K-2 EDITION · CLASSROOM

1868

Ulysses S. Grant vs Horatio Seymour

A 20-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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1. Cover
2. Story (with a picture)
3. Three questions
4. Teacher notes

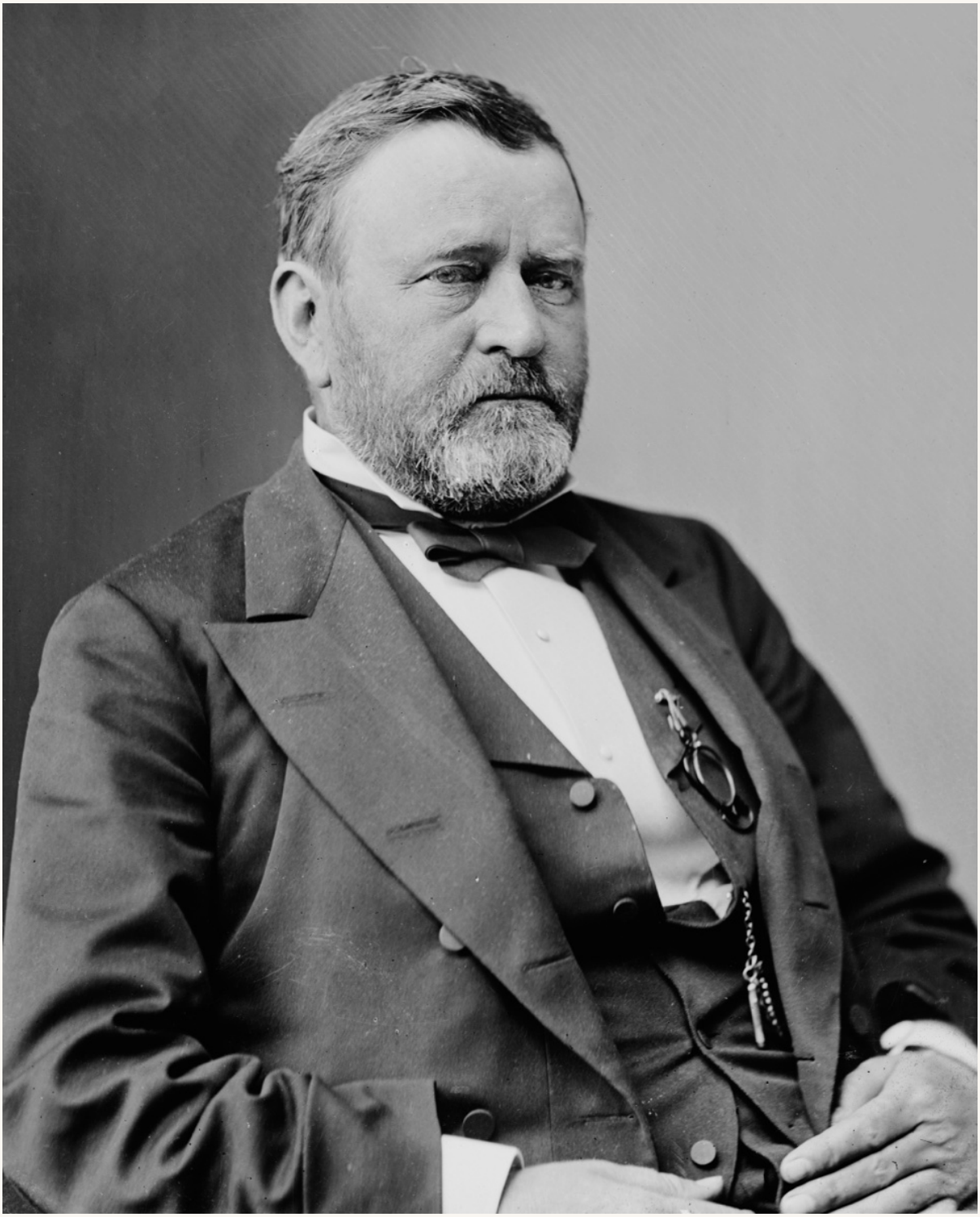
1868

After Lincoln died in 1865, his vice president Andrew Johnson became the seventeenth U.S. president. President Johnson and Congress fought about Reconstruction - how the South should be brought back into the Union after the Civil War. Johnson wanted to be easy on the South. Congress wanted to protect newly freed Black Americans. The two sides fought so hard that Congress almost removed President Johnson. He survived by just one vote.

In 1868 it was time to pick a new president. The Republicans chose Ulysses S. Grant. Look at the picture. That is General Grant. He had been the top Union army general who won the Civil War. He had accepted General Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House in April 1865. Grant was 46 years old and incredibly famous.

The Democrats picked Horatio Seymour, a former governor of New York. Seymour had opposed Lincoln during the war and many people thought he had been too friendly to the South.

The 1868 election was the first U.S. presidential election in which Black men in the South could vote. Many newly freed Black Americans voted for the first time. They voted overwhelmingly for the Republican Party - the party of Lincoln that had freed them.



Ulysses S. Grant, the eighteenth U.S. president. He was the Union army's top general during the Civil War.

MATHEW BRADY (1822-1896), VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Let's talk about the story

1.

Who became the eighteenth U.S. president?

2.

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

3.

Why did Grant's presidency face so much trouble even though he had been the country's greatest war hero?

Warm-up (5 min)

In 1868 the United States had a brand-new vice president serving as the boss. Andrew Johnson had taken over when Lincoln was killed. The country picked a war hero to be the next president.

Answer key

1.

Ulysses S. Grant. He had been the Union army's top general during the Civil War. He won 214 electoral votes.

Grant was the second consecutive Republican president after Lincoln. He would serve two terms (1869-1877).

2.

It was the first U.S. presidential election in which Black men in the South could vote. The Reconstruction Acts of 1867 had required Southern states to allow Black male voters as a condition of readmission. Many newly freed Black Americans voted for the first time in 1868. They voted overwhelmingly Republican.

The 1870 Fifteenth Amendment would constitutionally protect Black voting rights nationwide. Black political participation would continue until the post-1877 Jim Crow era effectively disenfranchised Black voters in the South.

3.

Grant was a great general but a less effective politician. His administration faced many scandals where Cabinet members and political allies stole money or took bribes (the Whiskey Ring, Credit Mobilier scandal, and others). Grant himself was not personally corrupt, but he was loyal to friends who turned out to be corrupt. The scandals damaged the Republican Party and contributed to declining Northern support for Reconstruction.

Grant's presidency is one of the most-scandal-plagued in U.S. history. Modern historians have re-evaluated Grant more favorably for his strong civil-rights record - particularly the 1871 Ku Klux Klan Act and federal enforcement of the 14th and 15th Amendments.