The Alien and Sedition Acts
Student Worksheet

Introduction:

In 1798, the Federalist-controlled Congress established the Alien and Sedition Acts. President John Adams also favored these acts, which limited what people could write and say about the government and denied liberties to people from countries in dispute with the United States. One of the main purposes of these acts was to give the Federalist government a legal excuse to suppress the statements of Democratic-Republicans such as Thomas Jefferson. In this activity, you'll read and answer questions about excerpts from both acts as well as the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.

All web links for this lesson can be found at: http://www.socialstudies.com/uslinks.html

Directions:

The 1st Amendment to the Constitution
Go to http://socialstudies.com/alien.html#1

Read the text of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. You'll refer to this amendment in a few minutes.

"An Act Respecting Alien Enemies" (The Alien Act)
Go to http://socialstudies.com/alien.html#2

Read this excerpt from the act and answer the following questions:

1. What does this excerpt say? Put it into your own words in two to four sentences.

2. What groups of people did the Alien Act affect?

3. Would the Alien Act be in effect all the time? If not, when would it be in effect?
Go to http://socialstudies.com/alien.html#3

Read the first section of the excerpt from the act and answer the following questions:

4. What does this section say? Put it into your own words in two to four sentences.

5. This section makes it illegal to "unlawfully" combine or conspire against any government measure and to participate in an "unlawful" assembly. Does it define the word "unlawful"? Who do you think would get to decide what's unlawful and what's lawful?

6. According to this section, what could happen to a group of friends who planned a protest against the government's policies toward France?

Read the second section of the Sedition Act, and answer the questions:

7. What does this section say? Put it into your own words in two to four sentences.

8. According to this section, could the following people be punished?
   - Someone who published a pamphlet stating that John Adams was a "war-monger."
   - Someone who stood on a wooden box in the town square and told passersby that the United States should not fight with France.
   - A Democratic-Republican Congressman who openly expressed his sympathies for the French.
9. Why do you think the Federalist-controlled United States government enacted the Alien and Sedition Acts? What group of *American* people was the Adams administration concerned about?

10. Do you think anything in these acts comes into conflict with the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution? If so, which parts in particular do you think are the most contradictory to this amendment?