Lesson Plan

Why did Texas Secede from the Union in 1861?

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This lesson focuses on one item from the proposed changes to the seventh grade Texas history TEKS. The current standard provides no reasons for Texas’ secession in 1861 but the proposed change instructs teachers to emphasize “states rights, slavery, sectionalism, and tariffs.” This lesson guides students to explain the reasons Texans gave in 1861 and then to contrast the findings of period sources with the emphasis of the twenty-first century curriculum.

Standards

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS, 1998), Texas History (7th grade)
§113.23.b.5.A: explain reasons for the involvement of Texas in the Civil War.
§113.23.b.21.F: identify bias in written . . . material.

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS, 1998), U.S. History (11th grade)
§113.32.c.24.B: analyze information by . . . comparing, contrasting.
§113.32.c.24.F: identify bias in written . . . material.

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS, 1998), Government (12th grade)
§113.35.c.10.C: analyze historical conflicts over the respective roles of national and state governments.
§113.35.c.21.A: analyze information by . . . comparing, contrasting.
§113.35.c.21.D: analyze and evaluate the validity of information from primary and secondary sources.

Background Information

The Texas State Board of Education (SBOE) is revising the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)—the standards adopted in 1998 that govern social studies teaching in the Texas public schools. The SBOE convened committees of citizens, school teachers, and university faculty in January 2009 to propose changes to the TEKS. In April they called for the advice of six outside reviewers. On July 31 they published a draft of the proposed changes. A period of informal public comment through October 9, 2009, will be followed by formal public hearings in January 2010. In March 2010, the new standards will be passed as state law and will then dictate the content of social studies teaching for the next decade. The new TEKS will be implemented in the schools in the fall of 2011 and billion-dollar textbook contracts will lead to revised textbooks implemented by the fall of 2013. Because Texas constitutes such a large market for textbooks, the books adopted here will be sold in many other state markets as well. Information from the SBOE is available at http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/teks/socialstudiesTEKS.html. News stories about the review process are available at www.utep.edu/chtl, select “TEKSWatch.”
Procedure

1. **Explain** to students that the state of Texas is currently revising the laws that dictate what students—they—should learn about American history (see the “Background Information” above).

2. Assign students to **read** “A Declaration of the Causes which Impel the State of Texas to Secede from the Federal Union,” February 2, 1861, and **look for the reasons given by Texans for their secession** in 1861. An html version of the document is published by the Texas State Library and Archives Commission at [http://www.tsl.state.tx.us/ref/abouttx/secession/2feb1861.html](http://www.tsl.state.tx.us/ref/abouttx/secession/2feb1861.html); a pdf version is published by the Texas Education Agency’s Social Studies Center at [http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/ssc/primary_resources/pdf/texas/Declaration_of_Causes_for_Secession.pdf](http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/ssc/primary_resources/pdf/texas/Declaration_of_Causes_for_Secession.pdf). Follow your preferences for assigning reading tasks (individually or groups, entire statement or final six paragraphs), emphasizing close reading (audience, context, purpose), and taking notes (on the document or in a notebook).

3. Students should **report their findings** in groups or to the class. It might be helpful to write the lists on a white board or butcher paper. Students will find reasons given that include: federal opposition to the expansion of slavery, mob rule in Kansas, the failure of the federal government to protect Texas from Indians and Mexicans, northern state violation of the U.S. Constitution (article 4, section 2, clause 3 on fugitive slaves), a Republican Party that allegedly endorses “the debasing doctrine of the equality of all men, irrespective of race or color,” abolitionists (who control Congress, encourage runaway slaves, send defamatory mailings, hire insurrectionists, block legislation to protect Texas from Indians, and elected Lincoln), and the fact that six other slave states have seceded and others surely will.

4. Direct students to **read the proposed changes to the TEKS and look for the reasons given** by twenty-first century curriculum designers—“states rights, slavery, sectionalism, and tariffs.” The passage is available at [http://academics.utep.edu/Portals/1719/Publications/TEKSmsTXCivilWar.pdf](http://academics.utep.edu/Portals/1719/Publications/TEKSmsTXCivilWar.pdf).

5. **Discuss the differences** in the reasons given. Some ideas include:
   - What reasons appear both in 1861 and 2009? (slavery, sectionalism)
   - What reasons given in 1861 are missing from the 2009 curriculum? (protection from Indians and Mexicans, northern annulment of the Constitution, the Republican party’s endorsement of racial equality, abolitionists)
   - What concept unites the reasons Texans gave in 1861? (racial superiority, racism)
   - What reasons given in 2009 were not given in 1861? (tariff, states’ rights)
   - How is it different to argue (as Texans did in 1861) that northerners had annulled the Constitution so there was no nation anyway *versus* arguing that any state has the right to leave the Union whenever it wants (states’ rights)? Why would someone in the 21st century want to blur this distinction? Does the US Constitution grant a “right” to secede?

6. You may **invite the students to act** on their new knowledge.
   - Send comments via email to TEKS@tea.state.tx.us (indicate the course or grade level your comments respond to in the subject line of your email), fax to (512) 463-8057, or mail to Curriculum Division, Attention: Social Studies Staff, 1701 N. Congress Ave., Austin, Texas 78701. The deadline for public comment is **October 9, 2009**.