Historical Rap Battles: Founding Fathers

Federalists vs. Democratic-Republicans, 1789–1815. Partners research the real fights of the early republic, write a battle together and perform it over a beat.

Grades 8–12	**Research and writing**	**Battle day**	**Free**
U.S. History, APUSH	2–3 periods	1–2 periods, plus the HAMMYs	this kit and every printable

The plan

Students work in pairs (a trio with George Washington as referee when the class is odd). Each pair researches the kit's issues on both sides, chooses the best three (or five), and writes a battle on one shared sheet: introductions, an issue round per issue (each rapper makes a case and answers the other), and closers. Slang of the period and pop-culture references from the 1780s–1810s count as challenges. You watch every sheet being written, grade research, then run battle day step by step: who's next, the performance (lyrics on the projector, the beat on your speakers), a quick grade, the class vote and the HAMMY Awards. The Founding Fathers kit and all printables are free; other kits are Teacher Plus.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Explain the Federalist and the Democratic-Republican position on at least three issues of 1789–1815, with a specific fact and its source for each.
- Explain how the conflict between Hamilton and Jefferson produced the first two political parties.
- Make a claim, support it with evidence, and rebut an opponent's claim, in verse.
- Use the vocabulary and cultural references of the early republic accurately, in context.

Standards

CA HSS 8.3.4	How the conflicts between Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton resulted in the emergence of two political parties
CA HSS 8.3.5	Domestic resistance movements, such as the Whiskey Rebellion, and how the central government responded
CA HSS 8.3.7	The functions and responsibilities of a free press
CA HSS 8.4.1	The country's political divisions and territorial expansion during the terms of the first four presidents
CA HSS 8.4.4	Daily life, art, music and literature of early national America
CA HSS 8.5.1	The causes and consequences of the War of 1812
AP U.S. History Topic 3.10	Shaping a New Republic

AP U.S. History Topic 4.2	The Rise of Political Parties and the Era of Jefferson
AP U.S. History Topic 4.4	America on the World Stage
C3 D2.His.16.9-12	Integrate evidence from multiple relevant historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument about the past
C3 D4.1.9-12	Construct arguments using precise and knowledgeable claims, with evidence from multiple sources, while acknowledging counterclaims
CCSS WHST.9-10.1	Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content
CCSS SL.9-10.4	Present information, findings and supporting evidence clearly, concisely and logically

Summaries. Official text: California History–Social Science Content Standards; AP U.S. History; C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards (NCSS); Common Core Literacy in History/Social Studies.

Procedure

Day 1

The case file and pairing

- Open the class activity on your computer. Choose 3 issues (research 5) or 5 issues (research 8), the class size and how partners are made: you lay out the battles and students claim characters first come, students pick partners, random, or you place each student.
- Project the code. Students join at simhistory.org/rap, type their name (locked on their device) and pick or get their character. Read the case file together.
- Open the writing room. Pairs begin research: each issue card gives both sides' positions and sourced facts; students write each side's position in their own words and a fact with its source, then choose the issues for their battle.

Day 2

Writing

- Partners write on one shared sheet at the same time. Each types only in their own boxes and reads the partner's live; they highlight each other's text to comment and reply (you see every comment, removed ones too). Copy and paste is turned off.
- Watch the writing monitor: each battle as a live thumbnail, with flags for paste attempts, bursts of text, blocked words, leaving the tab and idling. Open any battle to read it, replay the last 30 seconds of a student's typing or play back the whole writing log.
- Grade research from the sheet (suggested scores are filled in; change any). Students download a PDF backup at the end of each period; it can restore their work.

Battle day

1–2 periods

- Start battle day. Choose the order: random (with an "on deck" notice for the next pair), your own order, or volunteers. The game remembers who has gone.
- Perform: the projector shows the two portraits and the lyrics line by line, with slang and references called out. Run the teleprompter by hand (or the rappers do, from their Chromebooks) or let it auto-scroll at a speed you choose; the arrows nudge it either way. Each pair's mixtape plays on your speakers at the level they set, up to your limit; you can change it live.
- Grade the performance with the quick-tap rubric (below), then the next battle. Pause and save at any point: the game picks up where you stopped.

The HAMMYs

15–20 min

- Open voting: students vote in four categories on their devices (not for their own battle). Close voting, roll out the red carpet, open each envelope and hand out the trophies (cheap plastic trophies make the night). End on the selfie wall.
- Students download their battle PDF (certificate, lyrics with challenges marked, research, writing stats) to turn in. You download the results file.

Rap Lab only: skip battle day and grade from the sheets and PDFs. Multi-day: Save game at the bell (your computer also keeps an automatic copy); students rejoin with the same code on the same Chromebook. Work from home (optional): students can keep writing when your screen is closed, but their devices hold the only copy until you open it again.

