3-5 EDITION · CLASSROOM

1868

Ulysses S. Grant vs Horatio Seymour

A 35-minute lesson on the 1868 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA Reconstruction	ELECTORAL VOTES 294 total
WINNER Ulysses S. Grant (Republican) · 214 EV	RUNNER-UP Horatio Seymour (Democratic) · 80 EV
KEY ISSUE Reconstruction policy; Black suffrage; wartime debt repayment	TURNOUT 80.9%

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

1868: Ulysses S. Grant vs Horatio Seymour

Timing

5 min	Warm-up	After a war ends and the winning side has to decide how to treat the losing side, what kinds of difficult decisions must they make?
15 min	Reading	The 1868 election was the 21st U.S. presidential election. It was the first U.S. presidential election after the Civil War and the first in which Black Americans in the South could legally vote. The election produced Ulysses S. Grant's decisive victory and confirmed Republican control of Reconstruction. The political environment was dominated by Reconstruction. After Lincoln's April 1865 assassination, Vice President Andrew Johnson - a War Democrat from Tennessee - had become the 17th president. Johnson and the Radical Republican congressional majority had fundamentally conflicting visions of Reconstruction. Johnson favored lenient terms for the South (full restoration of state rights, no federal protection of Black civil rights). Radicals favored strict terms (federal protection of Black civil rights, military occupation, exclusion of former Confederate officials from political power). The conflict produced: the 1866 Civil Rights Act (passed over Johnson's veto); the Fourteenth Amendment (ratified July 1868); the 1867 Reconstruction Acts (placing the South under military rule); the 1867 Tenure of Office Act (limiting Johnson's ability to fire Cabinet officials); and Johnson's February 1868 impeachment (the Senate acquitted by one vote in May 1868). Johnson's presidency had been politically catastrophic for the Democratic Party - associating it with Confederate sympathies. The Republican Party - dominated by Radicals after the Johnson impeachment - met in Chicago on May 20-21, 1868. The convention nominated Ulysses S. Grant unanimously on the first ballot. Grant was 46 years old, the Union army's top general during the Civil War, and the most popular American since Washington. He had accepted Robert E. Lee's April 1865 surrender at Appomattox Court House. He had been Johnson's reluctant Secretary of War (briefly, August 1867 - February 1868) before resigning over the Tenure of Office Act dispute. Schuyler Colfax of Indiana was the vice presidential candidate. The Democratic Party met in New York City on July 4-9, 1868. The convention deadlocked through 21 ballots between Senator George H. Pendleton of Ohio, Senator Thomas A. Hendricks of Indiana, former Treasury Secretary Salmon P. Chase (who had been a Radical Republican but had broken with the party over Reconstruction policy), and others. On the 22nd ballot the convention nominated former Governor Horatio Seymour of New York - a Peace Democrat who had opposed Lincoln during the Civil War. Seymour was politically tainted by his association with Copperhead

sentiment. Frank Blair Jr. of Missouri was the vice presidential candidate; Blair publicly declared his opposition to Reconstruction in inflammatory terms, further damaging the Democratic campaign.

The 1868 election was politically transformative for several reasons. (1) The 1867 Reconstruction Acts had required Southern states to allow Black male voters as a condition of readmission to the Union. Seven of the eleven former Confederate states had been readmitted under Reconstruction governments by November 1868: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee. Black voters in these states cast hundreds of thousands of votes - the first significant Black voting in U.S. history. (2) Black voters supported Grant overwhelmingly (around 90%). (3) Three former Confederate states - Mississippi, Texas, Virginia - had not yet been readmitted and did not vote in 1868.

Grant won 214 electoral votes to Seymour's 80. Grant carried 26 states; Seymour carried 8 (Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Oregon). The popular vote was 3,013,650 (52.7%) to 2,708,744 (47.3%) - much closer than the electoral margin suggests. Grant's margin in the popular vote (305,000) was smaller than the estimated Black vote in his column - meaning that without Black voters, Seymour might have won the popular vote (though Grant would still have won the Electoral College).

Grant was inaugurated March 4, 1869. His two terms would deliver: the February 1870 ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment (prohibiting race-based denial of voting rights); the 1870-71 Ku Klux Klan Acts (federal prosecution of Klan violence); the 1872 Amnesty Act (restoring political rights to most former Confederate officials); the 1872 re-election (286-66 over Horace Greeley); but also major corruption scandals (Credit Mobilier 1872-73; Whiskey Ring 1875; Indian Ring 1876) that damaged the Republican Party and contributed to declining Northern support for Reconstruction. The 1877 Compromise would effectively end Reconstruction under Grant's successor Rutherford B. Hayes.

