Power Changes Hands

The election of 1800 and a peaceful transfer of power

8.H.9 "Identify the events leading up to the presidential and congressional election of 1800 and the transfer of political authority and power to the Democratic-Republican Party led by Thomas Jefferson (1801)..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two events that increased opposition to the Federalists, circle the results of the presidential and congressional elections, and number the House decision and Jefferson's inauguration in order. Use your marks to trace how political power changed hands.

An Election Tests the Republic

1. In the late 1790s, Americans argued about how much power the national government should have. President John Adams and his Federalist allies favored a stronger central government. Their rivals, the Democratic-Republicans led by Thomas Jefferson, feared that federal power could threaten liberty. A tense, undeclared naval conflict with France led Federalists to strengthen the military and raise taxes. In 1798, they also passed the Alien and Sedition Acts. One of these laws punished certain published attacks on the government, angering opponents who saw it as an attack on free speech.

2. In 1800, Americans voted in congressional races, while presidential electors were chosen by voters or state legislatures, depending on the state. Democratic-Republicans won enough races to control both the House and Senate when the new Congress met in 1801. Jefferson challenged Adams for the presidency, while Aaron Burr was Jefferson's intended vice president. Under the rules then in place, each elector cast two votes for president, with no separate vote for vice president. Jefferson and Burr each received 73 electoral votes. Their tie sent the decision to the House of Representatives.

3. The outgoing, Federalist-controlled House voted again and again before choosing Jefferson on its 36th ballot in February 1801. In March, Adams left office and Jefferson became president, while Democratic-Republicans also gained control of Congress. Power had passed from one rival party to another without a civil war or a military takeover. This peaceful transfer showed that political opponents could accept an election result and follow the Constitution. The tie had exposed a weakness in the voting rules, and the Twelfth Amendment later required separate electoral votes for president and vice president.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the conflict with France and the Alien and Sedition Acts add to disagreements between the two parties before the election?

2. Why did the congressional elections matter to the change in political power, even though they did not choose the president?

3. What rule helped produce the tie between Jefferson and Burr, and how was the tie resolved?

4. Why was the transfer of power significant, and what change followed from the problem exposed by the election?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence editorial dated March 1801 arguing why this change in power matters. Connect two events from before or during the election to the peaceful transfer, and explain what it shows about government under the Constitution.

ANSWER KEY

Power Changes Hands

GRADE 8 · 8.H.9

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two events that increased opposition to the Federalists, circle the results of the presidential and congressional elections, and number the House decision and Jefferson's inauguration in order. Use your marks to trace how political power changed hands. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the conflict with France and the Alien and Sedition Acts add to disagreements between the two parties before the election?	**The conflict led Federalists to expand the military and raise taxes. The acts angered opponents who believed federal power threatened free speech.**
2	Why did the congressional elections matter to the change in political power, even though they did not choose the president?	**Democratic-Republicans won control of both the House and Senate, giving Jefferson's party power in Congress as well as the presidency.**
3	What rule helped produce the tie between Jefferson and Burr, and how was the tie resolved?	**Electors cast two votes for president and none separately for vice president. The outgoing House chose Jefferson on its 36th ballot.**
4	Why was the transfer of power significant, and what change followed from the problem exposed by the election?	**Rival parties transferred power peacefully under the Constitution. The Twelfth Amendment later required separate electoral votes for president and vice president.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

March 1801: The Alien and Sedition Acts angered people who feared that Federalists had too much power. The congressional elections gave Democratic-Republicans control of Congress, showing that voters could change who governed. Even after Jefferson and Burr tied, the House followed the Constitution and chose Jefferson. Adams left office peacefully, showing that rival parties could disagree fiercely without fighting to keep power.

Accept editorials that connect two accurate events to the peaceful transfer and make a clear claim about its significance. Students may focus on the acts, congressional results, electoral tie, or House vote.