

# Florida Memory Classroom

---

## Milton, Yulee and the Florida Railroad, a Structured Academic Controversy

During the American Civil War, the Confederate and state governments faced shortages of critical building materials, ammunition and other supplies. Railroad iron was particularly scarce.

David Yulee's Florida Railroad was one of Florida's few existing when the war began. Governor John Milton and Yulee bitterly disagreed over the necessity of removing tracks from the Florida Railroad. Governor Milton wanted to remove the iron rail to prevent Union troops from using the tracks. He also wanted to use the iron to complete roads elsewhere in the state.

In this activity, you and your group will explore this issue through a **structured academic controversy**. The point of the activity is not so much to decide whose position was correct, but rather to understand the arguments on both sides.

### Directions:

#### Part I: Form Small Discussion Groups

1. Divide your group into subgroups. Half of you will explore David Yulee's position in this issue, and half of you will explore Governor Milton's position.
2. Your instructor will give you excerpts from the letters Milton and Yulee wrote.

#### Part II: Subgroups Present Their Case

1. Each subgroup will analyze the letters to determine the main points of their author's argument, their reasoning, and any evidence in support of their position.
2. The subgroups will come back together to present to each other. Using quotes and examples from the documents to reinforce your points.

As each subgroup makes their case, the students in the other subgroup should take notes and ask questions to clarify points they do not understand.

3. Once a subgroup has finished presenting, the task of the listening group is **not** to provide a rebuttal, but to repeat back what they understand from the presentation. Presenters may need to provide additional examples or quotes from the documents to properly explain their person's argument.

#### Part III: Small Groups Analyze the Debate and Synthesize the Information

1. After both sides have presented and all students in the group are fully convinced they understand one another's positions, they work toward reaching a consensus.
2. If consensus proves impossible, the group clarifies where their differences lie.
3. Students should identify their points agreement and any remaining differences.
4. Once both sides have been presented and both sides are convinced that they have been heard and understood, the entire group must attempt to reach a consensus on the issue of appropriating iron from the Florida Railroad. What were the merits of each side in this argument? If no consensus can be reached, the group must clarify where its differences lie.