Tennessee Divided

Name: ____________________

Prompt: Explain with supporting details why Tennessee was divided on the issue of secession and the events that led it to eventually leave the Union. Items that should be included in your essay include the following topics: state convention vote of 1861, the Free and Independent State of Scott, Hurst Nation, East Tennessee mostly pro-Union and divided families.

Thesis statement: ________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Read the following informational text about Tennessee and secession. After reading each paragraph, take a note about the main idea in the margin.

After states left the United States of America, those states formed a new government called the Confederate States of America. A confederacy is a group that joins together to help each other in time of need. This group of states decided to help each other during this time of forming a new country.

For several years, there were a number of threats by various southern states to secede - which means leave or remove themselves from a group - and most northerners viewed these statements as just threats and nothing more. This time was different. There were efforts in the South to raise money, raise an army, build forts and make preparations for what the South knew would be a fight.

The first battle of the Civil War happened at Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina’s harbor. At first, Tennessee did not leave the Union. But as the first shots of the war were fired, things soon changed. By the time Abraham Lincoln had been inaugurated as president, in February of 1861, seven states had left the Union and joined the Confederacy. Those states included South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas. Representatives from each of these states met in Montgomery, Alabama to make plans for a new government.

The Confederate Constitution
The Confederacy wrote a constitution very much like the United States Constitution. There were differences however. The Confederate Constitution wrote that each state was also an independent state and was able to govern itself. Slavery was legal in every Confederate state and territory.

Tennessee - Union or Confederacy?
Tennessee was a split state when it came to the idea of leaving the Union. The regions of Tennessee near the Mississippi River had better farmland. On those farms cotton was grown and the need for slave labor was higher than in the eastern part of the state. Tennessee’s governor at that time was Isham Harris. Governor Harris was from West Tennessee - where thousands of slaves worked on farms and plantations. He wanted Tennessee to secede from the Union and join the Confederate States of America. The citizens of the state of Tennessee were asked to vote on whether there should be a convention to meet about the future of Tennessee.

The citizens of West Tennessee voted to have the meeting and the citizens of Middle and East Tennessee voted against having a convention. The majority ruled, and the General Assembly and the governor didn’t call for the meeting. With the attack on Fort Sumter, Southerners began to change their minds about secession. Tennessee was the last of the southern states to leave the Union.

**The Free and Independent State of Scott**

At the beginning of the Civil War, Tennessee had 84 counties but within a few short months - Tennessee had only 83 counties! That’s because Scott County voted to become the “free and independent state of Scott” and secede from the state of Tennessee.

The leaders of Tennessee were also divided about secession. Andrew Johnson, a Tennessee senator and future United States president, was opposed to secession. While other Tennessee leaders left the Union and join the Confederacy, Johnson stayed with the Union. He urged many East Tennesseans to do the same. An interesting fact about the US Army is that more men from Tennessee joined the Union than all of the Confederate states put together. This division led to many fights and tension between neighbors and even families. Many young men from Eastern Tennessee did join the Union army but most young Tennesseans joined the Confederates. It was common that within a family one brother might join the Union army and another brother would join the Confederates. This war divided the nation and it also divided families.

**Hurst Nation**

There were pockets of Union support even in West Tennessee. A very rich planter in West Tennessee, Fielding Hurst, had so much farmland in McNairy County, Tennessee, that this region was named “Hurst Nation.”

Strangely, Hurst supported the Union. He and his army terrorized much of West Tennessee. His army destroyed towns and his army was very harsh in their activities - even in war. Most of Hurst’s neighbors were on the side of the Confederacy. There were counter attacks on Hurst’s family and land. The resentment toward Hurst lasted well after the Civil War was over.