

The Road to Civil War: Building an Event Timeline

Name: _____ Date: _____

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will construct and analyze a timeline of key events from 1850-1861 to understand how tensions escalated into war.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- long string or yarn (6-8 feet)
- index cards (7-8)
- markers
- tape or clothespins
- internet-connected device or reference book
- ruler

HANDS-ON ACTIVITY

1. Tape or hang your string across a wall or between two chairs to create a timeline base.
2. Research (briefly, using a device or reference book) these key events: Compromise of 1850, Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854), Dred Scott decision (1857), Lincoln-Douglas debates (1858), John Brown's raid (1859), Lincoln's election (1860), South Carolina secession (Dec 1860), firing on Fort Sumter (April 1861).
3. Write each event and its date on a separate index card, with one sentence explaining what happened.
4. Attach or clip each card to your string timeline in correct chronological order, evenly spacing them by date using your ruler as a guide.
5. Write a short paragraph (5-6 sentences) explaining which single event you believe made war unavoidable, and why.

QUESTIONS

1. What was the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and why was it so controversial?

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2. What did the Supreme Court rule in the Dred Scott decision (1857), and why was this significant?
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3. What event triggered South Carolina's secession from the Union?

4. Which event on your timeline do you think made war unavoidable, and why?
