



Unit: Soldiers

Lesson 1.1: Causes of the Civil War

Aim: To learn about the events leading up to the Civil War.

Objective: Students read and sequence paragraphs about the causes of the Civil War and create a timeline of the events that led to it.

Materials:

1. Multiple copies of each of the four paragraphs (see next two pages)
2. Chart or graph paper
3. Pencils, markers

Procedure:

1. Explain to the class that there were many events dating back to the founding of the country that eventually led to the Civil War. Seat students in groups of four, if possible. Distribute one of the four paragraphs about the causes of the war to each student or student pair per group.
2. Each student reads his assigned paragraph and records the time period it covers in his notebook.
3. Students then share this information with their groups. In this way, they will be able to sequence the paragraphs chronologically, beginning with the late 1700s and ending in May 1861.
4. Once the paragraphs are in order, each group will create a timeline of the events leading up to the war. If there is time, students may add illustrations of the events described in their paragraphs. Poster-size graph paper or chart paper and markers are recommended. Students should be encouraged to record the events and dates in pencil first.

The causes of the Civil War can be traced back to the late 1700s when Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon, two British surveyors, drew the border between Pennsylvania and Maryland, dividing the North from the South. Land north of the Mason-Dixon line was considered free soil, while the southern colonies adopted slavery as a way of life. Although the Constitution of 1789 joined the states into one nation, individual states' rights remained a problem. The states didn't want the federal government to tell them what to do. As new states joined the Union and the West expanded, Congress tried to balance the number of free and slave states, so that states' interests would be protected as new laws were made. In 1820 Congress passed the Missouri Compromise. Missouri entered the union as a slave state, while Maine separated from Massachusetts to form another free state. Future states north of Missouri's southern border would be free; new states south of the border would be slave states.

In 1828, Northern businessmen helped pass the Tariff Act, which allowed them to raise the prices of goods imported from Europe. Most of these goods were sold to the agricultural Southerners, who resented being charged the extra money. Northerners hoped that by raising the prices, Southerners would buy their goods instead of the more costly imports. This type of self-serving law reminded Southerners of the unreasonable taxes England had imposed before the Revolution. Though most of the tariff laws were changed by the time Civil War broke out, Southerners never forgot how the Northerners took advantage of them. Bad feelings about money and power only added to the growing disagreement between North and South.

After the war with Mexico, which lasted from 1846-1848, the United States acquired 500,000 square miles of new territory. This land would eventually become California; Nevada; Utah; parts of New Mexico, Arizona, and Wyoming; Colorado; and Texas. Now there were new debates in Congress about slavery. The North tried to limit the expansion of slavery, while the South, which depended on slaves to pick cotton, insisted it be allowed in the new western territories. The Compromise of 1850 made California a free state and abolished slave trade in the District of Columbia. Utah and New Mexico were declared neutral. They were allowed to decide for themselves whether to be free or slave states. The Fugitive Slave Act said that even citizens in free states were required to help slave owners search for and capture runaway slaves, who were considered property, not people.

In 1857, the Dred Scott Decision created more bad feelings between North and South. A slave named Dred Scott sued for his freedom after his master moved him to a free state. Scott argued that if he was living in a free state, he should be free. He lost the case. The court decided that he did not have the right to sue because he was not a legal citizen. They also declared the Missouri Compromise unconstitutional because it denied slave owners their property rights. In 1860 Abraham Lincoln, a Republican from the Northern state of Illinois, was elected President. Southerners were very angry because Lincoln was against slavery. In December 1860 South Carolina seceded from the Union. In the next five months, 10 other Southern states joined them. Known as the “Rebels,” or “Confederates,” South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas, Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee, and North Carolina all fought against the Union soldiers under the leadership of their new President, Jefferson Davis. On April 12, 1861, the Confederates attacked Fort Sumter in South Carolina, beginning a bloody Civil War, which lasted for the next four years.