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Teaching American History Program  
Civil War and Reconstruction

## **Lesson Plan**

### **Title: The Causes of the Civil War**

**Grade Level:** 8<sup>th</sup>

**Length of instruction time:** 3-45 minute periods

**Materials:** List of possible causes, primary source materials, map of the United States (1861), and debate instructional sheet.

#### **Recommended use of primary and secondary sources from:**

Edited by: *McClintock Russell*, Retrieving the American Past

Edited by: *Wilentz Sean and Paterson Thomas*, Major Problems in the Early Republic 1787-1848

\* The lesson should not be limited to sources only found in these books.

**Technology:** The students will conduct some web-based research.

#### **Objectives:**

The students will be able to identify the events that led to sectionalism in the United States (USI.36).

The students will be able to identify events and people that helped avoid the emergence of the American Civil War (USI.36).

The students will be able to identify the political geographic layout of the United States in 1860 and 1861 (USI.37).

The students will be able to argue and support their arguments with details regarding the reasons why the Civil War occurred and if it was an inevitable event (USI.36).

**Assumptions:** The students have done some secondary source research about the causes of the Civil War and are familiar with events such as the Missouri Compromise, the South Carolina Nullification Crisis, the Wilmot Proviso, the Compromise of 1850, Uncle Tom's Cabin, the Kansas-

Nebraska Act, the Dred Scott case, the Lincoln-Douglas debates, John Brown's raid, and the election of Abe Lincoln.

**Procedure:**

The students use primary source documents, secondary source documents, and web-based research to develop an argument whether the American Civil War could have been avoided. The culminating activity is a student debate.

1. The students complete a map that indicates the political geographic structure of the United States in 1861.
2. The students are quizzed on the political geographic structure of the United States in 1861.
3. The students complete a pre-debate/research list of the possible causes of the American Civil War.
4. The students research the causes of the American Civil War using primary source documents, the Internet, and secondary source documents.
5. The students refine and add to their lists of the causes of the American Civil War.
6. The students use their research to formulate well-supported opinions if and how the United States could have or have not avoided the Civil War.
7. The students conduct a debate regarding the implications of the Civil war, the outcomes, and if the event could and should have been avoided.
8. The students reflect upon their research and investigate if their opinions have changed regarding the issues leading to the American Civil War.

**Assessments**

Map Quiz (United States political, 1861)

Debate

Reflection sheet

### Sample Cause and Effect Worksheet

Cause	Location	Effect

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Possible Debate Format

Opening Statement/Group One/Five Minutes

Opening Statement/Group Two/Five Minutes

Response to Opening Statement/Group One/Three Minutes

Response to Opening Statement/Group Two/Three Minutes

Questioning/Group One/One Minute

Questioning/Group Two/One Minute

- The questioning should continue for five to ten minutes

Group discussion, refining, and planning time/Groups One and Two/Five Minutes

Refined Statements/Group Two/Five Minutes

Rebuttal/Group One/Two Minutes

Refined Statements/Group One/Five Minutes

Rebuttal/Group Two/Five Minutes

Closing Statement/Group One/Three Minutes

Closing Statement/Group Two/Three Minutes

Reflection