3-5 EDITION · CLASSROOM

1872

Ulysses S. Grant vs Horace Greeley

A 35-minute lesson on the 1872 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA Reconstruction	ELECTORAL VOTES 352 total
WINNER Ulysses S. Grant (Republican) · 286 EV	RUNNER-UP Horace Greeley (Liberal Republican) · 0 EV
KEY ISSUE Corruption reform; Reconstruction continuation; Liberal Republican revolt	TURNOUT 72.1%

CONTENTS

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

1872: Ulysses S. Grant vs Horace Greeley

Timing

5 min	**Warm-up**	When a political party has not won a presidential election for a long time, sometimes they support a candidate from outside their party. Why might this be a strategic choice?
15 min	**Reading**	The 1872 election was the 22nd U.S. presidential election. It produced Ulysses S. Grant's decisive re-election landslide and demonstrated that Northern Republican commitment to Reconstruction was eroding. It also produced one of the most unusual events in U.S. presidential history: the death of a major-party candidate between Election Day and the Electoral College meeting. The political environment was complicated. President Grant had governed for four years (1869-1873). His administration had passed the 15th Amendment (1870), the Enforcement Acts (1870-71), the Ku Klux Klan Act (1871), and the 1872 Amnesty Act. The federal prosecution of the Klan had produced 5,000 indictments and over 600 convictions in 1871-72. But the administration had also produced major corruption scandals. The Credit Mobilier scandal - exposed in September 1872 - revealed that Vice President Schuyler Colfax and other Republicans had received Credit Mobilier stock in exchange for political favors to the Union Pacific Railroad. The Liberal Republican Party emerged in 1872 from Republicans dissatisfied with Grant administration corruption and continued Reconstruction enforcement. The May 1-3, 1872 Liberal Republican Convention in Cincinnati nominated Horace Greeley, 61, the editor of the New York Tribune for 30 years. Greeley was an eccentric but nationally famous figure. He had championed antislavery, women's suffrage, the Homestead Act, public education, vegetarianism, and many other causes. He had also famously opposed the Civil War initially before becoming a pro-war voice. Benjamin Gratz Brown of Missouri was the vice presidential candidate. The Democratic Party - which had not won a presidential election in 16 years - made a strategic decision at its July 9-10, 1872 Baltimore convention. Rather than nominate its own candidate, the party endorsed Greeley and Brown. The fusion ticket was unusual: the Democratic Party was endorsing a former Whig and Republican who had spent his career attacking the Democratic Party. But Democratic leaders calculated that fusion was their only chance to defeat Grant. The Republican Party renominated Grant at its June 5-6, 1872 Philadelphia convention. Henry Wilson of Massachusetts replaced Vice President Schuyler Colfax (who was politically tainted by Credit Mobilier) on the ticket. The Republican platform endorsed civil-service reform, gradual debt reduction, continued Reconstruction,

and a high tariff.

The campaign focused on three issues: (1) Grant administration corruption (Liberal Republicans and Democrats attacked it); (2) Reconstruction policy (Liberal Republicans and Democrats wanted to end Reconstruction; Republicans wanted to continue it); (3) Greeley's eccentricities (Republican cartoons mocked Greeley relentlessly, with the famous Thomas Nast cartoons reaching mass audiences through Harper's Weekly).

Grant won 286 electoral votes to Greeley's 66. Grant carried 31 states; Greeley carried 6 (Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, Tennessee, Texas). The popular vote was 3,597,132 (55.6%) to 2,834,125 (43.8%) - a much larger margin than 1868. Grant's 1872 result was the second-largest popular-vote margin of any Republican presidential candidate until 1972 (Nixon).

Horace Greeley died on November 29, 1872 - 24 days after the November 5 popular vote. His wife had died on October 30, 1872; his New York Tribune had been politically attacked through the campaign and he had been pushed out of editorial control; he had lost the election decisively. The combined personal and political pressures contributed to his collapse and death from "brain fever" (probably encephalitis or stroke). He is the only major-party presidential candidate to die between Election Day and the Electoral College vote.

When the Electoral College met December 4, 1872, Greeley's 66 popular-vote electors had no legal candidate to vote for. They scattered their votes: 42 to Thomas A. Hendricks of Indiana, 18 to Benjamin Gratz Brown (Greeley's running mate), 2 to Charles Jenkins of Georgia, 1 to David Davis of Illinois, and 3 to Greeley himself (those 3 were not counted by Congress because the candidate was dead). Grant was easily confirmed as president-elect.

