

The Election of 1860

- Student Debate Simulation -

1.) Students should be grouped in number of 5-7. Each student “debate team” will be responsible for a candidate in this debate. The candidates are Abraham Lincoln, Stephen A Douglas, John Breckinridge, and John Bell

2.) Within the debate team, there will be 2 debaters. These students are responsible for filling out the accompanies script with answers from their candidate’s point of view. They will pull information from that “Candidate’s Bio” to fill their thoughts answers.

There also be 2 “supporters” in each debate team. Based on the “Candidate Bios” two students will need to ask themselves “What sort of people would support this candidate?” It can be a factory worker, slave, recently freed slave, a woman, or someone else. They will write a 4-5 sentence summary of “why they are voting for this candidate.” There is a spot in the debate where they will speak!

Finally, each team will have 2-3 “campaign managers.” These people are in charge of making the visual aids for their party’s platform. They can make buttons, flyers, flags, posters - ANYTHING that they feel will tell the public what their candidate’s stance is on the pressing issues~

**If you are doing groups of 5: I recommend you only have 1 debater or 1 campaign

3.) Following the 1860 Debate, students can complete an electoral college activity where they create a map and answer questions based on each state’s results. Included is a worksheet and election data for each student!

Abraham Lincoln

– Candidate Bio –

Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) was born in rural Hardin (now Larue) County, Kentucky, the son of an illiterate carpenter and farmer. Young Lincoln received little formal schooling and was largely self-taught. In 1816 the family moved to Indiana, and in 1830 they moved west again, to Illinois.

In 1831, Lincoln began life on his own by moving to New Salem, Illinois, a town near Springfield. He held various jobs there, including storekeeper and mill operator. In 1832,

he led a militia contingent in the Black Hawk War, but saw no action. Back in New Salem, Lincoln failed in the grocery business, incurring a heavy debt. He worked as a surveyor and rail-splitter and began the study of law.

Beginning his political career as a Whig, Lincoln was elected to the first of four terms in the Illinois State legislature in 1834. Two years later, he was

admitted to the bar and subsequently embarked upon a series of law partnerships, including that with William Herndon, later a Lincoln biographer. He developed a reputation as a skillful attorney, and became one of the leading Whig politicians in Illinois. In 1842, Lincoln married Mary Todd, the daughter of a socially prominent Lexington, Kentucky family.

Lincoln was elected to Congress in 1847, but quickly got on the wrong side of the voters by opposing the Mexican War and challenging President Polk's assertion that the Mexicans had fired the first shot. He campaigned for the Whig candidate, the Mexican War hero Zachary Taylor, in the presidential election of 1848, but was disappointed when he did not receive a political appointment from the victor.

Lincoln's law practice thrived in the early 1850s, but he returned to politics after the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854. His outrage at Illinois Senator Stephen A.

Douglas' bill, which opened the American West to the introduction of human

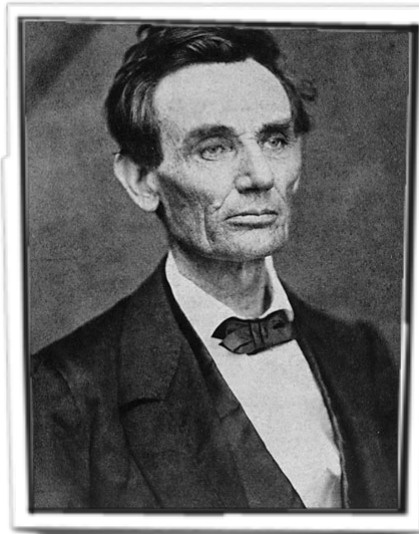
slavery, led him to once again seek elective office. Lincoln was elected to the state legislature, but declined in order to pursue an unsuccessful senatorial bid in 1856.

That year, Lincoln left the Whigs for the new Republican Party and quickly gained influence in the organization, receiving consideration for a vice presidential nomination that year. In 1858, Illinois

Republicans nominated Lincoln to challenge Douglas for his seat in the United States Senate. The two engaged in the celebrated Lincoln-Douglas debates, in which Lincoln emerged as an articulate critic of Douglas' doctrine of "popular sovereignty." He regarded slavery as a moral wrong that should not be extended to the territories; however, Lincoln did not advocate the abolition of the institution in the states where it already existed, nor did he believe in the equality of the races. Lincoln emerged as a national figure and a leading candidate for the presidency in 1860.

The Election of 1860 focused around one central issue: what is the United States to do with slavery? In 1860, Lincoln opposed the expansion of slavery and the doctrine of popular sovereignty. His opposition of the Kansas-Nebraska Act is evidence of that. However, Lincoln did not advocate abolishing slavery in new territories. Lincoln also, in several speeches, warned southern states about secession (leaving and creating a separate country), and that he, as President, would squash any chance of it.

Lincoln's odds of winning greatly improved when the Democratic party split – now they had two candidates, Stephen A Douglas and John Breckinridge. Democrat voters now were forced to split their vote between two candidates – and in a system where the winner of the state wins the electoral votes, Lincoln saw his competition beating each other up.



