A Divided Union

Trace how attempts to settle slavery disputes deepened the conflict.

8.C.11 "Analyze slavery as the principal cause of increased sectional polarization leading to the Civil War. Evaluate the goals of the Compromise of 1850 regarding the issue of slavery..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the 1850 settlement and the 1854 act. Circle three effects that increased division, then draw a line from each underlined measure to one of its effects.

Could the Union Hold?

1. After the Mexican-American War, the United States gained western land, and lawmakers argued over whether slavery could spread there. Slavery drove the growing divide between North and South. In 1850, Senator Henry Clay proposed measures to keep the Union together. The resulting Compromise of 1850 admitted California as a free state and let voters in Utah and New Mexico territories decide slavery through popular sovereignty. It also strengthened the Fugitive Slave Act, requiring federal marshals to help return people accused of escaping slavery, even from free states. This angered many Northerners.

2. The compromise eased the immediate threat of secession, but it did not settle slavery's future. In 1854, the Kansas-Nebraska Act allowed settlers in those territories to vote on slavery. This overturned the Missouri Compromise's ban on slavery in both territories. Many Northerners opposed the chance for slavery to expand onto land they believed had been closed to it. Proslavery and antislavery settlers rushed into Kansas to influence elections; violence between them became known as "Bleeding Kansas." Voting could not settle the issue fairly when opposing groups used threats and force.

3. In 1857, the Supreme Court's Dred Scott v. Sandford decision declared that African Americans could not be U.S. citizens and that Congress could not ban slavery in federal territories. The ruling treated enslaved people as property, alarming those who wanted to stop slavery's spread. In 1859, abolitionist John Brown raided the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, hoping to arm enslaved people for an uprising. The raid failed, but it increased Southern fears of rebellion and Northern arguments over resistance to slavery. Each attempted settlement or confrontation widened the divide, making civil war increasingly likely.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the Compromise of 1850 try to hold the Union together, and why did it fail to end the dispute over slavery?

2. Why did many Northerners oppose the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and how did voting on slavery lead to violence in Kansas?

3. How did the Dred Scott decision deepen the conflict over slavery's expansion?

4. What did John Brown hope to accomplish at Harpers Ferry, and how did the raid add to sectional tension?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a five-sentence editorial set in 1859 explaining why votes on slavery failed to keep the Union together. Connect the Compromise of 1850, events in Kansas, and either the Dred Scott ruling or John Brown's raid; explain why slavery remained the main cause of conflict.

ANSWER KEY

A Divided Union

GRADE 8 · 8.C.11

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the 1850 settlement and the 1854 act. Circle three effects that increased division, then draw a line from each underlined measure to one of its effects. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the Compromise of 1850 try to hold the Union together, and why did it fail to end the dispute over slavery?	**It admitted California as a free state and used popular sovereignty in Utah and New Mexico. It left slavery's future unsettled, while the strengthened Fugitive Slave Act angered many Northerners.**
2	Why did many Northerners oppose the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and how did voting on slavery lead to violence in Kansas?	**The act opened land previously closed to slavery under the Missouri Compromise. Opposing settlers rushed to influence elections, and some used threats and force.**
3	How did the Dred Scott decision deepen the conflict over slavery's expansion?	**It ruled that Congress could not ban slavery in federal territories, alarming people who wanted to stop slavery's spread.**
4	What did John Brown hope to accomplish at Harpers Ferry, and how did the raid add to sectional tension?	**He hoped to arm enslaved people for an uprising. The failed raid increased Southern fears of rebellion and Northern arguments over resistance to slavery.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The Compromise of 1850 let voters in two western territories decide slavery, but its stronger Fugitive Slave Act angered many Northerners. The Kansas-Nebraska Act offered voting again, this time on land where the Missouri Compromise had barred slavery. In Kansas, rival settlers used threats and force instead of accepting a peaceful decision. The Dred Scott ruling then said Congress could not ban slavery in federal territories, making another national settlement even harder. These clashes show that voting did not resolve the central dispute over slavery's expansion.

Accept answers that connect a specific measure or event to its effect on sectional conflict. For the editorial, look for five sentences, the required evidence, and a clear explanation of why slavery remained the central dispute.