

## Accelerated Social Studies 05/13: The Missouri Compromise and the Dred Scot Decision

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**PART ONE: How are you? I'd like to hear how you are doing. How are you spending your time? Is anything new with you? In the space below please let me know how things are going.**

### Part One: Missouri Compromise:

**A) Read the following document about the Missouri Compromise and highlight five sentences you think are particularly important.**

#### Background

With the [War of 1812](#) won, Americans could concentrate on solving what was a growing internal problem: what to do about slavery.

The first ships containing African slaves had arrived on American shores in 1619, and the slave trade had picked up in the 18th Century. The expansion of cotton and other types of farming in the South required more and more labor, and more and more plantation owners turned to slaves to fill their workloads.

By the turn of the 19th Century, outrage was growing over slavery, primarily in the Northern states. And as more and more territories were applying to become states, the decision of whether those states could allow slavery was becoming a very important issue.

One by one, states joined the Union. From 1816 to 1819, two Northern and two Southern states joined the Union. The two Northern states, Illinois and Indiana, did not allow slavery; the two Southern states, Alabama and Mississippi, did.



The slavery issue was rapidly driving the country into two separate camps, and Congress wasn't doing anything to stop the polarization. Both sides made threats over continued settlement of the Louisiana Territory, and neither side was willing to give the other even a temporary advantage.

When Missouri applied to become a state, in 1819, the Union had 22 states, 11 allowing slavery and 11 outlawing it. Missouri wanted to become a slave state. Anti-

slavery leaders were afraid that allowing another slave state would upset what was then a delicate balance between slave states and free states.

**Slavery** had been an issue ever since the adoption of the [Constitution](#), which agreed to count African-American slaves as three-fifths of a person for population purposes, sending the message that they were inferior to European-Americans. And even though [George Washington](#) freed his slaves (Yes, he did have them at one time!), not too many other Southerners followed suit. The plantations that dotted the South depended heavily on slave labor for their livelihood, and slave owners weren't about to give up a practice that saved them a lot of money.

**Slavery** really had two fronts, then. One was economic: Slave owners counted slaves as saved revenue, meaning that they would have had to pay for that labor otherwise. The other front was moral: Many people believed that it was wrong and against the principles of the [Declaration of Independence](#) and the Constitution that one person could *own* another.

## The Solution

**Abolitionists** wanted slavery outlawed everywhere, and they were willing to resort to violence to get what they wanted. Many slave owners and even non-slave-owning Southerners were willing to fight to keep what they thought was their right to own slaves if they chose. The country, only five years removed from a victory (again) over Great Britain, was close to going to war with itself.

**So** how did Congress solve this growing problem? By compromising. Because both sides were on opposite sides of the issue, both sides couldn't be satisfied by the same outcome. So Congress gave both sides something: Each side got a new state.

**Maine** applied for statehood about the same time, and both were eventually admitted to the Union, Maine as a free state and Missouri as a slave state.

The [Missouri Compromise](#), as it was called, found its greatest champion in [Henry Clay](#), who was at that time the Speaker of the House. A [War Hawk](#) from his days advocating war with Great Britain, he tried desperately to keep the North and South from fighting over the slavery issue. Largely because of Clay's efforts, the Missouri Compromise went into effect.



**Here** are some details of the Compromise:

- Missouri was admitted as a slave state
- Maine was admitted as a free state
- Slavery was forbidden north of the 36 degree latitude mark, the southern boundary of Missouri.
- People in the North were encouraged to return runaway slaves to their masters.
- Slavery was not prohibited anywhere, not even in the free territories.

**The** Missouri Compromise solved the immediate problem but didn't solve the slavery issue as a whole. As many people on both sides were sure, that would take a war.

### **B) View the following video about the Missouri Compromise:**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTSbn5cE4LA&feature=emb\\_title](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTSbn5cE4LA&feature=emb_title)

### **C) Visit the following link and read over the site; explore the links on the page:**

<https://www.history.com/topics/abolitionist-movement/missouri-compromise>

**D) Complete the following 5 W's Activity about the Missouri Compromise:**

<b>Who is involved?</b>	
<b>What is the event being described?</b>	
<b>When is this event taking place?</b>	
<b>Where is this event occurring?</b>	
<b>How is this event unfolding? In other words, what is going on?</b>	
<b>Why is this event important to my understanding of history?</b>	

**E) Write a one-paragraph response to the following:** This compromise was a "Temporary solution to a bigger problem that would eventually have to be decided with war." What do you think this quote means? Explain.

