



Lesson Plan Sectionalism

“There is intense excitement prevailing throughout our whole community on the alarming state of affairs in Kansas; and daily, almost hourly, rumors are spreading as to an anticipated collision of arms at the town of Laurence (sic). I pray God that it may not come to this. For the first drop of blood shed there, may, for ought of any one can see, be the opening of a fountain which can never be scaled, but must continue to widen and deepen till it becomes a crimson River.”
W.J. Davis, Lexington, MO, Dec. 5, 1855

Lexington experienced the pangs of sectionalism long before the Civil War erupted. Historically, the slave holding and non-slave holding or “free sections” of the nation reconciled differences through compromise -- the 3/5ths Compromise, the Missouri Compromise, and the Compromise of 1850. In 1854, the Kansas-Nebraska Act introduced the idea of “popular sovereignty” as the means of deciding whether slavery could be extended into the western territories of the United States.

The act permitted legal residents to vote on whether they wished to live in a slave or free state; a concept first tested in Kansas, Missouri’s neighbor to the west. A contest resulted. Which section of the country, slave or free, could send the greatest number of emigrants to control the outcome of the Kansas elections? At stake was the dominance of the United States government.

The main artery for these Kansas bound emigrants was the Missouri River, passing through the heart of this slave state and the river towns like Lexington. Pro-southerners and free-soilers clashed. Passion and prejudice prevailed. Violence broke out. Kansas started to bleed. Local residents could not escape the hysteria. The personal stories of Oliver Anderson and others reflect the mounting tensions.

This lesson about sectionalism is based on written histories, personal accounts and newspaper articles. This lesson could be used in teaching units on sectional conflict leading to the Civil War and in developing a critical understanding of what happened here. Students will strengthen their skills of observation and analysis, and gain an empathetic understanding of several historical characters.

Objectives for Students

- To understand the reasons sectionalism developed
- To explain how the Kansas and Missouri border warfare affected national policy
- To analyze the affect of sectionalism on Lexington and its citizens

Setting the Stage

Summarize for the students the various compromises which were reached as westward expansion continued. Give particular attention to the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. As the fear of

abolitionists emigrating to Kansas grew, pro-southern citizens of Lexington passed resolutions to encourage activity against the northern emigrants.

Review for the students some of Lexington's activities. Oliver Anderson was one of many residents who found himself involved in the Kansas issue. He formed the Lafayette Emigration Society, which encouraged the relocation of slave holders to Kansas. His son-in-law, Thomas Akers, advocated building churches and institutions of learning in Kansas. Others formed a new political party, the American Party, while the Republican loyalists remained silent for fear of recrimination.

Unfortunately, as the Kansas issue worsened, fewer residents could maintain their neutrality. The local newspaper summarizes as follows: "We are no alarmists; indeed we believe that we have been accustomed to look with too great indifference upon the dangers that have from time to time threatened this Union. But it would be folly -- it would be madness to disregard the startling evidences that are now presented to us, of the imminent peril in which the nation stands." *American Citizen*, Sept. 10, 1856

Locating the Site

Provide the students with the map depicting slave and free states in 1820 (map #1)

- Ask the students to label Missouri and Kansas on the map.

Ask the students to read the article from the *American Citizen*, Aug. 27, 1856 (article #1)

- Can you explain why compromise failed in 1854?

Ask the students to outline the Missouri River on map #2 with a blue crayon

Ask the students to read the article from the *American Citizen*, Feb. 20, 1856 (article #2)

- Can you explain how the Missouri River may have encouraged warfare?

Ask the students to label Lexington on map #2.

- Why do think Lexington became involved in the border warfare between Missouri and Kansas?

Determining the Facts

Have the class divide in half, part portraying Unionists and part pro-southern.

Explain that many loyal Unionists were Republicans. J.C. McGinnis, from the *Lafayette County History*, stated, "There were a good many who were Republicans in Lexington at that day, but the prejudice against Republicanism was so great that only a few persons had the nerve or the recklessness to declare themselves such in public manner." Read the Broadside.

Provide the Unionist half with a xerox photograph of Nicholas Hearle and quote #1.

- What do you think of your position in Lexington?
- How do you feel? Why?

Provide the pro-southern half with a xerox photograph of Oliver Anderson and quotes #2 and #3. Explain that after the Union army gained control of Lexington in October of 1861, many pro-southern citizens were charged as traitors and arrested. Oliver Anderson was among those who were sent to prison.

- Analyze your actions.
- Do you think it was fair to be imprisoned?
- How does it make you feel? Tell why it makes you feel this way.

Battle of Lexington State Historic Site
1101 Delaware Street
Lexington, MO 64067
660-259-4654
800-334-6946
800-379-2419 TDD