

Chapter 9 Debate: Resolved: Slaves Should Be Emancipated by the Federal Government in 1862

Introduction

Teachers can use class debates to help students understand conflicting perspectives of a past time and place *or* of a contemporary issue. This often involves dividing the class into two or more parts and assigning each group a role. Students are then encouraged to take on that role and argue their position. They need to argue the position they are assigned, *regardless* of whether or not they agree with that position. Sometimes, teachers may encourage students to know both sides of the argument and have the two sides switch roles midway through the debate.

Objectives of This Debate

- Students will learn the many facets of the debate over emancipation that took place in 1862.
- Students will evaluate what arguments and factors led Lincoln to issue the Emancipation Proclamation.

Background

One of the most crucial decisions Lincoln had to make during the Civil War was if and when to issue the Emancipation Proclamation. The topic was hotly debated in the North and had important ramifications for the war effort. By 1862, with all of the bloodshed that had already taken place, the debate intensified. Multiple perspectives included those of abolitionists, Republicans in Congress, free blacks in the North, Democrats in Congress, factory workers, and loyal slaveholders from the “border states.”

In this historical debate, teachers can have students represent these multiple perspectives in a town hall type debate. This will help students gain an understanding of the voices Lincoln heard as he considered his decision.

Procedures

This debate can be done in one class period. The teacher should divide the class into two parts, each side making arguments either for or against the resolution. Students should be reminded that they should stick to their role and argue *passionately* for their position, despite what they personally may believe. They should also be encouraged to base their points on factual information, rather than opinion and emotion.

Each side of the debate should research both their position AND the position of their opponents. This is important in the event the teacher elects to have the sides change

positions. It also makes for a better debate because each side is better able to counter arguments of their opponents.

Students should be able to use *America: The Last Best Hope* to find dual perspectives on these issues, but teachers will also need to provide background through short lectures or explanations. Students can also do research on their own to find arguments to support their point of view. Primary sources from the period can be particularly valuable as a side builds its case.

The following chart represents basic points that should be covered by both sides. Teachers should not immediately give students these points. They might be offered to each side after students have had time to research on their own, or they might be withheld until after the debate and used as a summary or to debrief the debate.

A blank version of the chart is offered at the end of this debate. Students may use this blank chart to take notes as they research their positions in the debate.

When the debate takes place, arrange student desks or chairs with the two debate factions on opposite sides of the classroom *facing each other*. The teacher should serve as a moderator, beginning the proceedings, laying out the resolution, and calling on members of each side in alternating order. If the debate begins to lag, the teacher may call a short break and have each side “caucus” to rethink their positions and prepare responses to arguments made by the other side.

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Affirmative	Negative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (A): The time to liberate the slaves in NOW. Slavery is and always has been an evil institution. • (R): I agree that it is time to liberate the slaves. Only such a noble purpose could justify the suffering that has already occurred in this war. • (F): An emancipation act would give hope to our brothers in chains. Also, it would encourage them to come north and take up arms on behalf of the Union. • (R): Such an action would help win the war. It would encourage slave revolts and cause chaos in the South. • (A): An emancipation order would help us gain the support of other countries – like England, where abolitionists are strong. • (R): The slaveholders are guilty of treason – this action is totally justified. • (R): Lincoln does indeed have the constitutional authority. He can take extraordinary measures under conditions of rebellion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (D): Such an action should not take place. This war has been about maintaining the Union. Emancipation would drive the South further from any chance of a negotiated settlement. • (L): I hold slaves, but have stayed loyal to the Union. An emancipation order would be the first step toward taking my slaves and that would be depriving me of my property without due process. • (W): Freeing the slaves would lead to a mass exodus of former slaves to the North – and they would be competing against me for jobs. • (L): It might indeed cause slave revolts in the South – but also in my state, which has remained loyal. • (D): We were told from the outset that this war is not about slavery – it should not become so now. We should settle this war and make peace with the South. Expanding the purpose of the war is not worth the additional bloodshed. • (D): Lincoln does not have the constitutional authority to do this.
<p>A=Abolitionist R=Republican in Congress F=Free black person in the North</p>	<p>D=Democrat in Congress L=Loyal slaveholder in a border state W=Factory worker in the North</p>

Student Debate Sheet

Name _____

Date _____

As your group researches their position on these issues, use the following table to record your views and prepare for the debate. You should research and prepare for *both* sides of this debate. As the debate progresses, make notes made by the opposing side that your side did not anticipate.

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