Power Changes Hands

Read how one election tested the new republic and changed its voting rules.

SS24.6.20d "Describe the significance of the Election of 1800 as setting the precedent for a peaceful transition of power and the electoral reform the election produced."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the sentence that shows the peaceful transfer of power. Circle the sentences that explain the voting-rule problem, and write 1 beside the sentence that names the reform.

The Election That Tested the Rules

1. In 1800, President John Adams faced Thomas Jefferson in a bitter election. Adams belonged to the Federalist Party, while Jefferson belonged to the Democratic-Republican Party. Their supporters argued fiercely over what the new United States should become. After the votes were counted, Adams had lost. No president had ever lost a reelection race and then given the office to a rival party. People had reason to wonder whether the young republic could handle such a change. The election tested whether voters' choice, not a leader's wish, would decide who governed.

2. The voting rules created another problem. Each elector cast two votes for president, and the runner-up was supposed to become vice president. Jefferson and his running mate, Aaron Burr, each received 73 electoral votes. They tied for first place, even though their supporters wanted Jefferson as president and Burr as vice president. The House of Representatives had to choose between them. After 36 rounds of voting, the House chose Jefferson. The tie showed that the rules did not clearly let electors choose which candidate should hold each office.

3. On March 4, 1801, Jefferson became president, and Adams left office. The rival parties did not fight a war over the result. This peaceful change set a precedent: future leaders could lose an election and still allow their opponents to take power under the law. The tie also led to a change in the Constitution. Ratified in 1804, the Twelfth Amendment required electors to cast separate votes for president and vice president. The election showed two ways to protect a republic: respect a lawful result and repair a rule that caused confusion.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why was Adams leaving office after Jefferson won an important first for the United States?

2. How did the voting rules turn Jefferson and Burr's result into a problem?

3. How did the Twelfth Amendment address the problem revealed by the election?

4. What two lessons about protecting a republic came from the Election of 1800?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a new republic is planning elections for its president and vice president. Write a four-sentence advice note that proposes one action after a president loses and one rule for choosing the two offices. Explain why each helps, using the Election of 1800 as evidence.

Power Changes Hands

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the sentence that shows the peaceful transfer of power. Circle the sentences that explain the voting-rule problem, and write 1 beside the sentence that names the reform. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why was Adams leaving office after Jefferson won an important first for the United States?	**It was the first time a president who lost reelection gave the office to a rival party. It showed that an election result could lead to a peaceful change in power.**
2	How did the voting rules turn Jefferson and Burr's result into a problem?	**Electors did not cast separate votes for the two offices, so Jefferson and Burr tied for president even though their supporters wanted Burr to be vice president.**
3	How did the Twelfth Amendment address the problem revealed by the election?	**It required electors to cast separate votes for president and vice president, making clear which office each vote was for.**
4	What two lessons about protecting a republic came from the Election of 1800?	**Leaders should accept lawful election results, and the country should change voting rules that cause confusion.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Ask a president who loses to announce that the winner will take office on the date set by law. That action would help people trust the result, as Adams leaving office after Jefferson won helped show in 1800. Require electors to vote separately for president and vice president. This rule would prevent the kind of tie between running mates that sent Jefferson and Burr's contest to the House.

Accept responses that connect a peaceful transfer of power to the precedent set in 1800 and separate votes for the two offices to the Twelfth Amendment. Students may propose different lawful actions for a losing president.