Stephen A Douglas

– Candidate Bio –

Stephen Arnold Douglas (1813–1861) was born in Brandon, Vermont. He received a basic education, became employed in farm work and, briefly, teaching. At age 20 he moved to Illinois, his home for the remainder of his life.

Douglas began practicing law in 1834, followed quickly by a strong political career, including the office of Illinois attorney general, two years in the state legislature and an unsuccessful run for Congress. In 1840, Douglas became Illinois Secretary of State, then served as a judge on the state supreme court from 1841 to 1843. He was elected to the House of Representatives in 1843 and to the Senate in 1847.

Known as the “Little Giant” for his diminutive size but towering will, Douglas played a major role in most of the major public issues of his day. He was an ardent expansionist, advocating the takeover of Cuba and the entirety of the Oregon Territory. He was a supporter of the Mexican War.

In the wake of the Compromise of 1850, Douglas increasingly called for Americans to use the doctrine of "popular sovereignty" as the solution to the thorny issue of slavery in the territories.

Douglas saw popular sovereignty, which asked the settlers of federal territories to decide the status (free or slave) under which they would join the Union, as a way to remove the issue of slavery’s expansion from national politics. But actually using popular sovereignty led to a violent struggle between



pro-slavery and free-soil settlers (such as the debate over whether or not Kansas should become a slave state).

In 1858 Douglas stood as one of the Democratic Party’s national leaders. When he sought reelection to the Senate, he faced the Republican Abraham Lincoln, a prominent Springfield lawyer, former legislator, and former Congressman.

Although Douglas won the election, the debates made Lincoln a spokesman for northerners opposing the extension of slavery in the western territories and a national political figure.

Many southerners rejected Douglas’ notion of "popular sovereignty" as an insufficient guarantee of their right to bring slave property into the territories. Northerners were no friends of Douglas either – they despised leaving the issue of slavery up to “popular sovereignty.” In 1860, Douglas had voters from many states who supported him but it was clear he did not have enough support to win electoral votes.

The 1860 election resolved around one issue – slavery and its expansion. Douglas began as a friend of the southerners, however many turned on him when Douglas openly supported popular sovereignty. Many others turned on him because of his background – he from Illinois, a northern state. The Democratic party split – the Northern Democrats nominated Douglas, Southern Democrats nominated John Breckinridge. This split paved the way for a strong, young candidate, Abraham Lincoln from Illinois.

John Breckinridge

- Candidate Bio -

A Kentucky attorney, John C. Breckinridge (1821-1875) served as Vice President of the United States under James Buchanan (1857-61), and accepted the Southern Democrats' nomination for the presidency when, in 1860, southerners determined that the national party and

Stephen Douglas' doctrine of "popular sovereignty" failed to provide enough protection for their right to take slave property into the western territories.

Breckinridge began his political career with service in the Kentucky legislature (1849-51) and in the House of Representatives (1851-55).

Like the southern Democrats he represented in the pivotal election of 1860, Breckinridge

argued that the Constitution did not provide the federal government with the power to restrict slavery in the territories. Although he believed in the states' right of

secession (to leave the United States), he did not

advocate that course of action during the 1860 campaign. In the November election, Breckinridge ran as a Southern Democrat and had huge support among the Deep South - Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina

Serving out his term as Vice President into early 1861, Breckinridge worked to fashion

a compromise that would preserve southern slavery in the Union. As Senator (elected 1859) in the special congressional session that began in July, 1861, he became a consistent opponent of the Lincoln administration's war policies. When Kentucky declared for the Union in September of 1861, Breckinridge accepted an appointment as brigadier general in the Confederacy. However, in 1860,

Breckinridge ran for President as a friend of the Southern "way of life" and this is obvious in his attempts to craft U.S. policy to keep the institution legal and thriving.



John Bell

- Candidate Bio -

John Bell (1797-1869) was a prosperous Kentucky slaveholder and politician nominated for the presidency by the short-lived Constitutional Union Party in 1860.

Beginning his political career as a Jacksonian Democrat, Bell soon became disappointed with Old Hickory (President Andrew Jackson) and joined the new Whig Party.

He served in the United States House of Representatives from 1827 to 1841, including a brief tenure as Speaker (1834-5). After service as Secretary of War in William Henry administration, Bell resigned the office in a dispute with Harrison's successor John Tyler. Bell won election to the United States Senate in 1847 and served until 1859.

In 1860 he emerged as a Presidential nominee when the Constitutional Union Party organized in reaction to the widening

sectional crisis over the expansion of slavery (North and South are fighting over the expansion of slavery). Bell's followers hoped that "no political principle but the Constitution of the country, the union of the states and the enforcement of laws" would be sufficient to preserve the Union.

Bell ran in 1860 with the Constitutional Union party - the name of this party also mirrors his goals and those who supported him. Bell ran on a platform that supported slavery, but was more focused on keeping the nation together. Tensions were growing hard between North and South. Bell,

unlike Lincoln, Douglas, or Breckinridge, tried to attract voters in the "middle" - those who wanted to avoid war, but didn't care so much about slavery. It would be hard to find states that shared this vision, however you can definitely bet that since he supported slavery, northern states opposed him entirely.