Rubric

Research (before the battle): 20 points

Issue research: each side's position in your own words, with a fact and its source	10
Challenge words: slang and references used correctly	5
Character research: background facts in the introduction	5

Performance (scored live, each rapper): 40 points

3 ISSUES	POINTS	5 ISSUES	POINTS
Issue 1: claim, evidence, and a rebuttal	5	Issue 1: claim, evidence, and a rebuttal	3
Issue 2: claim, evidence, and a rebuttal	5	Issue 2: claim, evidence, and a rebuttal	3
Issue 3: claim, evidence, and a rebuttal	5	Issue 3: claim, evidence, and a rebuttal	3
Accuracy and detail (first half)	4	Issue 4: claim, evidence, and a rebuttal	3
Accuracy and detail (second half)	4	Issue 5: claim, evidence, and a rebuttal	3
Character and background	4	Accuracy and detail (first half)	4
Challenges used correctly	5	Accuracy and detail (second half)	4
Rhyme and flow	4	Character and background	4
Delivery and back-and-forth	4	Challenges used correctly	5
		Rhyme and flow	4

3 ISSUES	POINTS	5 ISSUES	POINTS
		Delivery and back-and-forth	4

Extra credit: +3 for rapping over the beat instead of reading. Total: 60 points per student.

Answer key: each side's position

From the kit's issue cards (each fact on a card carries its source in the kit). Students should put these in their own words.

ISSUE	FEDERALISTS	DEMOCRATIC-REPUBLICANS
Hamilton's financial plan and the Bank 1790–1791	A national bank and paying the national and state war debts in full would give the country good credit and a strong economy. The Constitution's "necessary and proper" clause allows the Bank.	The Bank is unconstitutional because the Constitution never mentions one, and the plan rewards speculators and Northern merchants at the expense of farmers and the states that already paid their debts.
The whiskey tax and the Whiskey Rebellion 1791–1794	The excise tax paid the national debt, and the government had to enforce its laws. Washington leading the militia proved the new government could keep order.	The tax fell hardest on poor western farmers, who turned grain into whiskey to sell it. Sending an army of about 13,000 men against farmers was an overreaction.
Neutrality, France and Citizen Genêt 1793	Staying out of the war between Britain and France kept the young nation safe and kept trade with Britain flowing. Genêt's meddling proved France could not be trusted.	France helped win the Revolution and was fighting for liberty; America owed it friendship. Madison argued the president had overstepped by declaring neutrality on his own.
The Jay Treaty 1794–1795	The treaty avoided a war with Britain the country could not win, got British troops out of the western forts, and kept trade going.	The treaty gave in to Britain: it did nothing to stop the British from seizing American ships and sailors, and it insulted our ally France.
The XYZ Affair and the Quasi-War 1797–1800	French agents demanded bribes from American diplomats. America had to build a navy and stand up to France.	The Federalists used the war scare to build an army, raise taxes, and attack their political opponents at home.
The Alien and Sedition Acts 1798	In a time of near-war, the government needed power to deport dangerous foreigners and stop false and malicious attacks in the press.	The Sedition Act broke the First Amendment and was used to jail Republican editors. In the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions, Madison and Jefferson argued the states could judge such laws.
The Election of 1800 and the 12th Amendment 1800–1804	Federalists warned that Jefferson was a dangerous radical, and the tie with Burr showed the voting system was broken.	Jefferson called it the "Revolution of 1800": power passed peacefully from one party to another, and the 12th Amendment fixed the tie problem.

ISSUE	FEDERALISTS	DEMOCRATIC-REPUBLICANS
Marbury v. Madison and the courts 1801–1803	The Supreme Court can strike down laws that break the Constitution (judicial review), which protects the Constitution from the other branches.	Adams packed the courts with "midnight judges" on his way out, and an unelected Federalist court should not get the last word over the people's representatives.
The Louisiana Purchase 1803	Many Federalists said the Constitution gives no power to buy land and that new western states would drown out New England.	Doubling the country's size gave farmers land for generations and secured New Orleans and the Mississippi River, even though Jefferson himself doubted the Constitution allowed it.
The Embargo Act 1807–1809	The embargo ruined New England's shipping and trade and hurt Americans more than it hurt Britain or France.	After the Chesapeake-Leopard attack, cutting off trade was a peaceful way to force Britain and France to respect American ships without going to war.
The War of 1812 1812–1815	It was "Mr. Madison's War": unnecessary, badly run, and it saw the capital burned. New England Federalists met at Hartford to protest.	Britain was seizing American sailors and arming Native nations on the frontier. The victory at New Orleans proved the country could defend itself, and the Hartford Convention made the Federalists look disloyal.

Battle etiquette (share with students)

- Roast the character's record, never a classmate. Burns must be about history: the policies, the choices, the scandals of the time.
- No slurs or profanity; the built-in list blocks them, and you are told.
- Rap over the beat, not over your opponent. Applaud every battle.

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