



Why Did the Southern States Secede?

The Civil War



Sarah Brewer

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Grade Level	8th Grade	Time Frame	2 class period(s)
Subject	Social Studies	Duration	100 minutes
Course	U.S. History		

Essential Question

What was the principal cause of the Civil War? Why did the Southern states secede to form the Confederate States of America?

Summary

In this lesson, students analyze a variety of primary source documents in an effort to determine why the Southern states seceded from the Union to form the Confederate States of America. Using the evidence they compile, students craft Claim, Evidence, Reasoning statements to explain the Southern states' actions. To extend their learning, students use their new knowledge to analyze a 2011 Pew Research Center study about the legacy of slavery and the Civil War.

Snapshot

Engage

Students participate in a modified List-Group-Label activity to activate their prior knowledge about growing tension between the North and South prior to the Civil War.

Explore

Students analyze primary source documents to identify reasons why the Southern states seceded from the Union.

Explain

Students create Claim, Evidence, Reasoning (CER) statements using the text evidence they compiled during their document analysis.

Extend

Using the SIT strategy, students analyze and evaluate a 2011 Pew Research Center study about the legacy of slavery and the Civil War.

Evaluate

Students turn in their annotated primary source documents, CER statements, or SIT responses as assessments for this lesson.

Standards

Oklahoma Academic Standards (Social Studies Practices (8th Grade))

- 8.10:** The student will analyze major political, economic, and social events that resulted in the Civil War.
- 8.10.1:** Summarize the importance of slavery as the principal cause of increased sectional polarization leading to the Civil War.
- 8.11:** The student will analyze the course and consequences of the Civil War.
- 8.11.1:** Analyze the immediate impact of the presidential election of 1860 including
- 8.11.1A:** secession of southern states who declared slavery as the central factor for seceding

Attachments

- [CER with Teacher's Notes—Why Did the Southern States Secede.docx](#)
- [CER with Teacher's Notes—Why Did the Southern States Secede.pdf](#)
- [CER—Why Did the Southern States Secede - Spanish.docx](#)
- [CER—Why Did the Southern States Secede - Spanish.pdf](#)
- [CER—Why Did the Southern States Secede.docx](#)
- [CER—Why Did the Southern States Secede.pdf](#)
- [Confederate Constitution and Cornerstone Speech Excerpts with Teacher's Notes—Why Did the Southern States Secede.docx](#)
- [Confederate Constitution and Cornerstone Speech Excerpts with Teacher's Notes—Why Did the Southern States Secede.pdf](#)
- [Confederate Constitution and Cornerstone Speech Excerpts—Why Did the Southern States Secede - Spanish.docx](#)
- [Confederate Constitution and Cornerstone Speech Excerpts—Why Did the Southern States Secede - Spanish.pdf](#)
- [Confederate Constitution and Cornerstone Speech Excerpts—Why Did the Southern States Secede.docx](#)
- [Confederate Constitution and Cornerstone Speech Excerpts—Why Did the Southern States Secede.pdf](#)
- [Lesson Slides—Why Did the Southern States Secede.pptx](#)
- [Secession Ordinances with Teacher's Notes—Why Did the Southern States Secede.docx](#)
- [Secession Ordinances with Teacher's Notes—Why Did the Southern States Secede.pdf](#)
- [Secession Ordinances—Why Did the Southern States Secede - Spanish.docx](#)
- [Secession Ordinances—Why Did the Southern States Secede - Spanish.pdf](#)
- [Secession Ordinances—Why Did the Southern States Secede.docx](#)
- [Secession Ordinances—Why Did the Southern States Secede.pdf](#)
- [Text Evidence for Secession—Why Did the Southern States Secede - Spanish.docx](#)
- [Text Evidence for Secession—Why Did the Southern States Secede - Spanish.pdf](#)
- [Text Evidence for Secession—Why Did the Southern States Secede.docx](#)
- [Text Evidence for Secession—Why Did the Southern States Secede.pdf](#)
- [The Civil War's Legacy Answer Key—Why Did the Southern States Secede.docx](#)
- [The Civil War's Legacy Answer Key—Why Did the Southern States Secede.pdf](#)
- [The Civil War's Legacy—Why Did the Southern States Secede - Spanish.docx](#)
- [The Civil War's Legacy—Why Did the Southern States Secede - Spanish.pdf](#)
- [The Civil War's Legacy—Why Did the Southern States Secede.docx](#)
- [The Civil War's Legacy—Why Did the Southern States Secede.pdf](#)

Materials

- Lesson Slides (attached)
- Secession Ordinances (South Carolina, Mississippi, and Texas; attached, one ordinance per student)
- Secession Ordinances with Teacher's Notes (attached)
- Confederate Constitution and Cornerstone Speech Excerpts (attached, one excerpt per student)

