1872

Ulysses S. Grant vs Horace Greeley

A 20-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%

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2. Story (with a picture)
3. Three questions
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1872

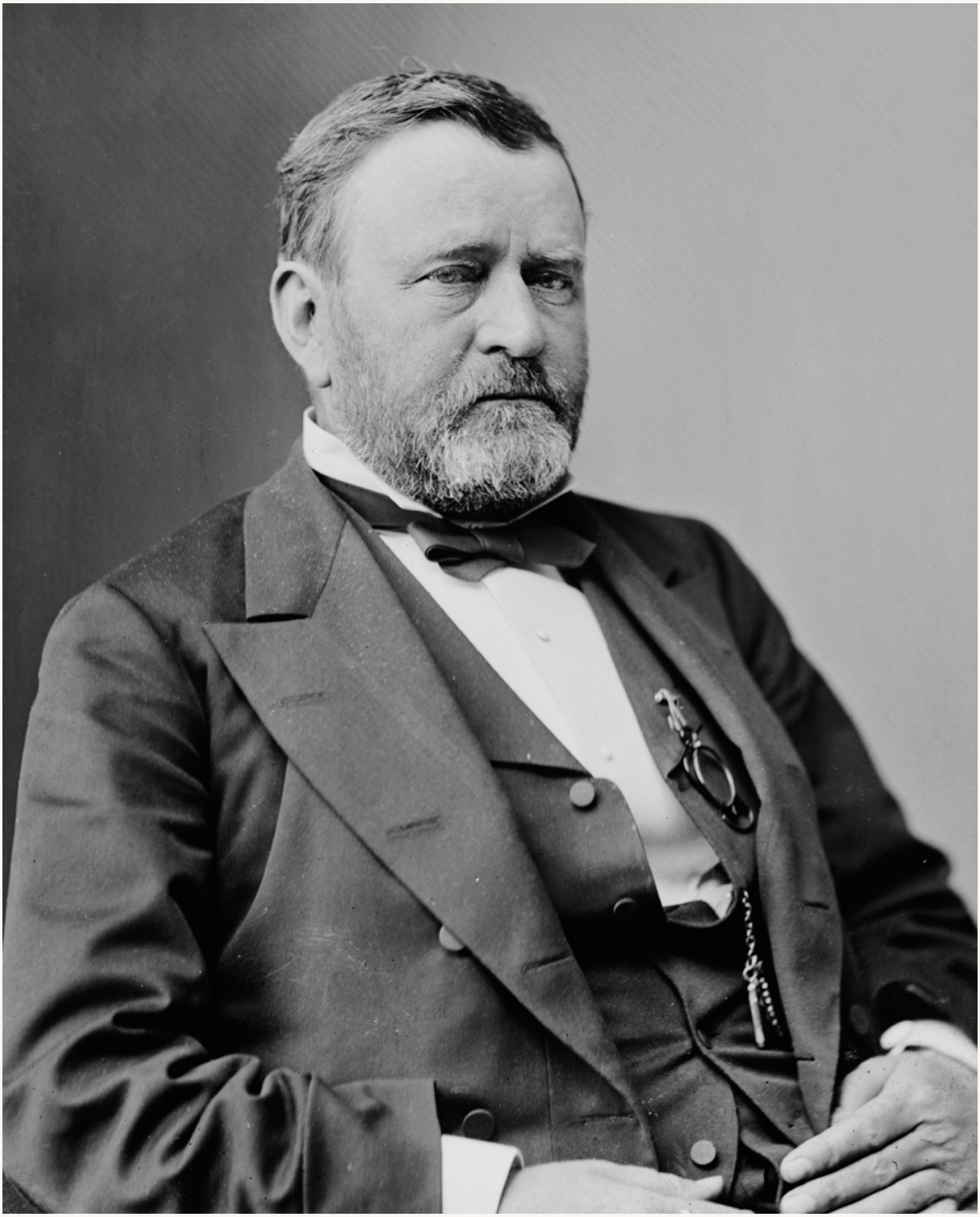
President Ulysses S. Grant had been president for four years. His government had fought against the Ku Klux Klan. He had supported the Fifteenth Amendment that protected the voting rights of Black men. But his government also had many scandals.

Some Republicans were upset with President Grant. They thought there was too much corruption. They formed a new political party called the Liberal Republicans. They nominated Horace Greeley, a famous newspaper editor from New York City. Greeley had run the New York Tribune for thirty years.

The Democrats did something unusual. They had not won a presidential election in 16 years. So instead of picking their own candidate, they decided to support Horace Greeley too. Look at the picture. That is Grant - the man Greeley was running against.

Grant won the election easily. He got 286 electoral votes. Greeley got 66 electoral votes.

But then something very strange happened. Just 24 days after the election, on November 29, 1872, Horace Greeley died. He had been very sad after the election because his wife had died and his newspaper had nearly gone bankrupt. The 66 electoral votes that should have gone to him were scattered among other



Ulysses S. Grant was re-elected in 1872 with 286 electoral votes. His opponent Horace Greeley died 24 days after the popular vote.

MATHEW BRADY (1822-1896), VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Let's talk about the story

1.

Who won the 1872 presidential election?

2.

What was very unusual about the man who ran against Grant in 1872?

3.

What were the Liberal Republicans, and why did they form?

Warm-up (5 min)

In 1872 President Grant ran for re-election. The strange thing about this election was that one of his opponents - Horace Greeley - actually died after the popular vote but before the Electoral College met!

Answer key

1.

Ulysses S. Grant. He was re-elected with 286 electoral votes. Horace Greeley got 66 electoral votes in the popular vote but died before the Electoral College met.

Grant's 286-66 margin was one of the largest re-election landslides of the 19th century.

2.

Horace Greeley died on November 29, 1872 - just 24 days after the popular vote but before the Electoral College met. His 66 electoral votes had to be scattered among other candidates. Three votes that were cast for the dead Greeley were not counted at all. He is the only major-party presidential candidate to die between Election Day and the Electoral College vote.

Greeley's death produced a unique constitutional moment. The Twelfth Amendment had not anticipated this scenario.

3.

The Liberal Republicans were a third party that formed in 1872 from Republicans dissatisfied with President Grant's administration. They were upset about corruption scandals (the Credit Mobilier scandal and others) and they wanted to end Reconstruction. They nominated Horace Greeley. The Democratic Party - which had not won a presidential election in 16 years - also endorsed Greeley.

The Liberal Republican defection demonstrated that Northern Republican commitment to Reconstruction was eroding by 1872.