

Huckleberry Finn: History Strategy

Student Handout: Map



Huckleberry Finn: History Strategy

Huckleberry Finn takes place before the Civil War ended slavery, probably about 1840, but Mark Twain does not give us a definite date. For our purposes we are going to say that the story takes place in the late 1850's. This doesn't affect the story at all and allows us to study the impact of some very important events that occurred in the 1850's.

In their attempt to escape from slavery, Huck and Jim travel from their home in Missouri south on the Mississippi River looking for the mouth of the Ohio River.

Map Handout: Assignment #1

Do some research to learn the locations and relationship of the Ohio River and the Mississippi River. Identify and label or color-code the slave and free states in 1850.

Huck's adventure begins in St. Petersburg, Missouri, which is a fictional town on the Mississippi River and was likely based on Hannibal, Missouri, which was Mark Twain's home town. Find and locate it on the map as well as the town of Cairo, Illinois.

WE judged that three nights more would fetch us to Cairo, at the bottom of Illinois, where the Ohio River comes in, and that was what we was after. We would sell the raft and get on a steam-boat and go way up the Ohio amongst the free states, and then be out of trouble.

Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (New York: P. F. Collier & Son, 1918) 112

Your map will illustrate clearly why this was a dangerous plan?

We went drifting down into a big bend, and the night clouded up and got hot. The river was very wide, and was walled with solid timber on both sides; you couldn't see a break in it hardly ever, or a light. We talked about Cairo, and wondered whether we would know it when we got to it. I said likely we wouldn't, because I had heard say there warn't but about a dozen houses there, and if they didn't happen to have them lit up, how was we going to know we was passing a town? Jim said if the two big rivers joined together there, that would show. But I said maybe we might think we was passing the foot of an island and coming into the same old river again. That disturbed Jim--and me too.

Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (New York: P. F. Collier & Son, 1918) 121

When it was daylight, here was the clear Ohio water inshore, sure enough, and outside was the old regular Muddy! So it was all up with Cairo. We talked it all over. It wouldn't do to take to the shore; we couldn't take the raft up the stream, of course. There warn't no way but to wait for dark, and start back in the canoe and take the chances. So we slept all day amongst the cotton-wood thicket, so as to be fresh for the work, and when we went back to the raft about dark the canoe was gone !

Mark Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (New York: P. F. Collier & Son, 1918) 130

Since Illinois was a free state, it would seem that Huck and Jim needed to only go straight across the river from their home in Missouri into Illinois to be free.

The question you are being asked to answer is:

Why didn't they simply cross into the free state of Illinois?

Library Research Component

Cooperative Group Projects

The students working in small groups will prepare and present reports about the following key events and turning points in United States history:

Compromise of 1850

This was a series of five laws which attempted to balance both slave and free interests concerning the spread of slavery after the acquisition of large tracts of land from the Mexican War. The report should introduce the concept of "popular sovereignty" and leave the fugitive slave law for a separate report.

Fugitive Slave Law of 1850

This was a part of the Compromise of 1850 and required the states to cooperate with federal authorities in apprehending runaway slaves and returning them to their masters without benefit of "due process." It ignited resistance in the north because it required local authorities to enforce what was regarded as an odious law.

Personal Liberty Laws

Personal Liberty Laws were attempts in the North to frustrate federal law enforcement, particularly the fugitive slave laws by denying local law enforcement help to those trying to catch runaway slaves. The report should show where they were strong and where they were weak or nonexistent.

Sanctuary Cities (Connection to Today)

These are contemporary local municipal authorities that refuse to recognize federal immigration laws and seek to frustrate immigration authorities trying to enforce immigration policy. Students should identify these cities and discuss their motivation for resisting federal authority. This report should follow the report on personal liberty laws and create a contemporary connection for this historical study. How are sanctuary city laws like the personal liberty laws of the pre-Civil War period? How are they different?

Illinois Black Laws of 1853

Illinois was a free state on the boundary between free and slave states and many runaway slaves settled in the state. These laws set stiff penalties for aiding and abetting this. Students should give specifics of the law and explain what motivated it to be enacted.

Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854

This was an attempt to use the idea of “popular sovereignty” to settle the issue of slavery in the territories. The report should identify this concept with Senator Stephen A. Douglas. The report should also discuss its role in the creation of the Republican Party and the emergence of Abraham Lincoln.

