

Utah's Struggle for Statehood: Ideas for Teaching

Warning: The documents contained in this inquiry include bigoted and racist materials, primarily targeting members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), but also insulting Muslims. The archive includes racist images of Native Americans, African Americans, Irish Americans and Chinese Americans. These materials are included because they show the views of many people across the United States in relation to Utah's application for statehood and the treatment of other minority racial and religious groups at the time.

This lesson is intended to help students understand why it took Utah 47 years and seven applications to become a state. Students will consider the important historical concepts of **continuity** and **change**, as they investigate how the argument against statehood for Utah remained the same and changed over time. In addition, the evidence students will use to explore this question, including many newspaper articles of the 19th century, have many traits in common with social media today. The documents in the archive include accurate information mingled with exaggerations and outright lies, often couched in hateful and bigoted language. Students who learn to make sense of such imperfect sources are positioned better to **think critically about what they encounter on social media**.

General Information about the Inquiry

Central Questions: Why did the U.S. government reject Utah's repeated applications for statehood? How did the issues that prevented Utah's statehood change and/or remain consistent over time?

Background Information: We provide a short essay with background information for students under the "background information" tab, with a longer essay with background information for the teacher included in the teacher resources.

Archive: The archive for this inquiry includes over 50 documents. Most bluntly list the reasons that the author opposes statehood for Utah. A few, created by the Saints, provide indirect evidence by rebutting the arguments against statehood that have been raised by others.

Teacher Materials: The [graphic organizer](#) is designed to be a worksheet where students jot notes in the row(s) with the argument(s) against statehood, that correspond to the evidence they find. They summarize in two or three words their document in the appropriate cell on that row, then record the document numbers in the appropriate spaces as their peers report on other documents. Because there is no evidence to support some of the arguments against statehood in the documents for several of the years, many of the cells in the graphic organizer will be left blank. At the end of the activity, students should be able to see patterns in the evidence and use the evidence to answer the questions about continuity and change. These images show what a graphic organizer might look like after students have marked boxes as their peers report on their documents.

Reason	1849	1856	1862	1876	1882	1887	1894
Deseret was too big	unfair land grab 1	it's huge! 2					
Saints were disloyalty to US		loyalty strong traitors war! 1 4 5 6 7	stopping US soldiers 2			hostile to US 4	
Opposition to polygamy	practicing polygamy 3	causing problems 3	ban polygamy 1 2 3 4	Congress' job 1 6 7	supports polygamy 5 6 7	no more polygamy 8	still happening 1 4 5 7
Utah's position on slavery	Utah allows slavery 5						
Saints are/would be too powerful	Mormon Kingdom 2 7				control world 2		
Saints would vote against their party					would vote Democrat 6	might vote Republican 2	
Saints could block California trails	controlling major trails 2		as long as they don't 3				

Name	1849	1856	1862	1876	1882	1887	1894
Too many foreigners lived in Utah	most are foreigners 7						low class Europeans 2
Religious bigotry	ancient Christians Muslims better 6			Saints lumped w/ Chinese/blacks 5 4	Ignorance hates Norwegians 2 4 5 6	people with doubt w/ tons of it 3 4	worst in history 3 4
Church leaders controlled all Saints		Bit in control controls militia 4 6 7			dictatorship 2	give up control 1 4	
Church leaders controlled govt and laws	believes in laws 6 7	that's self gov. ernment 1 5 7	Mormon polygamy 4	Mormon controls Utah → N.M. 2 6 7	controls laws 1 2 3	and control 2 6 8	low much control 5
Saints controlled the courts and juries	own court system 4	no punishment 4					
Saints were mean to Gentiles or keep them out	would be people w/ other beliefs 6 7	protect all rights 1 4		get rid of non-Mormons 7		boycott Gentile teachers revenge! 4	1 7
Utahns didn't obey the law		impossible to enforce law 4 7	crimes there 2	crimes there 2		start obeying laws 2 4 6	
Other reasons	(1) Deseret = Bonkle (2) Not enough people (3)	inciting Sioux Garrison massacre (6)	ruining Salt Lake in history (6)	rumors of Saints in N.M. (4)(3)	people want Utah territory for political favors (7)	not part of main parties schools controlled by church (8)	women's suffrage schools not controlled

1. What were the main arguments against statehood for Utah that stayed the same for most of the years?

Teaching materials also include a **slide show** that could be used during a lecture on the background information, **teacher background information**, and **lesson ideas**.

