A Union Tested

Read the evidence behind a debate over state and federal power.

8.C.8.2 "Analyze the impact of the Nullification Crisis on the development of the states' rights debate. Explain how provisions of the Constitution (Supremacy Clause; Article III) addressed the theoretical right to reject federal laws..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline South Carolina's claim about state power, circle the two parts of the Constitution that address it, and number two actions taken in response to the crisis. These marks will help you trace how the dispute grew and how leaders tried to settle it.

When a State Rejected a Federal Law

1. In 1832, South Carolina confronted a federal tariff that raised the cost of many imported goods. Some South Carolinians said the tax helped northern manufacturers while hurting southern buyers and cotton growers. A state convention declared the tariffs of 1828 and 1832 invalid within South Carolina. Its leaders argued that a state could nullify a federal law it judged unconstitutional. Opponents replied that letting each state decide which laws to obey could break the Union apart. The clash turned a dispute over taxes into a test of states' rights.

2. The Constitution offered a different way to settle such disputes. The Supremacy Clause makes the Constitution and federal laws made under it the highest law of the land, above conflicting state laws. Article III gives federal courts authority to hear cases arising under the Constitution and federal laws. A state could challenge whether a tariff was constitutional, but its convention could not make that judgment binding on the nation by itself. These rules put disputes over federal power before courts, rather than leaving each state free to reject laws.

3. President Andrew Jackson opposed nullification because he feared it could lead to secession and destroy the Union. He issued a proclamation rejecting South Carolina's claim and asked Congress for authority to enforce the tariffs. Congress passed the Force Bill, while a compromise tariff gradually reduced rates. South Carolina withdrew its nullification of the tariffs. Yet the argument remained: many northern manufacturers favored protective tariffs, many southern residents opposed them, and even South Carolinians disagreed with one another. The crisis showed how a fight over federal power could divide regions and neighbors.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did South Carolina's response to the tariffs turn a tax dispute into a debate about states' rights?

2. How do the Supremacy Clause and Article III each challenge the idea that a state convention can reject a federal law on its own?

3. How did Jackson's fear for the Union shape his response to South Carolina?

4. What details show that the crisis divided both regions of the country and people within South Carolina?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four- or five-sentence letter to a newspaper in 1833 from a South Carolina merchant who dislikes high tariffs but opposes nullification. Explain how the Constitution offers another path, respond to Jackson's fear, and suggest how people might calm their disagreements.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 8 · 8.C.8.2

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline South Carolina's claim about state power, circle the two parts of the Constitution that address it, and number two actions taken in response to the crisis. These marks will help you trace how the dispute grew and how leaders tried to settle it. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did South Carolina's response to the tariffs turn a tax dispute into a debate about states' rights?	**Its convention claimed that a state could declare a federal law invalid within its borders. Opponents argued that allowing states to choose which laws to obey threatened the Union.**
2	How do the Supremacy Clause and Article III each challenge the idea that a state convention can reject a federal law on its own?	**The Supremacy Clause places valid federal laws above conflicting state laws. Article III gives federal courts authority to hear disputes arising under the Constitution and federal laws, rather than leaving a state convention's judgment binding on the nation.**
3	How did Jackson's fear for the Union shape his response to South Carolina?	**Fearing that nullification could lead to secession and destroy the Union, Jackson rejected South Carolina's claim and sought authority from Congress to enforce the tariffs.**
4	What details show that the crisis divided both regions of the country and people within South Carolina?	**Many northern manufacturers favored protective tariffs, while many southern residents opposed them. South Carolinians also disagreed with one another about the crisis.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I sell imported cloth in Charleston, so high tariffs raise my costs, but I do not want South Carolina to cancel a federal law on its own. The Supremacy Clause puts valid federal laws above state decisions, and Article III lets federal courts hear challenges about those laws. Jackson fears that nullification could lead to secession and destroy the Union, and I share that fear. Congress should lower tariff rates through compromise while courts hear constitutional disputes. Neighbors who disagree about tariffs can debate and vote without treating one another as enemies.

Accept answers that distinguish a challenge to a law's constitutionality from a state's claim that it can make federal law invalid on its own. For the letter, accept other historically plausible ways to reduce tensions if the merchant's position and constitutional reasoning remain clear.