3-5 EDITION · CLASSROOM

1832

Andrew Jackson vs Henry Clay

A 35-minute lesson on the 1832 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA Second Party System	ELECTORAL VOTES 286 total
WINNER Andrew Jackson (Democratic) · 219 EV	RUNNER-UP Henry Clay (National Republican) · 49 EV
KEY ISSUE Bank of the United States; nullification crisis; tariff policy	TURNOUT 57.0%

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

1832: Andrew Jackson vs Henry Clay

Timing

5 min	**Warm-up**	Sometimes a president fights for one big issue and makes that fight the center of a re-election campaign. What does that strategy try to do for voters?
15 min	**Reading**	The 1832 election was the 12th U.S. presidential election. It was the first U.S. presidential election in which all three major parties chose their candidates through national conventions rather than through congressional caucuses. The election's central issue was the Bank of the United States. President Andrew Jackson was running for re-election. His first term had been politically dominant. He had introduced the spoils system (federal jobs as political reward), signed the Indian Removal Act (1830), and threatened force to defeat South Carolina's nullification of the federal tariff. But the central issue of the 1832 election was Jackson's war against the Second Bank of the United States. The Second Bank had been chartered in 1816 for 20 years. Its president, Nicholas Biddle of Philadelphia, ran the bank effectively but was politically arrogant. Biddle believed the Bank had become essential to American economic stability. He decided to push for early recharter in 1832 - four years before the existing charter expired - hoping Jackson would not dare veto it in an election year. Henry Clay, the National Republican candidate, encouraged the strategy. They believed the Bank issue would either kill Jackson politically (if he vetoed) or rob him of his populist credibility (if he signed). Jackson vetoed the recharter on July 10, 1832. His veto message, drafted by Roger Taney, articulated a populist case against concentrated economic power. The message argued that the Bank served "the rich and powerful" against "the humble members of society - the farmers, mechanics, and laborers." The veto became the founding document of American economic populism. The campaign was a referendum on Jackson and the Bank. The Democratic National Convention met in Baltimore in May 1832 and renominated Jackson with Martin Van Buren as his new running mate (replacing Calhoun, who had broken with Jackson over nullification). The National Republican National Convention had nominated Clay in December 1831. A third party - the Anti-Masonic Party - had nominated William Wirt of Maryland at the first major-party national convention in September 1831. The Anti-Masonic Party opposed Freemasonry and the influence of secret societies on politics. Jackson won 219 electoral votes to Clay's 49 and Wirt's 7. Jackson carried 16 states;

		Clay carried 6 (Connecticut, Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Rhode Island) plus 5 of Maryland's 10 electors. Wirt carried only Vermont. Jackson won 54.2 percent of the popular vote. South Carolina cast its 11 electoral votes for John Floyd of Virginia as a protest against Jackson on nullification. Jackson's second term would deliver the Removal of Deposits crisis (1833, when Jackson removed federal deposits from the Second Bank), the 1833 Compromise Tariff (resolving the Nullification Crisis), the 1834 Senate censure of Jackson (the only such censure in U.S. history, later expunged), and the 1836 Specie Circular (requiring gold or silver for federal land purchases). The 1832 election was the political foundation for all of these.
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 1832 Election

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Buren as his new running mate (replacing Calhoun, who had broken with Jackson over nullification). The National Republican National Convention had nominated Clay in December 1831. A third party - the Anti-Masonic Party - had nominated William Wirt of Maryland at the first major-party national convention in September 1831. The Anti-Masonic Party opposed Freemasonry and the influence of secret societies on politics.

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Key words

Bank War	The 1832-36 political fight between President Andrew Jackson and the Second Bank of the United States. Jackson vetoed the Bank's recharter in July 1832, removed federal deposits in 1833, and let the Bank's charter expire in 1836.
National convention	A large meeting where a political party chooses its presidential nominee. The 1832 election was the first U.S. presidential election in which all three major parties used national conventions to nominate candidates. The convention replaced the congressional caucus.

Anti-Masonic Party	The first U.S. third party of national significance. Founded in 1828 in response to the 1826 disappearance of William Morgan (a former Mason who had threatened to publish secrets). Held the first national party convention in September 1831. Nominated William Wirt in 1832; declined after 1840.
Veto	The president's constitutional power to reject legislation passed by Congress. Congress can override a veto with a two-thirds vote in both houses. Jackson used the veto more than all six previous presidents combined - 12 vetoes in eight years.
Nullification Crisis	The 1832-33 confrontation between the federal government and South Carolina. South Carolina nullified the 1828 and 1832 federal tariffs, declaring them void within the state. President Jackson threatened military force. Congress resolved the crisis with the 1833 Compromise Tariff.

Four questions

QUESTION 1 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

How many electoral votes did Andrew Jackson win in 1832?

( ) A. 168
( ) B. 189
( ) C. 219
( ) D. 247

QUESTION 2 · SHORT-ANSWER

Why did Nicholas Biddle push for early Bank recharter in 1832, and how did the strategy backfire?

QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER

What was the Anti-Masonic Party, and why was it historically significant despite not winning the 1832 election?

QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER

How did Jackson's Bank Veto Message frame the issue politically?

Answer key

QUESTION 1

219. Jackson 219; Clay 49; Wirt 7; Floyd 11 (South Carolina protest votes). Jackson carried 16 states.

The 1832 result was nearly as decisive as 1828. Jackson's coalition had broadened, and his Bank Veto had energized populist support.

QUESTION 2

Biddle and Clay believed forcing a Bank fight in an election year would put Jackson in an impossible position: vetoing would alienate moderate voters and the business community; signing would betray Jackson's populist base. They expected vetoing would politically destroy Jackson. The strategy backfired because Jackson successfully reframed the Bank as a tool of "the rich and powerful" against "the farmers, mechanics, and laborers." The veto became a political asset, not a liability. Jackson's Bank Veto Message energized the populist Democratic base and helped consolidate his 1832 coalition.

The Biddle-Clay miscalculation is one of the most-cited examples of opposition strategy backfiring in U.S. political history.

QUESTION 3

The Anti-Masonic Party was the first U.S. third party of national significance. It was founded in 1828 in response to the 1826 disappearance of William Morgan (a former Mason who had threatened to publish Masonic secrets). The party opposed Freemasonry and the influence of secret societies on politics. The Anti-Masonic Party held the first national party convention in U.S. history in Baltimore in September 1831 - a procedural innovation that all subsequent major parties adopted. Even though the Anti-Masonic Party won only Vermont in 1832 and declined after 1840, the convention innovation transformed U.S. politics.

The Anti-Masonic Party's political legacy is procedural, not substantive: it invented the national party convention. AP students should know the innovation.

QUESTION 4

Jackson's Bank Veto Message, drafted by Roger Taney, framed the Bank as a tool of "the rich and powerful" against "the humble members of society - the farmers, mechanics, and laborers." The message argued that government should protect ordinary citizens against concentrated economic power and "artificial distinctions" (titles, gratuities, exclusive privileges) that "make the rich richer and the potent more powerful." The framing positioned Jackson as the champion of ordinary Americans against an elite that included Eastern bankers, the political establishment, and the wealthy. The Bank Veto Message became the founding document of American economic populism.

The Bank Veto Message is one of the most influential documents in American political history. AP students should be able to identify its ideological structure.