## Part Two: the Dred Scot Decision

### A) Read the following article about Dred Scot and highlight four key sentences.

Dred Scott first went to trial to sue for his freedom in 1847. Ten years later, after a decade of appeals and court reversals, his case was finally brought before the United States Supreme Court. In what is perhaps the most infamous case in its history, the court decided that all people of African ancestry -- slaves as well as those who were free -- could never become citizens of the United States and therefore could not sue in federal court. The court also ruled that the federal government did not have the power to prohibit slavery in its territories. Scott, needless to say, remained a slave.

Born around 1800, Scott migrated westward with his master, Peter Blow. They travelled from Scott's home state of Virginia to Alabama and then, in 1830, to St. Louis, Missouri. Two years later Peter Blow died; Scott was subsequently bought by army surgeon Dr. John Emerson, who later took Scott to the free state of Illinois. In the spring of 1836, after a stay of two and a half years, Emerson moved to a fort in the Wisconsin Territory, taking Scott along. While there, Scott met and married Harriet Robinson, a slave owned by a local justice of the peace. Ownership of Harriet was transferred to Emerson.

Scott's extended stay in Illinois, a free state, gave him the legal standing to make a claim for freedom, as did his extended stay in Wisconsin, where slavery was also prohibited. But Scott never made the claim while living in the free lands -- perhaps because he was unaware of his rights at the time, or perhaps because he was content with his master. After two years, the army transferred Emerson to the south: first to St Louis, then to Louisiana. A little over a year later, a recently-married Emerson summoned his slave couple. Instead of staying in the free territory of Wisconsin, or going to the free state of Illinois, the two travelled over a thousand miles, apparently unaccompanied, down the Mississippi River to meet their master. Only after Emerson's death in 1843, after Emerson's widow hired Scott out to an army captain, did Scott seek freedom for himself and his wife. First he offered to buy his freedom from Mrs. Emerson -- then living in St. Louis -- for \$300. The offer was refused. Scott then sought freedom through the courts.

Scott went to trial in June of 1847, but lost on a technicality -- he couldn't prove that he and Harriet were owned by Emerson's widow. The following year the Missouri Supreme Court decided that case should be retried. In an 1850 retrial, the the St Louis circuit court ruled that Scott and his family were free. Two years later the Missouri Supreme Court stepped in again, reversing the decision of the lower court. Scott and his lawyers then brought his case to a federal court, the United States Circuit Court in Missouri. In 1854, the Circuit Court upheld the decision of the Missouri Supreme Court. There was now only one other place to go. Scott appealed his case to the United States Supreme Court.

The nine justices of the Supreme Court of 1856 certainly had biases regarding slavery. Seven had been appointed by pro-slavery presidents from the South, and of these, five were from slave-holding families. Still, if the case had gone directly from the state supreme court to the federal supreme court, the federal court probably would have upheld the state's ruling, citing a previously established decision that gave states the authority to determine the status of its inhabitants. But, in his attempt to bring his case to the federal courts, Scott had claimed that he and the case's defendant (Mrs. Emerson's brother, John Sanford, who lived in New York) were citizens from different states. The main issues for the Supreme Court, therefore, were whether it had jurisdiction to try the case and whether Scott was indeed a citizen.

The decision of the court was read in March of 1857. Chief Justice Roger B. Taney -- a staunch supporter of slavery -- wrote the "majority opinion" for the court. It stated that because Scott was black, he was not a citizen and therefore had no right to sue. The decision also declared the Missouri Compromise of 1820, legislation which restricted slavery in certain territories, unconstitutional.

While the decision was well-received by slaveholders in the South, many northerners were outraged. The decision greatly influenced the nomination of Abraham Lincoln to the Republican Party and his subsequent election, which in turn led to the South's secession from the Union. Peter Blow's sons, childhood friends of Scott, had helped pay Scott's legal fees through the years. After the Supreme Court's decision, the former master's sons purchased Scott and his wife and set them free.

Dred Scott died nine months later.

**B) Watch the following video about the Dred Scot case:**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=96&v=YM7onFP9vUQ&feature=emb\\_title](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=96&v=YM7onFP9vUQ&feature=emb_title)

**C) Write a one-paragraph response to the following prompt:** The Dred Scot Decision was called “The worst decision the Supreme Court has ever made?” Why do you think this case was called that? Use textual evidence to back up your claims.