One Nation, Divided

Shared connections and conflicting beliefs in the 1850s

6-12.US1.17 "Identify the traits, beliefs, and characteristics that united and divided the United States as a nation and a society during this time period."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details that connected people across states, and circle three details that show divisions. Beside each circled detail, write who disagreed or was affected.

A Nation Debates Freedom

1. In 1850, people in the United States argued fiercely about whether slavery would spread west. Yet many still saw themselves as members of one nation. They used the same Constitution to argue their cases, voted in national elections, and followed news from Congress. Roads, ships, and expanding rail lines moved goods and letters across state borders. Some families had relatives in several states. These shared institutions and connections did not mean everyone had equal rights. Enslaved people could not choose their work or travel freely, and women could not vote in national elections.

2. California asked to enter the Union as a free state. Many white southerners feared that more free states would weaken their power in Congress and threaten slavery. Many northerners opposed slavery's expansion, though they did not all support equal rights for Black Americans. Congress passed the Compromise of 1850: California entered as a free state, while a stronger Fugitive Slave Act required officials in free states to help return people who had escaped slavery. The law made slavery a national issue, even in places where slavery was banned. It also divided neighbors who disagreed about helping enforce it.

3. In northern towns, some people helped freedom seekers hide or travel toward safety, while others supported obeying the new law. Black communities organized against the capture of people accused of escaping slavery because even free Black residents faced the danger of being seized. In the South, enslaved people resisted slavery, while slaveholders defended it as essential to their wealth and way of life. The conflict did not fit a simple North-against-South pattern. People shared national laws and networks, but they disagreed sharply over who deserved freedom and whose rights those laws protected.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Identify two connections that helped people in different states see themselves as part of one nation.

2. How did many white southerners and many northerners differ over the spread of slavery?

3. What disagreement within northern towns shows that the conflict was not simply North against South?

4. How did the Fugitive Slave Act show both a national connection and a division over freedom?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence letter to a member of Congress in 1850. Explain one national connection and one division from the passage, then propose a specific response to the division and explain whose rights it would protect.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADES 6-12 · 6-12.US1.17

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details that connected people across states, and circle three details that show divisions. Beside each circled detail, write who disagreed or was affected. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Identify two connections that helped people in different states see themselves as part of one nation.	**They used the same Constitution and followed news from Congress. Accept other shared connections named in the passage.**
2	How did many white southerners and many northerners differ over the spread of slavery?	**Many white southerners feared free states would threaten slavery and weaken their power in Congress, while many northerners opposed slavery's expansion.**
3	What disagreement within northern towns shows that the conflict was not simply North against South?	**Some people helped freedom seekers reach safety, while others supported obeying the Fugitive Slave Act.**
4	How did the Fugitive Slave Act show both a national connection and a division over freedom?	**The national law required officials in free states to help return people who had escaped slavery. Neighbors disagreed about enforcing it and about whose freedom the law should protect.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Our states share a Constitution and follow news from the same Congress. Yet the Fugitive Slave Act requires officials in free states to help return people who escaped slavery, dividing neighbors over freedom. I ask you to repeal that law so officials are not required to help capture freedom seekers. This change would protect people escaping slavery and reduce the danger that free Black residents could be seized.

Accept passage-supported connections and divisions beyond those in the sample answers. For the letter, accept a historically plausible proposal if the student explains whose rights it would protect.