A Union Bargain

Read how Clay tried to hold the country together in 1850

8.C.11.1.A "Describe the series of measures proposed by Senator Henry Clay to avert the threat of dissolution of the Union, including a strengthened Fugitive Slave Act and the application of popular sovereignty regarding the spread of slavery into new..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each measure Clay proposed, circle the measures about western lands, and write "free states" or "slaveholding states" beside one measure that might appeal to each side.

Henry Clay's Plan to Save the Union

1. In 1850, the United States faced a dangerous argument over slavery in land gained after the war with Mexico. California asked to enter the Union as a free state, where slavery would be illegal. Many Southern leaders feared losing influence in Congress if more free states joined. Some even warned that Southern states might leave the Union. Senator Henry Clay of Kentucky proposed a series of measures meant to keep the country together. His plan offered gains and losses to both sides rather than giving either side everything it wanted.

2. Clay proposed admitting California as a free state. For the territories of Utah and New Mexico, his plan did not ban slavery or require it. Instead, settlers would decide the issue through popular sovereignty as those territories organized and sought statehood. Clay also proposed settling a border dispute between Texas and New Mexico; in return, the federal government would pay some of Texas's debts. In Washington, D.C., the sale of enslaved people would end, but slavery itself would remain legal. These measures paired limits on slavery with concessions to slaveholding states.

3. One proposal especially pleased slaveholding states: a stronger Fugitive Slave Act. It required federal marshals to help return people accused of escaping slavery, even from free states, and punished people who helped them. The law offered accused people few ways to challenge a claim, putting free Black people at risk of capture too. Clay hoped these trade-offs would prevent Southern states from leaving the Union, but the measures did not settle the conflict over slavery. Congress passed the main measures as separate laws in 1850, after Clay's combined proposal failed.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Clay's proposals for California and the territories of Utah and New Mexico differ?

2. Describe how the stronger Fugitive Slave Act was meant to gain support from slaveholding states.

3. What two changes did Clay propose involving Texas and Washington, D.C.?

4. Using two measures from the passage, explain how Clay tried to offer something to both sides of the slavery dispute.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you are a newspaper editor in 1850 explaining Clay's plan to readers who fear the Union will split. Write a short paragraph in your own words that describes at least three measures, including popular sovereignty and the stronger Fugitive Slave Act, and explains why the plan might hold the Union together without ending the conflict over slavery.

ANSWER KEY

A Union Bargain

GRADE 8 · 8.C.11.1.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each measure Clay proposed, circle the measures about western lands, and write "free states" or "slaveholding states" beside one measure that might appeal to each side. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Clay's proposals for California and the territories of Utah and New Mexico differ?	**California would enter as a free state. Settlers in Utah and New Mexico would decide the slavery question through popular sovereignty.**
2	Describe how the stronger Fugitive Slave Act was meant to gain support from slaveholding states.	**It required federal marshals to help return people accused of escaping slavery and punished people who helped them.**
3	What two changes did Clay propose involving Texas and Washington, D.C.?	**He proposed settling the Texas–New Mexico border dispute while the federal government paid some of Texas's debts. He also proposed ending the sale of enslaved people in Washington, D.C., while keeping slavery legal there.**
4	Using two measures from the passage, explain how Clay tried to offer something to both sides of the slavery dispute.	**Admitting California as a free state appealed to opponents of slavery's spread. Strengthening the Fugitive Slave Act appealed to slaveholding states.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Clay's plan asks both sides to accept a bargain. California would join as a free state, while settlers in Utah and New Mexico would decide the slavery question through popular sovereignty. A stronger Fugitive Slave Act would help slaveholding states reclaim people accused of escaping slavery. These measures might keep Southern states from leaving the Union because each side gets part of what it wants. But the plan does not end slavery or stop future arguments about it.

Accept accurate explanations that connect specific measures to Clay's effort to prevent Southern states from leaving the Union. For the open task, look for three distinct measures, both required topics, and a clear explanation of why the bargain would not settle the slavery conflict.