- Confederate Constitution and Cornerstone Speech Excerpts with Teacher's Notes (attached)
- Text Evidence for Secession graphic organizer (attached, one per student)
- The Civil War's Legacy handout (attached, one per student)
- The Civil War's Legacy Answer Key (attached)
- CER graphic organizer (attached, one per student)
- CER with Teacher Notes (attached)

Engage

Teacher's Note: Student Preparation

This lesson should be taught as a part of a larger unit on the Civil War. Students should be familiar with events leading up to the war, such as the Compromise of 1850, the publication of Uncle Tom's Cabin, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the Supreme Court ruling in the case of Scott v. Sandford, John Brown's Raid on Harpers Ferry, and the election of 1860.

Use the attached **Lesson Slides** to follow along with the lesson. Display **slide 3** and divide students into groups of four. Ask groups to review the list of items on the slide. Explain to them that each of the items should be familiar to them, or, in other words, things they have already studied and discussed in class. Invite students to review and discuss each item with their groups.

Using a modified version of the [List-Group-Label](#) strategy, explain to students that they should work with their groups to consider what the items have in common and determine an appropriate label for the list.

After giving groups about five minutes to discuss, call on several groups to share their labels with the whole class.

Sample Student Responses

Ideally, students will point out that each of the items listed relates to the growing sectional polarization between the non-slaveholding states in the North and the slaveholding states in the South regarding the existence and expansion of slavery in the United States. Possible labels might be, "Events Related to Growing Tension Over Slavery," "Events Leading to Civil War Over Slavery," or "Events That Highlighted Disagreements Over Slavery."

Remind students that all of these items, while they might bring up other issues, come back to slavery as the root of tension or disagreement. Consider asking students to support their label with evidence by explaining how one or more of the terms from the list connect to the chosen label.

Sample Student Responses: Scott v. Sandford

In the ruling in the case Scott v. Sandford, the U.S. Supreme Court declared that Black people were not intended to be considered citizens of the United States and that all Black people who were enslaved should be considered property anywhere in the United States. Because this ruling clearly protected the system of slavery and arguably made slavery legal everywhere, forcing non-slaveholding states to recognize enslaved people as property, it created further tension between slaveholding and non-slaveholding states.

Conclude the discussion by moving to **slide 4** and explaining to students that they will spend this lesson investigating the following essential questions:

- What was the principal cause of the Civil War?
- Why did the Southern states secede from the Union to form the Confederate States of America?

Consider displaying **slide 5** to share the learning objectives. In this lesson, students will evaluate the central cause of the Civil War and explain, using text evidence, why the Southern states seceded to form the Confederate States of America.

Explore

Teacher's Note: Primary Source Language And Ideas

Take time to preview each of the primary source documents before teaching this lesson so that you can prepare students for the language and ideas that they will encounter. Before students begin their analysis of the primary source documents, make it clear that these documents contain racist language and ideas. It is important to note that the language used represents the beliefs held by the authors of the documents. Encourage students to be on the lookout for such language and ideas so that you can discuss them as a class. Remind students that it is important to discuss the truths about the past, but we must do so in a way that honors the humanity of all people. You might also choose to edit the documents to suit the needs of the students in your classroom.

Display **slide 6**. Review with students that after the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860, seven states seceded from the Union to form the Confederate States of America. (If you have not already, make sure to explain to students that secede means to formally break away.)

Display **slide 7**. Explain that each state that seceded created a formal document declaring that it was no longer part of the United States. In these documents, called "ordinances of secession," the seceding states explained their reasons for breaking away from the Union. Tell students that the class will explore three of these ordinances of secession, with each group being assigned a document from one of three states (South Carolina, Mississippi, or Texas), in order to understand why the Southern states seceded and formed the Confederate States of America. Distribute one of the documents from the attached **Secession Ordinances** to each group. (All students in a group should be reading the same document, while different groups will have different documents.) Ask students to use the [Why-Lighting](#) strategy to highlight pieces of the text that explain why the state they are reading about seceded from the Union. Students should then make notes in the margins of the text to explain their reasoning.

When students have finished Why-Lighting the ordinance of secession, pass out copies of the attached **Text Evidence for Secession** chart. In the first row of their charts, ask students to circle the state name that corresponds with the ordinance of secession that they read and then work with their groups to summarize why the Southern states seceded from the Union, using their Why-Lighted documents as a guide. Next, groups should find the most compelling piece of text evidence that supports their summary and record it in their chart. Suggest that they also draw a star next to this piece of evidence in their ordinance document, should they want to come back to it later in the lesson.