Dred Scott Decision of 1857

The report should give the facts of the case and the constitutional reasons for the decision. Students should also show how the decision repealed the Missouri Compromise of 1820 and further enflamed the issue of the spread of slavery.

Lincoln-Douglas Debates (Freeport Doctrine)

The report should briefly describe the purpose and nature of the debates and not attempt to outline the arguments of Lincoln and Douglas except for the “Freeport Doctrine,” which should be the focus of the report and be fully explained.

Hear and discuss reports in a series of Socratic seminars. Then review the importance and nature of the Lincoln-Douglas debates.

Map Handout: Assignment #2

As a homework assignment return to your outline map and label the locations of each of the seven Lincoln-Douglas debates. Then color-code on your map the area of Illinois known as “Little Egypt.” How was this area economically and politically different from most of Illinois?

Lincoln Douglas Debates

Consider the particular geographic locations as you read the following excerpts from the debates.

First debate at Ottawa

This was in the middle of the most antislavery section of Illinois and Douglas makes clear that he expects Lincoln to “change his tune” when they debate in the pro-slavery southern half of the state.

Douglas said:

I desire to know whether Mr. Lincoln today stands as he did in 1854, in favor of the unconditional repeal of the fugitive slave law. I desire him to answer whether he stands pledged to-day, as he did in 1854, against the admission of any more slave States into the Union, even if the people want them. I want to know whether he stands pledged against the admission of a new State into the Union with such a Constitution as the people of that State may see fit to make. ("That's it;" "put it at him.") I

want to know whether he stands today pledged to the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia. I desire him to answer whether he stands pledged to the prohibition of the slave trade between the different States. ("He does.") I desire to know whether he stands pledged to prohibit slavery in all the territories of the United States, North as well as South of the Missouri Compromise line, ("Kansas too.") I desire him to answer whether he is opposed to the acquisition of any more territory unless slavery is prohibited therein. I want his answer to these questions. Your affirmative cheers in favor of this Abolition platform is not satisfactory. I ask Abraham Lincoln to answer these questions, in order that when I trot him down to lower Egypt, I may put the same questions to him. (Enthusiastic applause.)

My principles are the same everywhere. (Cheers and "hark.") I can proclaim them alike in the North, the South, the East, and the West. My principles will apply wherever the Constitution prevails and the American flag waves. ("Good" and applause.) I desire to know whether Mr. Lincoln's principles will bear transplanting from Ottawa to Jonesboro?

2nd debate was at Freeport

Again in the anti-slavery northern part of the state, Douglas gives the Freeport Doctrine which slips and slides around the issue of the spread of slavery into the territories and threatens to alienate his pro-slavery support in the south. Douglas believed the idea of "popular sovereignty" could be sold to both pro-slavery and anti-slavery interests.

Douglas said:

The next question propounded to me by Mr. Lincoln is, Can the people of a Territory in any lawful way, against the wishes of any citizen of the United States, exclude slavery from their limits prior to the formation of a State constitution? ... It matters not what way the Supreme Court may hereafter decide as to the abstract question whether slavery may or may not go into a Territory under the Constitution, the people have the lawful means to introduce it or exclude it as they please, for the reason that slavery cannot exist a day or an hour anywhere, unless it is supported by local police regulations. Those police regulations can only be established by the local legislature; and if the people are opposed to slavery, they will elect representatives to that body who will by unfriendly legislation effectually prevent the introduction of it into their midst. If, on the contrary, they are for it, their legislation will favor its extension. Hence, no matter what the decision of the Supreme Court may be on that abstract question, still the right of the people to make a Slave Territory or a Free Territory is perfect and complete under the Nebraska bill. I hope Mr. Lincoln deems my answer satisfactory on that point.

3rd debate at Jonesboro

This was in "Little Egypt," a strongly pro-slavery area in southern Illinois. Lincoln slips and slides around "popular sovereignty" and essentially tries to avoid the issue of slavery north of the 36'30 line by blaming Douglas for the repeal of the Missouri Compromise and asking why he didn't just leave it alone.

