# A Fragile Deal

How the Compromise of 1850 delayed a national crisis

**8.C.11.1** "Evaluate the goals of the Compromise of 1850 regarding the issue of slavery. Describe the series of measures proposed by Senator Henry Clay to avert the threat of dissolution of the Union..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

## 1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

**YOUR JOB** As you read, underline Clay's goal and circle three measures meant to reach it. Write 1 beside a reason the compromise worked for a time and 2 beside a reason it could not last.

### Holding the Union Together

1. In 1850, lawmakers faced a question that threatened to split the United States: would slavery expand into lands gained from Mexico? California asked to join as a free state. Many Northerners supported its request, but Southern leaders feared losing power in the Senate if free states gained an advantage. Senator Henry Clay proposed a set of measures to hold the Union together. His goal was not to settle whether slavery was right. It was to give leaders on both sides enough reason to remain in the same country.

2. Clay's plan admitted California as a free state. It organized Utah and New Mexico as territories, leaving slavery's status there to popular sovereignty as they moved toward statehood. Under that principle, residents would have a say in whether slavery was allowed. A stronger Fugitive Slave Act required the return of people who escaped slavery and punished those who helped them. The plan also ended the slave trade in Washington, D.C., but left slavery legal there. Texas accepted a boundary settlement, and the federal government took on some of its debt.

3. Clay's combined bill failed, but Congress passed the measures separately in 1850. Lawmakers could support different parts, so the Union held together for the moment. Yet the deal did not end slavery or agree on where it could expand. Many Northerners protested the Fugitive Slave Act because it forced some citizens to help capture people who had escaped slavery. Popular sovereignty postponed a decision about slavery in the territories, leaving settlers to fight over it. The compromise delayed a crisis without removing its cause.

## 2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did admitting California and using popular sovereignty try to address demands from different regions?

2. What did the stronger Fugitive Slave Act require, and which region's demands was it meant to satisfy?

3. Why could passing the measures separately help hold the Union together for a time?

4. How could popular sovereignty lead to future conflict instead of settling the issue of slavery?

## 3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you edit a newspaper in 1850. Write a three-sentence note with a headline that judges whether the deal brings lasting peace. Name two measures, predict how people in different regions might react, and explain what could cause the conflict to return.

ANSWER KEY

# A Fragile Deal

GRADE 8 · 8.C.11.1

## PART 1 · READ AND MARK

As you read, underline Clay's goal and circle three measures meant to reach it. Write 1 beside a reason the compromise worked for a time and 2 beside a reason it could not last. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

## PART 2 · ANSWERS

| # | QUESTION | ANSWER |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | How did admitting California and using popular sovereignty try to address demands from different regions? | **California's admission as a free state met a Northern demand. Popular sovereignty left open the possibility that slavery could be allowed in Utah and New Mexico, rather than ruling it out.** |
| 2 | What did the stronger Fugitive Slave Act require, and which region's demands was it meant to satisfy? | **It required the return of people who escaped slavery and punished those who helped them. It was meant to satisfy Southern demands.** |
| 3 | Why could passing the measures separately help hold the Union together for a time? | **Lawmakers could support different measures, giving leaders on both sides a reason to accept the deal and remain in the Union.** |
| 4 | How could popular sovereignty lead to future conflict instead of settling the issue of slavery? | **It postponed the decision about slavery in the territories, leaving settlers to fight over whether slavery would be allowed.** |

## PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

My headline is “A Pause, Not Peace” because California's entry as a free state may please many Northerners, while the stronger Fugitive Slave Act may reassure Southern leaders. These measures may keep the Union together for now because each side gained something. Yet fights over slavery in Utah and New Mexico could bring the crisis back.

Accept other accurate pairs of measures and plausible regional reactions. The note should distinguish a short-term reason for unity from an unresolved cause of conflict.