

Debating the Expansion of Slavery into the Western Territories

The setting is 1848 in the US Senate – A group of Senators is trying to settle the issue of slavery in the western territories. A number of citizens have come to testify about the issue. Some of the people favor opening the western territories to slavery others do not. The senators need make some decisions and to put together a bill that will hopefully become law.

Directions: Students will be assigned one of the following roles. Each role has a stake in the issue. You need to decide: Why do you favor slavery in the territories? or Why don't you favor slavery in the territories? Also do you have an idea for settling or compromising the issue?

You may form groups for each side of the issue and work together to make arguments. You will also need to create rebuttal arguments for the people that will testify on the opposite side. Start by deciding which side you are on and listing the reasons why. Use these reasons to make your argument for or against slavery in the territories. Also write an argument from your perspective that goes against the position of an individual from the other side. What will you have to say to the Senators and others about the issue?

For example: The Missouri plantation owner may choose to argue against the Kansas farmer that says growing cotton is not possible in the Kansas territory. The states are next to one another! Maybe the Kansas farmer just needed slaves to make it work?

Roles:

1. **Cottonocracy**- You live in South Carolina and own a large plantation with over 100 slaves. Your family roots go back more than 100 years on the land you farm. Cotton is your way of life and you see nothing wrong with using slaves as workers. You think that those who would like to limit slavery don't understand slavery and how important it is to the economy.
2. **Missouri Plantation Owner** - You have been farming cotton in Missouri and established a sizable plantation, some people said that your would never be successful growing cotton in Missouri but the 50 slaves and 800 acres you own have made you very wealthy.
3. **Small Farmer** - You are a small farmer in the south you own only two slaves. You treat your slaves well and believe they are essential to the well being of your family.
4. **Poor Southern White** - You live in Western North Carolina, you have no slaves and have no land. You are aware that cotton and slavery are important to the southern economy, but you don't seem to benefit from it now. You think a new start in the west might be what you need to have a better life.

5. **Mexican War Veteran** - Veteran and hero of the Mexican war and you make your home in Virginia. You are proud of the victory and the territory gained. Your status as a war hero has made you very popular and some have encouraged you to get into politics
6. **Industrialist** - You are a wealthy Industrialist from the north and you would like to establish textile mills in North Carolina. Your idea is to create textiles closer to the supply of valuable cotton. In your opinion, the south needs to produce much more cotton to keep up with demand.
7. **Abolitionist** - You are an abolitionist from New York. You believe all slavery is morally wrong. You would use violence to end slavery if necessary.
8. **Free African American** - You are a free African American from Boston and you have never been a slave. Although you have faced discrimination you have built a successful business building wooden crates for goods being shipped to Europe.
9. **Former Slave** - You are a former slave who escaped more than 10 years ago. You made your way to the north and make your home in Philadelphia. You think of the family you left behind often and remember what it was like to be a slave. As long as there are slaves, you will never feel completely free.
10. **Railroad Executive** - You are an executive of a railroad company that has plans to build new rail lines out into the western territories. You would like to see new states enter the union quickly and anticipate building the rail lines that will connect new cities.
11. **Kansas Homesteader** - You are a homesteader in the Kansas Territory, farming is hard, you have tried to grow cotton and have been unsuccessful. You grown corn, grain, and have begun to raise cattle. You believe the future of the west is in raising cattle.
12. **Free Soil party member**- Member of the Free soil party, you did not win a seat in congress as thirteen other party members did. The election was close and you feel strongly that the next election will be yours. You feel that most sensible people can support limiting slavery to areas where it exists now.
13. **Factory Owner** - Upper class factory owner from Lowell, MA. Your workers labor for 13 hours each day. You have plenty of immigrant workers in your factories and can't understand why the south depends on slavery.
14. **Gold prospector** - You have heard that there is gold in large quantities in California and you plan to leave next month in hopes of striking it rich.