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 1868 Election

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The political environment was dominated by Reconstruction. After Lincoln's April 1865 assassination, Vice President Andrew Johnson - a War Democrat from Tennessee - had become the 17th president. Johnson and the Radical Republican congressional majority had fundamentally conflicting visions of Reconstruction. Johnson favored lenient terms for the South (full restoration of state rights, no federal protection of Black civil rights). Radicals favored strict terms (federal protection of Black civil rights, military occupation, exclusion of former Confederate officials from political power). The conflict produced: the 1866 Civil Rights Act (passed over Johnson's veto); the Fourteenth Amendment (ratified July 1868); the 1867 Reconstruction Acts (placing the South under military rule); the 1867 Tenure of Office Act (limiting Johnson's ability to fire Cabinet officials); and Johnson's February 1868 impeachment (the Senate acquitted by one vote in May 1868). Johnson's presidency had been politically catastrophic for the Democratic Party - associating it with Confederate sympathies.

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The 1868 election was politically transformative for several reasons. (1) The 1867 Reconstruction Acts had required Southern states to allow Black male voters as a condition of readmission to the Union. Seven of the eleven former Confederate states had been readmitted under Reconstruction governments by November 1868: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee. Black voters in these states cast hundreds of thousands of votes - the first significant Black voting in U.S. history. (2) Black voters supported Grant overwhelmingly (around 90%). (3) Three former Confederate states - Mississippi, Texas, Virginia - had not yet been readmitted and did not vote in 1868.

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Key words

Reconstruction	The 1865-1877 period when the federal government tried to rebuild the South after the Civil War and protect the rights of newly freed Black Americans. Ended with the 1877 Compromise that withdrew federal troops from the South.
Fourteenth Amendment	Ratified July 1868. Established birthright citizenship; required equal protection of the laws; reduced congressional representation for states denying voting rights. The constitutional foundation of modern American civil rights law.
Fifteenth Amendment	Ratified February 1870. Prohibited federal or state denial of voting rights based on race, color, or previous condition of servitude. The third of the three Reconstruction Amendments.
Reconstruction Acts of 1867	The federal laws that placed the former Confederacy under military rule and required Southern states to ratify the 14th Amendment, allow Black male voters, and adopt new state constitutions as conditions of readmission to the Union.
Tenure of Office Act	The 1867 federal law (passed over Johnson's veto) limiting the president's ability to fire Cabinet officials without Senate consent. Johnson's violation of the Act in firing Secretary of War Edwin Stanton was the basis for his February 1868 impeachment.

Four questions

QUESTION 1 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

How many electoral votes did Ulysses S. Grant win in 1868?

( ) A. 189
( ) B. 203
( ) C. 214
( ) D. 247

QUESTION 2 · SHORT-ANSWER

Why did Grant's margin in the popular vote (305,000) suggest the 1868 election was politically close despite the electoral landslide?

QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER

What was different about the 1868 election compared to all previous U.S. presidential elections?

QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER

How did Andrew Johnson's presidency between 1865 and 1869 damage the Democratic Party's political position?

Answer key

QUESTION 1

214. Grant 214; Seymour 80. Grant carried 26 of 34 voting states; Seymour carried 8.

Grant's 214 EV was decisive. Three former Confederate states (Mississippi, Texas, Virginia) had not been readmitted and did not vote in 1868.

QUESTION 2

Grant's popular margin of 305,000 was smaller than the estimated Black vote (around 700,000) in his column. Without Black voters in the recently readmitted Southern states, Seymour might have won the popular vote (though Grant would still have won the Electoral College). The 1868 result is the first U.S. presidential election in which Black voters were structurally decisive for the popular-vote outcome.

AP students should recognize that the 1868 result was much closer than the electoral margin suggests, and that Black voter participation was electorally consequential.

QUESTION 3

It was the first U.S. presidential election in which Black men in the South could legally vote. The 1867 Reconstruction Acts had required Southern states to allow Black male voters as a condition of readmission to the Union. Seven of the eleven former Confederate states had been readmitted under Reconstruction governments by November 1868. Black voters in these states cast hundreds of thousands of votes - the first significant Black voting in U.S. history. Black voters supported Grant overwhelmingly (around 90%).

AP students should be able to identify the 1868 election as the first with significant Black voting participation.

QUESTION 4

Johnson's presidency between 1865 and 1869 damaged the Democratic Party in several ways. (1) Johnson had been Lincoln's VP and was technically a War Democrat, but his lenient Reconstruction policy associated the Democratic Party with Confederate sympathies. (2) Johnson's February 1868 impeachment (the Senate acquitted by one vote) demonstrated that Republicans believed Johnson was unfit for office. (3) The Democratic Party platform of 1868 attacked Reconstruction as "unconstitutional, revolutionary, and void" - positions that associated Democrats with white Southern resistance to federal civil-rights protection. The Democratic Party would not recover its national competitiveness until the 1877 Compromise effectively ended Reconstruction.

AP students should be able to articulate how the Johnson presidency tarnished the Democratic Party.