

American Government & Politics: A Christian Worldview.
Operation Peaceable Departure (20–25 Minutes)

TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS

Goal

Students build a case for secession by refuting three common accusations—that secession is (a) dangerous, (b) disloyal, and (c) illegal—using evidence from the readings, and directly counter Daniel Webster’s famous “union” quote.

Instructions

1. Divide students into groups of 3–4. Each group is a “Secession Defense Council.”
2. Read the scenario together as a class.
3. Students complete the handout (hand out one per group); give groups 10–12 minutes.
4. Each group presents its best argument (one spokesperson, 2 minutes max) to the class.
5. Class votes on which group made the most persuasive case!

Suggested Key

Answers will vary, but ideally, students will point out several things:

- Several of the original 13 states, including New York, Virginia, and Rhode Island, agreed to ratify the U.S. Constitution only with the understanding that they could secede any time they wanted to.
- Northern states threatened to secede after Jefferson made the Louisiana Purchase...After the election of 1800....During the War of 1812, representatives from several northern states held the Hartford Convention to discuss seceding. No one thought this was shocking or illegal or dangerous; in fact, Thomas Jefferson gave his blessing on this.
- Abraham Lincoln in 1848: ‘Any people whatsoever have the right to abolish the existing government, and form a new one that suits them better. This is a most valuable, a most sacred right.’”
- Madison and others rejected the idea [of using force to stop secession], because they said that forcing a state to stay in the union would defeat the whole purpose of having a union.
- Secession’s constitutionality is easily defended: No power granted the U.S. government to stop states from seceding; no prohibition to states in Article I, Section 10; Ninth Amendment guarantees endless rights and powers to states and the people besides the ones protected by the BOR; Tenth Amendment says clearly that U.S. government may not stop secession because it is not explicitly given that power.

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This week, the state of Jefferson (a large, resource-rich western state) has voted by a wide margin to secede from the United States. Its citizens believe they are being unfairly taxed by federal tariffs and spending policies that benefit poorer states at their expense. They want to trade freely with other nations, keep more of their tax dollars at home, and govern themselves without interference from Washington, D.C.

The President has called secession “dangerous and disloyal.” The media call Jefferson’s supporters “radicals who want to destroy the country.” A prominent senator quotes Daniel Webster: “Liberty and union, now and forever, one and inseparable!” Others claim that secession is illegal/unconstitutional.

You are the Jefferson Secession Defense Council. Your job is to defend your state’s right to secede. Refute each accusation below using arguments from the readings you have studied and discussed. Feel free to use quotes from early Americans and/or statesmen if you want!



Accusation #1: “Secession is dangerous and disloyal.”

Your refutation:

How this proves secession is not dangerous or disloyal:

Accusation #2: “Daniel Webster was right—‘Liberty and union, now and forever, one and inseparable!’ The union must never be broken.”

Your refutation (why a forced union can be harmful, arguments that other founders/early Americans made against this view, how secession can protect liberty):

Accusation #3: “Secession is illegal!”

Your refutation (use evidence from the readings and our discussions—what the Constitution does not say, amendments, other evidence):