

Compromises Before the Civil War – Teacher Background

The purpose of this lesson is to help students understand the serious differences that existed between the North and South, primarily with regard to the slavery issue. The nation truly struggled for more than 40 years to resolve these differences through its elected representatives. This struggle is best illustrated by a series of crises that occurred in Congress during the first half of the 19th century. The expansion of the United States continually threatened to upset the balance of slave and free states in the Union. As territories applied to the Union as either free or slave states, Congressional members were hard-pressed to engineer compromises that would not tilt the balance of power. As time went on, these compromises became less and less acceptable to both regions of the United States. In the end the issues would have to be resolved by force of arms.

A challenge for the teacher is to insure that students understand why the Congressional balance of power was so important during this period. Once made, this point will create a context that makes the specific compromises much easier to understand.