

Virginia General Assembly Debate Lesson Plan:

- Students each receive a card assigning them to represent a county in Virginia in 1860. Each county card will have one talking point that they can use in a General Assembly debate on remaining one state and all seceding (eastern counties, “Virginia’s economy depends on slave labor, so Virginia must secede with other southern states;”) or dividing into two states (western counties, “Not all of Virginia is dependant on slaves, so they do not want to leave the Union and will become a separate state”).
 - They are to add at least two additional talking points based on what they have learned about the divided feelings in Virginia over slavery, secession, and civil war.
 - Students draw cards that will assign them to a western (anti-slavery) or an eastern (pro-slavery) county.
 - Add that you will be grading them based on how they have used what they have learned in class to prepare their other talking points. You will give special notice to those who respond with good arguments to what another person said.
 - *Differentiation option: Students may opt not to participate in the debate. Instead they will sit in the “gallery” and observe as citizens. After the debate they may either write a report on what they observed and how it could affect a vote on secession – or they may schedule a conference with the teacher to report on what they observed and how it could affect a vote on secession.*
1. Students may use the following web sites to research their talking points:
<http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/vcdh/vahistory/reconfiguring/index.html>
Used for Virginia secessionist debates of 1860-61 and creation of West Virginia.
Links to newspapers, maps, images.

<http://library.cornell.edu/mayantislavery>
Used for 1832 slavery debate in the Virginia General Assembly and other primary sources for and against slavery.

<http://www.vahistorical.org/sva2003.html>
This incredible site details the story of Virginia in simple terms. The “Becoming Southerners” area offers great background. The “Becoming Confederates” area begins with an east-to-understand explanation of the Compromise of 1850 through Dread Scott and also has a brief overview of John Brown. The discussion of the 1860 election could be a postscript to this unit.

<http://www.vahistory.org/reconfiguring/convention.html>
Used for talking points and map of vote on West Virginia secession. Part of a video series.

NOTE: In a normal year this could be the 3rd or 4th General Assembly debate in my classroom. The first on Bacon’s Rebellion; second, a debate on whether to remain loyal to England or join the cause of the Patriots. The 2nd or 3rd is on whether Virginia should or should not ratify the constitution. By this time they know the routine for debates and enjoy the opportunity.

This is the one debate plan. If time allows and unit can be extended another day, follow format for Day 3 of lesson, but debate if Virginia should secede from the United States. Assign students to write about their experience. On Day 4 of lesson, switch students from eastern and western counties (there were more WESTERN representatives at the Wheeling Convention) and debate the statehood issue..