# Rights Under Pressure

Weigh national security against individual rights in 1798

**8.C.5.2** "Evaluate the impact of the Alien and Sedition Acts on individual rights during the Adams Administration, including the responses of the Democratic-Republicans, as expressed in the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions."

NAME _____ DATE _____

## 1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

**YOUR JOB** Underline three details showing how the acts could affect individual rights, circle one reason Federalists gave for the acts, and number the different responses in the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions 1 and 2.

### A Dispute Over Federal Power

1 In 1798, the United States feared a war with France. Federalists, who controlled Congress and the presidency under John Adams, said the nation needed protection from foreign threats and dangerous rumors. They passed four laws called the Alien and Sedition Acts. The Naturalization Act increased the years an immigrant had to live in the United States before becoming a citizen from five to fourteen. This delay mattered because citizenship brought voting rights to eligible men. Many new immigrants supported the opposing party, the Democratic-Republicans.

2 One law let the president order a noncitizen considered dangerous to leave the country without a court trial. Another allowed the government to detain or remove noncitizens from an enemy nation during war. The Sedition Act made it a crime to publish certain false, malicious statements about the federal government, Congress, or the president. Editors could face fines or prison. Federalists said these powers protected the country. Critics argued that they threatened immigrants' security and chilled the freedom to criticize leaders, even when people had real concerns.

3 Democratic-Republicans Thomas Jefferson and James Madison helped write the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions in 1798. These statements argued that the federal government had gone beyond its constitutional powers. Kentucky argued that states could declare unconstitutional federal laws void. Virginia called on states to work together to oppose unconstitutional federal actions. The resolutions did not immediately cancel the acts. Instead, they challenged the laws and raised a lasting question: how should states respond when they believe federal power violates individual rights?

## 2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the Naturalization Act affect an immigrant's path to voting?

2. How did the Alien Acts and the Sedition Act put different people's rights at risk?

3. What reason did Federalists give for the acts, and what concern did critics raise about that approach?

4. How did the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions differ in the ways they said states should respond to unconstitutional federal laws?

## 3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a three-sentence note as a newspaper editor in 1798. Explain one risk the Sedition Act poses to you, how a Federalist might defend the law, and which resolution's approach you would support to challenge it, with a reason.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 8 · 8.C.5.2

## PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline three details showing how the acts could affect individual rights, circle one reason Federalists gave for the acts, and number the different responses in the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions 1 and 2. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

## PART 2 · ANSWERS

| # | QUESTION | ANSWER |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | How did the Naturalization Act affect an immigrant's path to voting? | **It increased the wait for citizenship from five to fourteen years, delaying voting rights for immigrants who would otherwise be eligible.** |
| 2 | How did the Alien Acts and the Sedition Act put different people's rights at risk? | **The Alien Acts put noncitizens at risk of removal or detention. The Sedition Act put people who published criticism at risk of fines or prison.** |
| 3 | What reason did Federalists give for the acts, and what concern did critics raise about that approach? | **Federalists said the acts protected the country from foreign threats and dangerous rumors. Critics argued that the laws threatened immigrants' security and discouraged criticism of leaders.** |
| 4 | How did the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions differ in the ways they said states should respond to unconstitutional federal laws? | **Kentucky argued that states could declare such laws void. Virginia called on states to work together to oppose unconstitutional federal actions.** |

## PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

As a newspaper editor in 1798, I worry that a critical article could bring a fine or prison sentence under the Sedition Act. A Federalist might argue that punishing false, malicious attacks protects the nation when war seems possible. I support Virginia's call for states to act together against unconstitutional federal actions because a united challenge could defend the freedom to criticize leaders.

Accept either resolution in the note if the student describes its approach accurately and connects it to a right affected by the act. Do not require students to claim that the resolutions repealed the laws.