

Subject	Social Studies / U.S. History - grades 6-8
Topic	Cognitive Biases and the Missouri Compromise
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handouts with definitions and examples of biases • Primary source documents related to the Missouri Compromise (e.g. speeches, letters, newspaper articles)
Standards	
Objective	<p>By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define the Confirmation Bias and In-group Bias • Identify examples of these biases by leaders/figures related to the Missouri Compromise • Analyze the consequences of these biases on the Missouri Compromise and events leading up to the Civil War
Warm Up (5 minutes)	<p>Define Confirmation Bias and In-group Bias</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirmation Bias: The tendency to interpret information in a way that confirms your preexisting beliefs or hypotheses. For example, you might seek out news sources that align with your political views and not look to other sources that might challenge your beliefs. You might believe that Taylor Swift is the most talented artist in the world. You follow fan accounts, watch interviews, and read articles that praise her work, but when you come across negative comments or criticism about her, you dismiss or ignore it because it contradicts your existing belief. • In-group Bias: This causes people to view members of their group (based on things like school, team, race, gender, etc.) in a more positive light than outsiders, without good reason. If you play sports you might think kids who are in band are not very athletic. Similarly, if you're in band you might think athletes lack talent in the arts. The In-group Bias is when you favor people who are part of your group more than those who are not part of your group.
Short Lecture (5 minutes)	<p>Discuss how Confirmation Bias and In-group Bias could have influenced perspectives and negotiations around the Missouri Compromise.</p> <p>The Missouri Compromise involved intense negotiation and required both sides to compromise core beliefs around slavery's expansion. However, confirmation bias and in-group bias could have made it extremely challenging for Northern and Southern leaders to view the issue impartially and find common ground. These biases likely contributed to the</p>

	<p>growing polarization and eventual failure of the compromise to resolve the country's divisions over slavery in the long-term.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was likely a strong divide between the "in-groups" of the North and South, with each side favoring the interests and arguments of their respective regions. • Northern politicians were heavily influenced by their abolitionist constituents, making them partial to anti-slavery viewpoints. • Southern legislators showed preferential treatment to the perspectives of wealthy slave-owning elites who made up an influential "in-group." • Difficulty in considering the opposing region's arguments objectively due to deeply entrenched "us vs them" mentalities.
<p>Group Activity (10 minutes)</p>	<p>Divide the class into small groups of 4-5 students. Provide each group with primary source documents from the era (e.g. writings of Henry Clay, John C. Calhoun, Thomas Jefferson)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instruct groups to identify examples of Confirmation Bias and In-group Bias in the documents • Groups should analyze how these biases may have impacted the Missouri Compromise and its eventual failure to resolve the issue of slavery <p>Have groups share examples they found and discuss the consequences of these biases Facilitate a discussion on how being aware of biases could have altered the outcome.</p>
<p>Assessment (5 minutes)</p>	<p>Here's a short 5-question multiple choice quiz assessing students' understanding of Confirmation Bias, In-group Bias, and their application to the Missouri Compromise:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is confirmation bias? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Favoring information that supports one's existing beliefs b) Showing favoritism towards one's own group c) Believing something is true based solely on tradition d) Expecting present trends to continue unchanged 2. An example of in-group bias related to the Missouri Compromise would be: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Northern politicians prioritizing abolitionist viewpoints b) Southern leaders dismissing anti-slavery arguments c) Both a and b d) None of the above 3. How could confirmation bias have affected the Missouri Compromise debates? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) By leading both sides to ignore evidence contradicting their stance b) Through an inability to consider alternative compromises c) Due to increasingly entrenched pro- and anti-slavery positions d) All of the above 4. To overcome their biases, politicians should have: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Solely prioritized the interests of their state/region

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">b) Sought out and understood perspectives from the opposing viewpointc) Avoided interactions with the other side completelyd) Remained steadfastly committed to their existing beliefs |
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Answer Key: 1-a, 2-c, 3-d, 4-b