A Fragile Balance

How one compromise delayed conflict over slavery

8.C.7.5 "Analyze congress' attempt to balance sectional interests and political power, by describing the impact of the Missouri Compromise on the expansion of slavery, both delaying the Civil War and sowing its seeds."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two ways Congress tried to balance sectional interests or political power. Circle one detail showing how the deal delayed conflict and one showing how it led to later conflict, then label them D and L.

The Missouri Compromise

1. In 1819, Missouri asked to join the United States as a state that allowed slavery. At the time, the Senate had equal numbers of free and slave states. Adding Missouri alone would give slave states more senators, since every state sent two senators to Congress. Many northerners opposed slavery's spread; many southerners feared losing political power if Congress blocked Missouri. Lawmakers argued over more than one state's future. Their decision could shape who held power in the Senate and where slavery might expand across western lands.

2. In 1820, Congress approved a deal called the Missouri Compromise. Maine, which prohibited slavery, entered as a free state in 1820; Missouri entered as a slave state in 1821. Together, their admission kept the number of free and slave states equal in the Senate. Congress also barred slavery in the remaining Louisiana Purchase territory north of latitude 36°30′, except Missouri. South of that line, slavery was not barred by this compromise. The line did not divide every part of the United States, only land covered by this agreement.

3. The deal let both sides claim a gain, so Congress settled the statehood fight without ending the argument over slavery. That pause helped delay the Civil War, which began in 1861. Yet the bargain left slavery able to expand in some western territory while barring it in other territory. The boundary also kept alive a hard question: Could Congress limit slavery in territories? In 1854, Congress repealed the compromise's northern restriction with the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and violence followed in Kansas over whether slavery would be allowed there.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why would admitting Missouri by itself have changed political power in the Senate?

2. How did the two state admissions balance power while the boundary addressed slavery's expansion?

3. How did the compromise delay a larger conflict without ending the disagreement over slavery?

4. How do the events of 1854 show that the compromise also set the stage for later conflict?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you are a member of Congress in 1820. Write a four-sentence proposal for one additional rule about admitting future states. Explain how it would affect the Senate balance, give one reason northerners or southerners might object, and predict whether it would reduce or deepen future disputes over slavery.

ANSWER KEY

A Fragile Balance

GRADE 8 · 8.C.7.5

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two ways Congress tried to balance sectional interests or political power. Circle one detail showing how the deal delayed conflict and one showing how it led to later conflict, then label them D and L. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why would admitting Missouri by itself have changed political power in the Senate?	**Missouri would have added two senators from a slave state, giving slave states more senators than free states.**
2	How did the two state admissions balance power while the boundary addressed slavery's expansion?	**Maine and Missouri kept the numbers of free and slave states equal. The boundary barred slavery in most remaining Louisiana Purchase territory north of 36°30′, but the compromise did not bar it south of that line.**
3	How did the compromise delay a larger conflict without ending the disagreement over slavery?	**It settled the immediate statehood fight by giving each side a gain, but it did not settle whether slavery could expand.**
4	How do the events of 1854 show that the compromise also set the stage for later conflict?	**Congress repealed the compromise's northern restriction, and violence followed in Kansas over whether slavery would be allowed there.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I propose admitting future free and slave states in pairs whenever both are ready for statehood. This would keep the two groups of states equal in the Senate at each admission. Northerners might object because a free state could have to wait for a slave state. The rule might delay a fight over Senate votes, but it could deepen disputes when no suitable partner is ready.

Accept different plausible rules if the response explains their effect on Senate power, identifies a sectional objection, and makes a reasoned prediction. For the marking job, accept any passage details that clearly support the student's D and L labels.