessed of the people's confidence, restored to office by popular will after the procedural theft. The framing was the founding statement of Jacksonian Democracy as a political ideology.

AP students should be able to read the Jackson-Adams contrast as a deliberate ideological framing rather than a stylistic difference.

QUESTION 7

Jackson swept the South, the West, Pennsylvania, New York, and parts of Maine. Adams held New England 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 consolidated New York under Van Buren's machine. 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 coalitions would persist with minor variations until the 1850s, when the slavery-extension question would break both parties along sectional rather than economic-policy lines.

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.

Discussion prompts

1. The 1828 turnout (57.6%) was more than double the 1824 turnout (26.9%). Identify two structural reasons for the surge, and one specific feature of Van Buren's organizational work that mobilized the new voters.

2 The 1828 campaign's personal attacks set a low-water mark for U.S. political discourse. Identify two factors that made the attacks politically effective even when their literal accuracy was contested, and explain whether such attacks could have happened in a less developed party-press environment.