Teacher's Note: Summarizing

Give students explicit instructions about what you expect their summaries to look like. We recommend that students write at least one complete sentence, but feel free to adjust that expectation to best fit the needs of your students. Additionally, you might tell students that they do not have to write out entire passages from the text; instead, they can simply choose important short phrases to use as supporting evidence.

When students have had enough time to complete their charts, bring the class back together, and call on representatives from each group to share their findings with the class. As groups share, remind students that they can change or modify their responses in the chart based on the feedback they gain from the whole-class discussion. If the topic does not come up organically, consider acknowledging the racist ideas presented in the texts and how those ideas supported belief in white supremacy, which was necessary to justify the system of slavery.

Sample Student Responses

In each ordinance of secession, the states argue that the non-slaveholding states have broken promises embodied in the U.S. Constitution by violating the Fugitive Slave Clause. They also argue that those states continue to incite hostility toward slavery in a variety of ways—for example, by passing laws to limit slavery, encouraging enslaved people to rebel or run away, advocating for racial equality, and electing a president whom the slaveholding states believed was a threat to the institution of slavery. Given all of these things, and in order to protect their rights to property established through the institution of slavery, they argue that they must secede from the Union. Refer to the attached **Secession Ordinances with Teacher's Notes** document for additional comments about each document.

Display **slide 9**. Explain to students that, by examining two additional primary source documents, they are going to continue exploring the question of why the Southern states seceded from the Union. Distribute one of the two documents from the **Confederate Constitution and Cornerstone Speech Excerpts** attachment to members of each group, so that half of the class has each document. Ask groups to repeat the same Why-Lighting process by reading their assigned document and highlighting pieces of the text that explain why the Southern states seceded from the Union to create the Confederacy, and then making notes explaining their reasoning in the margins of the text.

Have students return to their Text Evidence for Secession charts and, in the second row, circle the title that corresponds with the document they read. Then ask them to follow the same process as they used previously to provide a summary and text evidence from their document to explain the reasons for secession.

Teacher's Note: Differences Between U.S. And Confederate Constitutions

For additional information about how the C.S.A. Constitution differed from the U.S. Constitution, refer to the following articles from [The National Constitution Center](#) and [The New York Times](#).

When students have completed their charts, bring the class back together and call on new representatives from each group to share their findings. Again, if the topic does not come up organically in the whole-class discussion, consider acknowledging the racist ideas presented in the texts and how those ideas supported beliefs about white supremacy. As groups share, remind students that they can change or modify their responses in the chart based on the feedback they gain from the whole-class discussion.

Sample Student Responses

Diverging from the U.S. Constitution, the new Confederate States Constitution explicitly states that there can be no law passed that would abolish slavery, ever. Additionally, it specifically protects the rights of slaveholders to transport and travel with enslaved people who are legally deemed their "property," and it guarantees the right of slaveholders to recover their lost "property" should an enslaved person attempt to escape. Thus, it can be inferred that the states that formed the Confederacy wanted to secede to create a government that would go further in protecting and maintaining the institution of slavery. In the "Cornerstone Speech," Stephens remarks that the Confederate states seceded to protect the institution of slavery and the superiority of white people. He praises the new Confederate States Constitution for explicitly protecting both. Refer to the attached **Confederate Constitution and Cornerstone Speech Excerpts with Teacher's Notes** document for additional comments about each document.

Conclude the class discussion by adding any important points that might have been overlooked by students and reminding them that their charts should be completed at this point.

Teacher's Note: Additional Documents

Feel free to add any documents to the analysis that you feel would help to provide additional context.

Explain

Display **slide 10** and pass out a copy of the attached **CER handout** to each student. Explain to students that they will write **CER** (Claim, Evidence, Reasoning) statements to answer the question, "Why did the Southern states secede from the Union to create the Confederate States of America?"

As a class, establish the "claim." Based on the discussion of the primary source documents, the claim should be something like, "The Southern states seceded to protect and maintain the system of slavery." Students should write the claim in the top section of their CER handouts.

Teacher's Note: States' Rights

Depending on the concepts that have been previously covered in your class, the idea of states' rights as it relates to the Civil War might come up in class discussions. When considering the causes of the Civil War and why the Southern states seceded, many argue the Southern states seceded to protect states' rights. While this argument is true to an extent, it is important to ask the follow-up question, "Protect states' right to do what?" The answer to this question then brings the conversation back to slavery. The Southern states sought to protect the right of states to keep people enslaved. For further information, review the document [Slavery: Cause and Catalyst of the Civil War](#) from the U.S. Department of the Interior. While the entire document is worth reviewing, pages 10-15 specifically address the relationship between states' rights and slavery.

