

# Triumph or Tragedy?: The Compromise of 1850

Middle/High School

<b>Date:</b>	<b>Time:</b> 1-2 class periods
<b>Topic:</b> Triumph or Tragedy? The Compromise of 1850	
<b>Standards/Benchmarks:</b>  <p><b>2.14</b> Students understand the democratic principles of justice, equality, responsibility, and freedom and apply them to real-life situations.</p> <p><b>2.16</b> Students observe, analyze, and interpret human behaviors, social groupings, and institutions to better understand people and the relationships among individuals and among groups.</p> <p><b>2.19</b> Students recognize and understand the relationship between people and geography and apply their knowledge in real-life situations.</p> <p><b>2.20</b> Students understand, analyze, and interpret historical events, conditions, trends, and issues to develop historical perspectives.</p>	
<b>Content Objectives: SWBAT:</b>  Students will learn how to consider a historical event from multiple perspectives and will use critical thinking analyze how a decision affected different groups of people differently. Students will be able to analyze primary sources and narratives to better understand a historical event. Students will be able to communicate their analysis verbally.	
<b>Activities:</b>  Students will watch a video from <a href="#">NBC News Learn</a> outlining the Compromise of 1850, who was involved, and what each side wanted. In addition to the video, students will be handed a summary sheet that includes context and results of the Compromise. (NOTE: There is an error in this video.)  Students will be split into groups of 4-5, then each group will receive a persona card. Each card tells the story of an individual living during the time of the Compromise of 1850: an enslaved person, a freedman in Boston, a Northern textile factory owner, a Northern abolitionist, and a slave owner in Maryland. The students will reflect on what their individual would have wanted from a potential compromise.  The classroom will come back together, and the teacher will ask for motivations from each persona card. Each group must designate a speaker and will share their opinions. This should	

generate communication and some debate because other groups will be allowed to share their opinions on certain persona cards, as well. Be careful on time during this step of the lesson plan.

Via group discussion, the outcomes of the Compromise of 1850 will be discussed. These outcomes are on the sheet handed out at the beginning of class and should be briefly reviewed for one minute before the group teacher-facilitated discussion begins.

Students will return to their groups and discuss how their individual will be impacted by the outcomes of the Compromise of 1850.

Each group will share their results and how they believe their individual was impacted by the Compromise. See if the results changed from the initial discussion.

**Closure:**

Take time at the end of class or the next day to do the discussion questions (in PowerPoint). You may assign the additional discussion questions and guiding questions (also in PowerPoint) to your students as homework.

**Resources:**

Persona cards, Triumph or Tragedy PowerPoint, History Channel video, Compromise of 1850 Overview sheet

## The Compromise of 1850 Overview

### **Who was involved in the decision-making?**

Henry Clay, Senator (KY)

- Proposed the initial Compromise

Stephen Douglas, Senator (IL)

- Re-worked it to get it passed

Senate

- Fierce debates
- John C. Calhoun of South Carolina was against the Compromise.

### **Context:**

Aftermath of the Mexican-American War

California Gold Rush happened in 1848 and 1849

- California now is about to become a state
- If it becomes a slave state, it will throw off the balance of slave/free states in the Senate

Major sectional divide

- Pro-slavery
  - Economy is built on slavery: Agriculture is the economy of the South. It produces crops that are sold domestically and internationally.
  - The North's textile economy is also supported by cheap crops in the South (made cheap by slave labor).
- Abolitionists
  - Advocate for the immediate abolition of slavery
- Free-soilers
  - Think slavery is fine where it is, but it should not expand

Henry Clay offered package of proposals to try to ease sectional conflict

Intense debate in the Senate.

Turned over to Stephen A. Douglas who re-worked it to make it more palatable.

Failed as an Omnibus (1 bill) – passed as 5 separate bills

### **What were the main issues being debated?**

#### Territory

- There were two new western territories: New Mexico and Utah
- California wants to be admitted as a state

#### Boundaries

- Texas had expanded: where did the boundaries begin and end? Much of Texas' land could run into New Mexico Territory.
  - Texas is a slave state. If it kept its massive territory, it might soon throw off the number of representatives it gets in the House, upsetting the balance of free and slave states.

#### Slavery

- Expansion of slavery
  - Should new territories be free or allow slavery?
  - If slavery doesn't expand west, then the slave states voting in Congress will be limited. With growing opposition to slavery in the North, the South worries that if it does not expand, it will die.
  - Slave states want more strict laws relating to "contraband"
  - Abolitionists want to see the slave trade and slave labor come to an end.


## Results

1. California entered the Union as a free state.
2. New Mexico and Utah would choose if they would become free or slave states through “popular sovereignty.”
3. The border of Texas and the New Mexico territory was decided – allowing Texas to maintain control over the Panhandle region, giving back a large swath of land in return for \$10,000,000 of their debt to the federal government being waived.
4. Slave trading was outlawed in Washington D.C., but the institution of slavery itself was not.
5. The Fugitive Slave Law becomes more strictly enforced.

