ANTEBELLUM ECONOMY – UNDERSTANDING EMPLOYMENT IN 1850

TEACHER VERSION

Subject Level: High School History
Grade Level: 9-12
Approx. Time Required: 60 minutes

Learning Objectives:
• Students will be able to interpret a primary source from 1850 to calculate percentages.
• Students will be able to compare and contrast northern and southern economies in the years leading up to the Civil War.
• Students will be able to write and answer their own questions about 1850 Census data.

Classrooms Powered by Census Data
Activity Description

Students will examine a table of 1850 Census data on employment to understand the professions of free men across the United States at the time, calculating the percentages working in different industries. Students will also compare and contrast economies in the North and South during the Antebellum Period.

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Topics:
- Antebellum Period
- Economy

Skills Taught:
- Comparing and contrasting
- Examining primary sources
- Synthesizing data
Materials Required

- The student version of this activity, 7 pages
- Calculators

Activity Item

The following item is part of this activity. The item, its source, and instructions for viewing it online appear at the end of this teacher version.

- Item 1: Employments of the Free Male Population of the United States Over Fifteen Years of Age – 1850

For more information to help you introduce your students to the U.S. Census Bureau, read “Census Bureau 101 for Students.” This information sheet can be printed and passed out to your students as well.

Standards Addressed

See charts below. For more information, read “Overview of Education Standards and Guidelines Addressed in Statistics in Schools Activities.”

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Strand</th>
<th>Cluster</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.7</td>
<td>RH 9–10 – History/Social Studies</td>
<td>Integration of Knowledge and Ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrate quantitative or technical analysis (e.g., charts, research data) with qualitative analysis in print or digital text.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7</td>
<td>RH 11–12 – History/Social Studies</td>
<td>Integration of Knowledge and Ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
UCLA National Standards for History: U.S. History Content Standards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Era</th>
<th>Standard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 – Expansion and Reform (1801–1861)</td>
<td><strong>Standard 2:</strong> How the industrial revolution, increasing immigration, the rapid expansion of slavery, and the westward movement changed the lives of Americans and led toward regional tensions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

UCLA National Standards for History: Historical Thinking Standards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standard 2: Historical Comprehension</td>
<td>Utilize visual and mathematical data. Students will examine 1850 Census data in a table to understand employment and economies during the Antebellum Period.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bloom’s Taxonomy

Students will create and support their own inferences after examining census data.
Teacher Notes

Before the Activity

Students must understand the following key terms:

- **Antebellum Period** – the time period before the Civil War, during which the divide between opponents and supporters of slavery grew
- **Civil service** – work in the administrative divisions of the U.S. government (e.g., at post offices), excluding the armed forces
- **Commerce** – the activity of buying and selling goods or services
- **Divinity** – the formal study of religion
- **Domestic servant** – a person who is employed to work within a household for a family or individual

Students should have a basic understanding of the following concepts:

- The major differences in the northern and southern economies in the years leading up to the Civil War
- The states that were considered northern and southern, respectively, in 1850

Teachers should review **Item 1** with students to help them understand the data, specifically the job categories (e.g., divinity, government civil service). If necessary, teachers should also go over how to calculate percentages.

During the Activity

Teachers should monitor students as they work.

After the Activity

Teachers should ask students to share their responses to question 10 with their classmates. Then teachers should review with the class the differences in the northern and southern economies in the years leading up to the Civil War as well as the ways in which some of those differences are reflected in the 1850 employment data.

Extension Ideas

- Teachers could have students conduct research and create a visual tool — such as a timeline or infographic — depicting how U.S. industries have changed since the Antebellum Period.
- Teachers could have students examine and discuss an example of a filled-in questionnaire from the 1850 Census ([www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/programs-surveys/sis/resources/historical-documents-and-images/h03-figure6.jpg](http://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/programs-surveys/sis/resources/historical-documents-and-images/h03-figure6.jpg)). Students could compare the data for Henry Clay, a Virginia statesman at the time, with the data for other census respondents noted on the form.
Student Activity
Click [here](#) to download a printable version for students.

Activity Item
The following item is part of this activity and appears at the end of this student version.

- Item 1: Employments of the Free Male Population of the United States Over Fifteen Years of Age: 1850

Student Learning Objectives:

- I will be able to interpret a primary source from 1850 to calculate percentages.
- I will be able to compare and contrast northern and southern economies in the years leading up to the Civil War.
- I will be able to write and answer my own questions about 1850 Census data.

