

Topic: The Missouri Compromise

Historical Thinking Skill Assessed: Critical Reading, Contextualizing

Grade Level: Middle/High

[National History Standards](#)

Era 4: Expansion and Reform (1801-1861)

Standard 3: The extension, restriction, and reorganization of political democracy after 1800

Using the Item: The question assesses students' critical reading skills, as well as their ability to connect this text to events during this period.

Background: This excerpt is from a letter from former President Thomas Jefferson to U.S. Congressman John Holmes, a staunch supporter of the Missouri Compromise. In it, Jefferson predicts that the Missouri Compromise was merely a temporary agreement that would not prevent an inevitable conflict over slavery.

Thomas Jefferson to John Holmes, Apr. 22. 1820

"...this is a reprieve only, not a final sentence. A geographical line, coinciding with a marked principle, moral and political, once conceived and held up to the angry passions of men, will never be obliterated; and every new irritation will mark it deeper and deeper...."

Source: Thomas Jefferson to John Holmes, April 22, 1820. Thomas Jefferson Papers, Series 1, General Correspondence, 1651-1827. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Accessed 1/23/14. <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mtj1&fileName=mtj1page051.db&recNum=1237>

Jefferson was likely referring to which of the following political topics?

- A. Trade with Europe
- B. Compromises over slavery (answer cue)**
- C. Creation of the National Bank
- D. Westward expansion

Explanation

"A" and "C" are clearly unrelated to the quote. Answer "D" is not likely but could be selected by a less-prepared student, who may connect Jefferson to expansion through the Louisiana Purchase. "B" includes key phrases such as "geographical line," "moral and political," and "angry passions" that offer clues that Jefferson was alluding to the issue of slavery. Additionally, the date of 1820 should prompt students to recall that this was the year the Missouri Compromise was passed. **[Critical Reading, Contextualizing]**

HISTORICAL THINKING SKILLS ASSESSMENT

Directions: Read the excerpt from the letter and circle the response that best answers the question.

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