[Compromise of 1850](#)



## Enslaver in Maryland



**RAN AWAY**  
From the subscriber, living on Bear Grass, five miles from Louisville, a negro man, named **CHARLES**, commonly called Charles Harrison. He is about the common size, with rather a yellowish hue in the face, has a fine slick skin, his eyes showing a good deal of the white, and about 28 or 30 years old. He is a very intelligent fellow, and remarkably handy; being a shoemaker, working mostly with pegs, preferring to make pegged shoes, and does very good work. He is an excellent gardener—very handy at butchering—can lay brick, &c. It is apprehended that he will make for Indiana or Ohio. Very probably he may attempt to get a passage in a steam boat.

For the apprehension and security of said fellow, so that I get him, I will give, (if taken in Kentucky,) fifty dollars. If taken on the north side of the Ohio, and in like manner secured, I will give to the person or persons so apprehending and securing him, the sum of one hundred dollars.

**JOHN SPEED.**  
march 8—774ow

He is a wealthy man who benefits from the expansion of slavery into Western territories because the limitation of slavery to the Southeast signals the end of slavery to come.

Recently, two of his slaves ran away to the nearby free state of Delaware looking for work and freedom.

He buys and sells slaves in Washington, DC.





## Northern Abolitionist

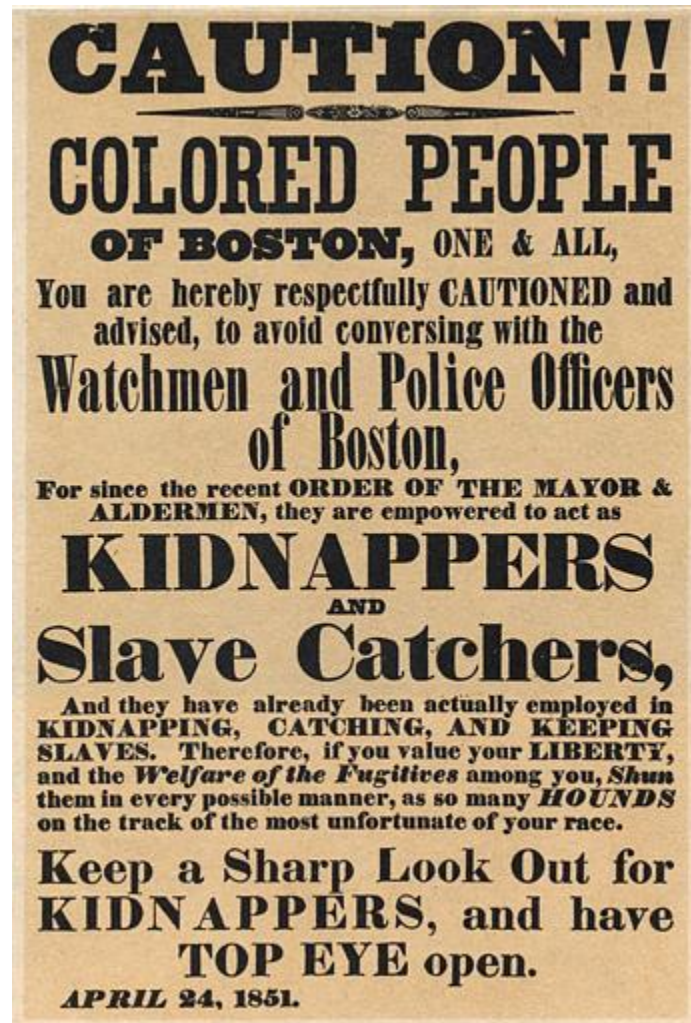


*Image that appeared in William Lloyd Garrison's abolitionist newspaper, "The Liberator"*

The northern abolitionist wants slavery abolished immediately in all states and wants it prohibited in the western territories. She worries that Texas coming in as a massive state will give it more votes in the House of Representatives, throwing off the balance of free and slave states represented.

She harbors escaped slaves and does not want to help enforce their return to their owners.

## Freedman in Boston



He is a former slave who bought his own freedom and now lives in Boston. He works long hours and is not paid well. He has many family members who are still enslaved, including his wife and children.

At all times, he must carry around proper documentation showing that he is, indeed, a free man. He has heard stories of freedmen being captured and sold back into captivity and worries this could happen to him. He wants to stay in Boston in case his wife, still enslaved, might be able to find him, but safety awaits in Canada.

## Enslaved Person in the South



She has been enslaved on a cotton plantation her whole life. Her husband was able to buy his freedom and is currently working in Boston in order to buy her freedom and that of their children.

She has heard rumors of a group of people in the north known as “abolitionists” who advocate for the immediate abolition of slavery. She often dreams of a life that she has never known - one out of bondage.