

Chapter 6 Debate: War Hawks vs. Federalists, 1812

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 be able to explain reasons Republicans supported going to war against England in 1812.
- Students will be able to explain reasons Federalists opposed war with England in 1812.
- Students will be able to connect each party's view on the question of war with their vision of the type of nation America should become.

Background

The War of 1812 divided the country along regional and party lines. The Jeffersonians (who called themselves Republicans) supported the war. This was especially true for young, brash members of Congress – the so-called “War Hawks.” Their number included Henry Clay and John C. Calhoun. They were largely from the South and West and hoped the war would bring additional lands to the American nation. Former President Thomas Jefferson was reported to have said that “Canada will be ours, but for the marching.”

Federalists in the East and Northeast largely opposed the war, knowing it would do great damage to trade with Europe – a key economic activity for their region. When the war occurred, Federalist resistance continued, culminating in the Hartford Convention of 1815, where secession was discussed. The party's actions during the war ultimately led the nation to reject them and they disappeared from the national scene soon thereafter.

At the foundation of their differences over the war were their competing views of what type of nation the United States should be. The Federalists had the Hamiltonian view that America should become an economic power based on manufacturing and trade. The Republicans held fast to Jefferson's view of America as an agrarian nation of small, yeoman farmers.

Procedures

This debate can be done in one class period. The teacher should divide the class into two parts, each side making arguments for their particular perspective. 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 key issues, 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.

War Hawks vs. Federalists, 1812

War Hawks	Federalists
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We must go to war to protect our national honor and sovereignty. • England has violated our rights on the high seas (impressment of sailors). • England has interfered with our trading rights as a neutral nation. • English agents from Canada continue to stir up Indians to attack our settlers on the frontier. • America <i>needs</i> to expand so there will be farmland for our sons and grandsons. War might bring new lands to America – Canada and Florida in particular. • We will bring to these new lands the blessings of American liberty. • America needs new lands so that all Americans will always have the chance to own their own land. The only <i>truly</i> independent men are those who own their own land and depend on no one for their survival. • New lands will make Jefferson’s agrarian dream possible. That will prevent us from <i>ever</i> becoming a nation of corrupt cities and oppressive factories like Europe is becoming. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes, England has interfered with our trade, but we can find a diplomatic solution to this problem. • A war would cut off ALL trade and be devastating to America’s economy – particularly the economy of the Northeast. • New lands will mean more states that will vote Republican. This war is nothing more than an attempt by their party to expand their base and totally take over the national government. • New lands should not be added using the sword of war. That violates the very principles of liberty. • The United States should not go to war when the war is favored by only one section and when the war will do such damage to another section. • America can become the greatest economic power in the world. We have the resources to lead the world in manufacturing and trade. A war will hamper this effort.

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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War Hawks	Federalists