Grant's second term (1873-1877) was difficult. The September 1873 Panic produced a deep depression. The Whiskey Ring scandal in 1875, the Indian Ring scandal in 1876, and continued Reconstruction violence damaged Republican standing. The 1876 election - between Rutherford B. Hayes and Samuel J. Tilden - was disputed for months and eventually resolved by the 1877 Compromise that ended Reconstruction.

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 1872 Election

The 1872 election was the 22nd U.S. presidential election. It produced Ulysses S. Grant's decisive re-election landslide and demonstrated that Northern Republican commitment to Reconstruction was eroding. It also produced one of the most unusual events in U.S. presidential history: the death of a major-party candidate between Election Day and the Electoral College meeting.

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The Liberal Republican Party emerged in 1872 from Republicans dissatisfied with Grant administration corruption and continued Reconstruction enforcement. The May 1-3, 1872 Liberal Republican Convention in Cincinnati nominated Horace Greeley, 61, the editor of the New York Tribune for 30 years. Greeley was an eccentric but nationally famous figure. He had championed antislavery, women's suffrage, the Homestead Act, public education, vegetarianism, and many other causes. He had also famously opposed the Civil War initially before becoming a pro-war voice. Benjamin Gratz Brown of Missouri was the vice presidential candidate.

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Key words

Liberal Republican Party	The 1872 third party formed by Republicans dissatisfied with Grant administration corruption and continued Reconstruction enforcement. Nominated Horace Greeley. Also endorsed by the Democratic Party. Demonstrated that Northern Republican commitment to Reconstruction was eroding.
Credit Mobilier scandal	The 1872 scandal revealing that Vice President Schuyler Colfax and other Republicans had received Credit Mobilier stock in exchange for political favors to the Union Pacific Railroad. The first major U.S. railroad-corruption scandal.
Horace Greeley	The editor of the New York Tribune for 30 years. Liberal Republican and Democratic nominee in 1872. Died November 29, 1872 - 24 days after Election Day. The only major-party presidential candidate to die between Election Day and the Electoral College vote.
Amnesty Act of 1872	The May 1872 federal law restoring political rights to most former Confederate officials. About 500 prominent Confederate leaders were excluded; the rest could now hold public office. The Act signaled the gradual federal retreat from Reconstruction enforcement.

Panic of 1873 The major financial crisis that began September 18, 1873 with the failure of Jay Cooke & Company. Produced a deep depression that lasted until 1879. The longest U.S. economic contraction until the Great Depression.

Four questions

QUESTION 1 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

How many electoral votes did Ulysses S. Grant win in 1872?

( ) A. 247
( ) B. 286
( ) C. 305
( ) D. 331

QUESTION 2 · SHORT-ANSWER

What was unusual about the 1872 Democratic Party convention?

QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER

What happened to Horace Greeley's 66 electoral votes after his November 29, 1872 death?

QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER

What were the main issues of the 1872 campaign? Identify three.

Answer key

QUESTION 1

286. Grant 286; Greeley 66 popular vote (scattered after Greeley's death). Grant carried 31 of 37 states. The popular vote was 55.6% to 43.8%.

Grant's 1872 result was the largest popular-vote margin of any Republican presidential candidate until Nixon in 1972.

QUESTION 2

The Democratic Party had not won a presidential election in 16 years. Rather than nominate its own candidate at its July 1872 Baltimore convention, the party endorsed Horace Greeley - the Liberal Republican candidate. The fusion ticket was unusual because Greeley was a former Whig and Republican who had spent his career attacking the Democratic Party. Democratic leaders calculated that fusion was their only chance to defeat Grant.

The 1872 Democratic-Liberal Republican fusion is one of the most unusual coalition arrangements in U.S. political history.

QUESTION 3

When the Electoral College met December 4, 1872, Greeley's 66 popular-vote electors had no legal candidate to vote for. They scattered their votes: 42 to Thomas A. Hendricks of Indiana, 18 to Benjamin Gratz Brown (Greeley's running mate), 2 to Charles Jenkins of Georgia, 1 to David Davis of Illinois, and 3 to Greeley himself. The 3 votes for the dead Greeley were not counted by Congress because the candidate was dead. Grant was easily confirmed as president-elect.

The 1872 Electoral College scattering of Greeley's votes is a unique constitutional moment.

QUESTION 4

(1) Grant administration corruption (Credit Mobilier scandal, exposed September 1872). (2) Reconstruction policy (Liberal Republicans and Democrats wanted to end Reconstruction; Republicans wanted to continue it). (3) Greeley's eccentric political career and personality (Republican cartoons by Thomas Nast in Harper's Weekly mocked Greeley relentlessly).

AP students should be able to identify the three campaign issues.