Answer the following questions using Item 1: Employments of the Free Male Population of the United States Over Fifteen Years of Age: 1850.

1. Summarize what the data show as well as how and when they were collected. Also mention a couple groups of people that are not included in the table.

   **Student answers will vary but should include** that the table displays employment data about the free male population older than 15, collected as part of the 1850 Census. The data are organized by employment type across all of the states and territories that existed at the time. The table does not include data for enslaved people or for free women, for example.

2. Fill in the following pieces of information.
   a. The state or territory with the greatest number of free men in the Army:
      
      **New York**
   b. The number of domestic servants working in Pennsylvania:
      
      **4,431**
   c. The total number of free men employed in Delaware:
      
      **22,061**
   d. The percentage of the total number of free men working in sea and river navigation:
      
      **2.17 percent**
e. The employment category with the greatest number of free men in Louisiana:

   Commerce, trade, manufactures, mechanic arts, and mining

3. In 1850, the U.S. Census Bureau changed the way it collected information about American citizens for the decennial census. It added questions — about taxes, schools, crime, wages, the value of one’s estate, and mortality — and listed the name of each free person in the home (no longer just of the primary person who completed the form). Census Bureau workers also asked about the job of each person in the home who was older than 15. During this time, the United States was transforming from an agrarian — or agriculture-based — society to an industrial — or industry-based — economy.

With this information in mind, why do you think the census changed? How do you think this new information would be used by the U.S. Congress, state and local government agencies, and/or the general public?

Student answers will vary but should reference points from the paragraph above. Students could also mention that Congress and government agencies used the information to plan for the future and to allocate appropriate resources to the states that needed them most.

4. In the following chart, list five common jobs during the Antebellum Period and today.

Student answers will vary. Sample answers appear in the chart below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Jobs in America</th>
<th>During the Antebellum Period</th>
<th>What You Typically See Today</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper reporter</td>
<td>Retail salesperson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plantation owner</td>
<td>Cashier</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Army service member</td>
<td>Food service worker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Railroad worker</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textile manufacturer</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Looking at the jobs you just wrote in your chart, how are they similar and how are they different?

Student answers will vary based on the jobs selected.

6. Name several jobs from the Antebellum Period that would fit in the commerce and nonagricultural labor employment categories, which may or may not include jobs from your table in question 4.

Student answers will vary but could include boat builders, merchants, shop and factory owners, and manufacturers of tools or cloth.
7. Looking at the last row of data in the item, which category of employment has the largest percentage of free male workers in 1850?

**Agriculture**

8. Select three northern states and three southern states, and then calculate the percentage of each state’s free male population older than 15 employed in agriculture and the percentage employed in commerce and in nonagricultural labor. Record your answers in the following data table, rounding to the tenths place.

_Student answers will vary. Two sample answers appear in the table below._

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Formula:
Percent of state's free male population older than 15 working in a specific sector = \frac{\text{total number of free men working in the specific sector}}{\text{total number of free men in the state}} \times 100

Example:
Percent of New York's free male population older than 15 working in agriculture = \frac{313,980}{888,294} \times 100 = 35.3%

Percent of New York's free male population older than 15 employed in commerce and nonagricultural labor = \frac{(312,697 + 196,613)}{888,294} \times 100 = 57.3%
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Using your table and your background knowledge, compare and contrast northern and southern economies prior to the Civil War, being sure to address the role of free labor versus that of slave labor in each economy.

**Student answers will vary depending on the states selected but should be supported by the percentages calculated and mention that, during this time, northern states had primarily commerce- and industry-based economies (using free labor) while southern states had mostly agriculture-based economies (using slave labor).**

10. Explain how the differences between the economies of the North and South may have caused a problem for the nation.

**Student answers will vary but could include difficulty coming to a national consensus on political and economic issues.**

11. Imagine you are the teacher: Write three questions — including at least one open-ended, critical-thinking question — and answer them using Item 1. (Think to yourself: What would I want my students to know?)

**Student questions and answers will vary.**
Item 1: Employments of the Free Male Population of the United States Over Fifteen Years of Age: 1850

To view the data in an easier-to-read table, click on the link above.

www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/sis/resources/historical-docs-images/h03-figure1.pdf