Possible Focus Skills

These are several historical thinking skills that could be supported during this inquiry.

- [Hypothesis management](#): The graphic organizer is designed to support students as they think through many different reasons for the denial of statehood. The graphic organizer helps students manage all of these hypotheses and keep an open mind as they gather evidence.
- [Contextualization](#): It is essential that the teacher talk about the changing historical context through the 49 years of applications. Students might observe, for instance, that the argument against statehood based on polygamy picks up momentum after the formation of the Republican Party that opposed it. The argument that the Saints were disloyal appears most frequently in the years leading up to the Utah War.
- [Healthy Skepticism](#): Students should be reminded not to accept the information in these articles at face value but to think critically about its source and why it might have said what it said. For instance, why would the Salt Lake Tribune frequently publish articles opposed to statehood. Students can be shown that the same type of healthy skepticism is needed when a person finds information on social media.

Possible Lesson Structure

- **Bell ringer**: Give students a few minutes to write about whether they can trust the information they get on social media and how they can evaluate information and decide whether to trust it. (Example one found on the included slides.)
- **Provide [background information](#)**: The student background information page and the teacher background information page suggest vocabulary and information that will help students during the analysis of the archive. Before thinking about the evidence, students will need to know the advantages of statehood over territory status, that Utah applied for statehood seven times while many states around Utah were quickly admitted after their first application. They should also know a little about the changing conditions over the 49 years of applications. We recommend that teachers give the information through a lecture rather than having students read it, to break up the activities students are engaged in. Teachers might also have students watch this video about Utah's Struggle for Statehood: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LbP7IN27IXQ> Along with providing background information, the teacher might model for students how to use the graphic organizer, using Document 1 from the 1849 application as an example.
- **Explain and use the [graphic organizer](#)**: The graphic organizer looks complicated and might intimidate students, but once its structure is understood it is not difficult to use. You might read down the list all of the potential arguments against statehood (in the left column) with the students before exposing them to the archive. We recommend that the teacher prepare for this lesson by looking at each of the documents in the archive and filling out the graphic organizer on their own before teaching the lesson. Some documents include arguments against statehood that are not listed on the graphic organizer (such as the Saints were accused of inciting the Sioux Indians to attack

emigrants). There is a place on the last row of the graphic organizer to list “other” arguments.

- **Crowdsource the evidence:** This inquiry is not designed to have every student read all 50 documents. Instead, we imagine a teacher crowdsourcing this activity, with each student reading one or two documents. The documents are of varying length so a teacher could be strategic about assigning shorter documents to struggling readers and multiple documents to stronger readers. After having a few minutes to read their document(s) and identify evidence, students report to the class which of the arguments against statehood they found in their document. As students listen to their peers they mark the appropriate boxes on their graphic organizer.
- **Evaluate the evidence and answer the questions:** After listening to their peers report, students are prepared to look for patterns in the frequency of arguments and answer the questions at the bottom of the graphic organizer. After they have answer the questions individually, the last few minutes of class can be spent debriefing about their conclusions and the importance of healthy skepticism when reading historical documents and social media.
- **Assessment:** The questions at the bottom of the graphic organizer can be used to assess students’ achievement of the objectives for the lesson.

Other Teaching Ideas

- Rather than having students work individually with one or two documents you could have students work in small groups to analyze 4 or 5 documents. For instance, you could assign each group a different application year.
- At the end of class look at some examples of social media posts and practice critical reading with them. For example, you could use lateral reading to investigate the source of the social media post, point out exaggerations or loaded language, and seek alternative sources of information that show a different perspective.

Feedback: We want your input on how to make these lessons better! If you have any comments or suggestions, please email our team at utahhistoryinquiries@gmail.com.