Students can work individually or in small groups to complete the remainder of the CER handout. Have students use their Why-Lighted documents and their Text Evidence for Secession charts to find evidence to support their claim. Students should use at least one piece of text evidence, but you might choose to have them use more, such as a piece of text evidence from both documents that they analyzed. Students should record their text evidence in the middle section of the CER handouts. In the bottom section of their CER handouts, students should explain their reasoning for how or why their text evidence supports the claim.

Optional: Extending The CER

Optionally, ask students to use the CER handout as an outline to craft a coherent paragraph response, especially focusing on integrating the text evidence from the primary sources into their own writing.

After they have completed their CER statements, have several students read their responses out loud to the class. Use this opportunity to review what students have written and offer verbal feedback. Refer to the attached **CER with Teacher's Notes** handout for a sample student response.

Extend

Provide each student with a copy of the attached **The Civil War's Legacy** handout. Explain that the Pew Research Center is a nonprofit organization that conducts research regarding various topics, such as U.S. politics. In 2011, the Pew Center conducted a study titled [Civil War at 150](#) about the legacy of the Civil War. Two of the prompts from this study are shown on **slide 11** and on students' handouts. The first prompt relates to respondents' views about the modern relevance of the Civil War, and the second relates to their understanding of the cause of the Civil War.

Teacher's Note: The Pew Research Center

Visit the [Pew Research Center website's "About" page](#) for additional information about the center's mission, research, and methods.

Ask students to work with their groups to predict how they think participants responded to these prompts in the 2011 study and add their predictions to the Estimated Percentage column in their handouts. Remind students that their percentages for each prompt should add up to 100% (though the reported percentages may add to slightly more or less than 100 due to rounding), and assure them that you are not looking for "correct" answers here; they should simply craft an informed hypothesis based on what they have learned in class and have experienced and observed outside of the classroom.

Once students have had a few minutes to discuss, call on a few groups to share their thoughts.

Display **slide 12** to reveal the results of the study. Have students record the actual percentages for each prompt in the Actual Percentage column in their handouts, and then give them a few minutes to discuss the question on the slide with their groups: How do the actual response percentages compare to the guesses made by your group? Ask for a few student groups to share out their responses.

Display **slide 13**. Using the [S-I-T](#) strategy, ask students to consider the study results and work with their groups or individually to identify each of the following:

- A surprising fact or idea
- An interesting fact or idea
- A troubling fact or idea

Students can record their answers on sticky notes or note cards or on the back of their handouts.

Optional: Technology Integration

As an option for students to share their S-I-T responses digitally, create a [Padlet](#) layout with three columns labeled Surprising, Interesting, and Troubling.

Sample Student Responses

- **S:** I was surprised that most of the people identified states' rights as the main cause for the Civil War because, while states' rights were an issue, that was primarily because states wanted to have the right or the power to protect slavery.
- **I:** I found it interesting that, while a majority of people still believe the Civil War is relevant to our country's political life, almost 40% of people do not see how the legacies of slavery and the Civil War still impact us today.
- **T:** I was troubled that only 38% of people identified slavery as the main cause of the Civil War, because that means most Americans do not know or understand slavery's essential role in the war.

See the attached **The Civil War's Legacy Answer Key** for further guidance and responses.

Once students have had enough time to record their responses, bring students back together to share their thoughts.

Conclude the discussion by noting that, in order to solve the issues facing our communities today, it is important to understand how things became the way they are (in other words, our history). For Americans, understanding the relevance of slavery to the country's past will create opportunities now and in the future to better work toward a more just and equal society.

Evaluate

Depending on your preferences, the Why-Lighted documents, Why Did the South Secede? chart, CER statements, and S-I-T responses can all be used as assessments for this lesson.

Resources

- Bomboy, S. (2020, March 11). On this day, the Confederate Constitution is approved. Constitution Daily. National Constitution Center. <https://constitutioncenter.org/blog/looking-back-at-the-confederate-constitution>
- The Charleston Mercury. (1860, December 20). The Union is dissolved! The Gilder Lehrman Collection. <https://ap.gilderlehrman.org/resources/union-dissolved-1860>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Claim, Evidence, Reasoning (CER). Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/156>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). List-Group-Label. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/55>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Padlet. Tech Tools. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/tech-tool/1077>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). S-I-T (Surprising, interesting, troubling). Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/926>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Why-Lighting. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/128>
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- Pew Research Center. (2011, April 8). Civil War at 150: Still relevant, still divisive. <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2011/04/08/civil-war-at-150-still-relevant-still-divisive/>
- The New York Times. (1861, March 20). New Constitution of the C.S.A.; Where in it differs with the Constitution of the United States. <https://www.nytimes.com/1861/03/20/archives/new-constitution-of-the-csa-where-in-it-differs-with-the.html>