Lincoln said:

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN: There is very much in the principles that Judge Douglas has here enunciated that I most cordially approve, and over which I shall have no controversy with him. In so far as he has insisted that all the States have the right to do exactly as they please about all their domestic relations, including that of slavery, I agree entirely with him. He places me wrong in spite of all I can tell him, though I repeat it again and again, insisting that I have no difference with him upon this subject. I have made a great many speeches, some of which have been printed, and it will be utterly impossible for him to find any thing that I have ever put in print contrary to what I now say upon this subject. I hold myself under constitutional obligations to allow the people

in all the States, without interference, direct or indirect, to do exactly as they please, and I deny that I have any inclination to interfere with them, even if there were no such constitutional obligation. I can only say again that I am placed improperly-altogether improperly, in spite of all I can say-when it is insisted that I entertain any other view or purposes in regard to that matter.

On the compromise of 1850

When that Compromise was made it did not repeal the old Missouri Compromise. It left a region of United States territory half as large as the present territory of the United States, north of the line of 36 degrees 30 minutes, in which slavery was prohibited by act of Congress. This compromise did not repeal that one. It did not affect or propose to repeal it. But at last it became Judge Douglas's duty, as he thought (and I find no fault with him), as Chairman of the Committee on Territories, to bring in a bill for the organization of a Territorial Government-first of one, then of two Territories north of that line. When he did so it ended in his inserting a provision substantially repealing the Missouri Compromise. That was because the Compromise of 1850 had not repealed it. And now I ask why he could not have let that compromise alone? We were quiet from the agitation of the slavery question. We were making no fuss about it. All had acquiesced in the Compromise measures of 1850. We never had been seriously disturbed by any abolition agitation before that period. When he came to form governments for the Territories north of the line of 36 degrees 30 minutes, why could he not have let that matter stand as it was standing? [Applause.] Was it necessary to the organization of a Territory? Not at all. Iowa lay north of the line and had been organized as a Territory and come into the Union as a State without disturbing that Compromise. There was no sort of necessity for destroying it to organize these Territories. But, gentlemen, it would take up all my time to meet all the little quibbling arguments of Judge Douglas to show that the Missouri Compromise was repealed by the Compromise of 1850. My own opinion is, that a careful investigation of all the arguments to sustain the position that that Compromise was virtually repealed by the Compromise of 1850, would show that they are the merest fallacies. I have the Report that Judge Douglas first brought into Congress at the time of the introduction of the Nebraska bill, which in its original form did not repeal the Missouri Compromise, and he there expressly stated that he had forborne to do so because it had not been done by the Compromise of 1850. I close this part of the discussion on my part by asking him the question again, "Why, when we had peace under the Missouri Compromise, could you not have let it alone?"

At Alton

Again in the pro-slavery southern part of Illinois, Douglas recounts the Ottawa debate in the north and tries to paint Lincoln as an abolitionist and show that his statements are just political spin intended to trick the pro-slavery interests in "Egypt."

Douglas said:

Having obtained this power under the operation of that great principle, are you now prepared to abandon the principle and declare that merely because we have the power you will wage a war against the Southern States and their institutions until you force them to abolish slavery everywhere. After having pressed these arguments home on Mr. Lincoln for seven weeks, publishing a number of my speeches, we met at Ottawa in joint discussion, and he then began to crawfish a little, and let himself down. I there propounded certain questions to him. Amongst others, I asked him whether he would vote for the admission of any more Slave States, in the event the people wanted them. He would not answer. I then told him that if he did not answer the question there, I would renew it at Freeport, and would then trot him down into Egypt and again put it to him. Well, at Freeport, knowing that the next joint discussion took place in Egypt, and being in dread of it, he did answer my question in regard to no more Slave States in a mode which he hoped would be satisfactory to me, and accomplish the object he had in view. I will show you what his answer was. After saying that he was not pledged to the Republican doctrine of "no more Slave States," he declared : — " I state to you freely, frankly, that I should be exceedingly sorry to ever be put in the position of having to pass upon that question. I should be exceedingly glad to know that there never would be another Slave State admitted into this Union." Here permit me to remark, that I do not think the people will ever force him into a position against his will. He went on to say : — " But I must add, in regard to this, that if slavery shall be kept out of the Territory during the Territorial existence of any one given Territory, and then the people should, having a fair chance and a clear field, when they come to adopt a constitution, if they should do the extraordinary thing of adopting a slave constitution uninfluenced by the actual presence of the institution among them, I see no alternative, if we own the country, but we must admit it into the Union." That answer Mr. Lincoln supposed would satisfy the old line Whigs, composed of Kentuckians and Virginians, down in the southern part of the State.

