A Shifting Balance

How new states kept the slavery debate before Congress

8.C.9.2.C "Describe the continued political pressure to maintain a balance of free and slave states."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each time a state or territory raised concerns about Senate power, and circle the political response to that concern.

The Struggle for Senate Power

1 In the early 1800s, each state sent two senators to Congress. Northern states were gradually ending slavery, while slavery remained legal in Southern states. Leaders from slave states feared that more free states would give opponents of slavery enough Senate votes to limit its spread. In 1819, Missouri asked to join the Union as a slave state, threatening the equal number of free and slave states. Angry debates followed. Congress responded with the Missouri Compromise: Maine entered as a free state in 1820, and Missouri entered as a slave state in 1821.

2 The pressure returned as the United States gained western land. In 1849, California asked to enter as a free state. Its admission would give free states more Senate seats than slave states, so Southern politicians demanded protections for slavery. In the Compromise of 1850, Congress admitted California as a free state but also passed a stronger Fugitive Slave Act, which required help in returning people who had escaped slavery. The deal did not restore an equal number of states. Instead, lawmakers traded different measures to hold the Union together.

3 Debate continued because more western territories could become states. In 1854, Senator Stephen Douglas proposed letting settlers in Kansas and Nebraska decide whether to allow slavery. Congress passed the Kansas-Nebraska Act, replacing an earlier rule that had barred slavery in those areas. Supporters of both sides rushed into Kansas, hoping to shape its future vote and, eventually, the balance of power in the Senate. Fighting broke out there. The violence showed that deciding statehood one territory at a time did not remove the political pressure over slavery.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why did leaders from slave states worry about admitting more free states?

2. How did the Missouri Compromise respond to pressure over the number of free and slave states?

3. Why did California's request create new pressure, and how did Congress respond without restoring an equal number of states?

4. How did the Kansas-Nebraska Act leave the struggle over future Senate power unresolved?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine that a fictional western territory asks to enter as a free state in 1851. In four sentences, explain how its admission would affect the Senate balance, why politicians from slave states might resist, one response modeled on a compromise in the passage, and why that response might not end the conflict.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 8 · 8.C.9.2.C

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each time a state or territory raised concerns about Senate power, and circle the political response to that concern. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why did leaders from slave states worry about admitting more free states?	**Each state had two senators. More free states could give opponents of slavery enough Senate votes to limit its spread.**
2	How did the Missouri Compromise respond to pressure over the number of free and slave states?	**Maine entered as a free state and Missouri entered as a slave state, keeping the numbers equal.**
3	Why did California's request create new pressure, and how did Congress respond without restoring an equal number of states?	**California would give free states more Senate seats. Congress admitted it as a free state and also passed a stronger Fugitive Slave Act.**
4	How did the Kansas-Nebraska Act leave the struggle over future Senate power unresolved?	**It let settlers decide whether to allow slavery, so both sides tried to shape Kansas's decision and its possible future effect on the Senate balance.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Admitting this territory would increase the free states' lead in Senate seats. Politicians from slave states might resist because they would lose more power to block limits on slavery. Congress could pair admission with a law protecting slavery, as it did in 1850. That bargain would not restore equal numbers of states or settle the dispute over slavery's spread.

Accept responses that connect state admission to two Senate seats per state and explain why the pressure continued. For the open task, accept a historically grounded response modeled on either compromise in the passage.