



# Reconstruction and Its Aftermath

BY STEVEN SCHWARTZ

## UNIT OVERVIEW

Over the course of three lessons the students will examine primary source documents—including broadsides, letters, legal documents, and speeches—related to the period of Reconstruction following the Civil War. They will first learn to identify the explicit messages in these materials and then draw logical inferences about the implicit messages. They will demonstrate their understanding by writing succinct summaries, answering critical thinking questions, and taking part in a mock press conference.

## UNIT OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to

- Analyze primary source documents using close-reading strategies for written documents and appropriate evaluative strategies for non-textual sources
- Summarize the essential message in a text
- Explain the meaning and relevance of images
- Engage in peer- and teacher-led discussions of complex historical events
- Draw conclusions based on direct evidence found in the text and images
- Collaborate in a mock press conference activity

## ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How were the Emancipation Proclamation and the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments meant to improve the lives of African Americans?

## NUMBER OF CLASS PERIODS: 3

## COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.4: Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases in a text relevant to a grade 5 topic or subject area.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.6: Analyze multiple accounts of the same event or topic, noting important similarities and differences in the point of view they represent.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RF.5.4: Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension. a) Read grade-level text with purpose and understanding; . . . c) Use context to confirm or self-correct word recognition and understanding, rereading as necessary.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.1: Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information; . . . b) Provide logically ordered reasons that are supported by facts and details

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly; . . . e) Provide a concluding statement or section related to the information or explanation presented.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.5.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 5 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly; a) Come to discussions prepared, having read or studied required material; explicitly draw on that preparation and other information known about the topic to explore ideas under discussion; . . . d) Review the key ideas expressed and draw conclusions in light of information and knowledge gained from the discussions.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

*Adapted from Gary W. Gallagher, "The American Civil War," and Edward L. Ayers, "Reconstruction," in History Now, The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, gilderlehrman.org.*

Questions relating to the institution of slavery set the stage for secession and civil war in 1861. Most men and women at the time would have agreed with Abraham Lincoln's assertion in his Second Inaugural Address that slavery "was, somehow, the cause of the war." Alexander H. Stephens, the Confederacy's vice president, minced no words when he proclaimed in March 1861 that slavery "was the immediate cause of the late rupture and the present revolution" to establish southern independence. The framers of the United States Constitution had compromised regarding slavery, creating a democratic republic that sought to ensure its citizenry's freedoms while also reassuring the South that individual states would have the power to maintain and regulate slavery within their boundaries. The paradox of white liberty that rested in part on a foundation of black slavery was thus imbedded in the origins of the United States. . . .

When the Civil War ended, the political Reconstruction of the South progressed in two distinct eras. The first was Presidential Reconstruction, from 1865 through early spring 1867, when Andrew Johnson shaped the pace and depth of the reintegration of the South into the United States following the Confederacy's surrender. . . . Under Johnson, white Southerners held on to all they could of the old order. They passed "Black Codes" that narrowly defined the possibilities of life for freedpeople, preventing them from renting land or owning firearms and placing their children in coercive "apprenticeships" to their former owners. Former Confederates violently attacked black people in New Orleans, in Memphis, and in the countryside across the region. The Ku Klux Klan terrorized those who challenged white supremacy in any way. . . .

A second era of Reconstruction began in March 1867, when a new Republican majority in Congress pressed for a much more aggressive recasting of the South than Johnson had overseen. The blatant and violent resistance of white Southerners to even the mild reforms of Presidential Reconstruction had persuaded the Northern electorate that deeper reforms were required before the Southern states

could rejoin the Union. A wing of the Republican Party, called “Radicals” by their critics, instituted a sweeping set of changes in the South.

The Reconstruction Acts of 1867 divided the South into five military districts under national control. The Acts required that each state write a new constitution giving voting rights to all men, regardless of race or prior enslaved status, and ratify the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which declared that all people other than American Indians born in the United States were citizens, with rights to due process of law. African American men mobilized to vote and elected many of their number to the constitutional conventions and political positions across the South. . . .

From the largest perspective, the challenges of Reconstruction are all too clear. The effort to recast the postwar South was up against long odds from the outset. Reconstruction sought to complete one of the great revolutions of modern history and to do so without the benefit of overwhelming military force, modern tools of surveillance, or a contrite opponent. Slavery in the United States had been strong and growing stronger when it suddenly ended in a vast war waged over much of the continent. . . . Southerners had dominated the presidency and the Supreme Court throughout the first three generations of United States history and had not hesitated to use that power to suppress abolition, to force northern complicity in returning fugitive slaves, and to lay legal claim to at least half of the nation’s territory. Changing all those power relations at one time was a massive undertaking.

## LESSON 1

### OVERVIEW

In this lesson students will examine two posters and an engraving that were created during the Civil War depicting African Americans. An in-depth examination of these images will help the students develop an understanding of the conditions faced by African Americans during the Civil War and how African Americans came to identify with the Union cause. You will first model the activity with the whole class and then divide the students into small learning groups.

### OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to

- Analyze a variety of primary source images
- Work with peers to identify people, objects, and events depicted in images
- Complete an activity sheet to help them analyze the purpose of an image
- Compose a short paragraph-length statement in response to a question

## MATERIALS

- Images
  - *Freedom to the Slave*, 1863, The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC04198
  - “City of Montgomery, Alabama” by W. H. Russell, *Harper’s Weekly*, June 1, 1861, pp. 344–345, The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC01733.03
  - *The Gallant Charge of the Fifty Fourth Massachusetts (Colored) Regiment*, 1863, The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC02881.23
- Image Analysis activity sheet
- Overhead projector, Elmo projector, or similar device

## PROCEDURE

1. Divide the class into small learning groups. Distribute three or four copies of the Image Analysis activity sheet to each group. These will be their working copies. Have additional copies ready for each student to write out a final clean copy. Ask for two volunteers in each group, one to take notes and another to report the group’s findings.
2. Display the images using an overhead projector or similar device. If you cannot display the images, distribute one set of all three images to each group.
3. The groups will work on the first task in the upper left corner of the chart: Describe the people in the image.
4. Ask the students to carefully examine the first Civil War broadside, or poster, *Freedom to the Slave*. Tell the students that this image is rich in content and symbolism. Encourage them to study the document carefully, reminding them to look at every section of the image. The students will tell the note taker in their group exactly what they see. Allow time for student-to-student interaction, circulating to provide assistance, and make certain the note taker is recording all contributions.
5. Reconvene the class as a whole and model the completion of the People section on the activity sheet. Ask one or several of the groups’ reporters to list what they found and point out where each person or group of people appears. For example,
  - A Union soldier holding the US flag and a sword, standing on the Confederate flag; the red hat on top of the US flag is a liberty cap, a symbol of freedom
  - African American troops going into battle under the American flag
  - An African American Union soldier removing shackles from enslaved people
  - African Americans going to a public school and reading a newspaper

Because there are many people depicted in the broadside, this activity may take some time.

6. Ask if other groups identified each of the people or groups pointed out and what the role or significance is of that individual or group. Through a brief discussion, determine if there is consensus. If so, have the students write their agreed-upon findings in their own clean copy of the chart.

7. Repeat this process with the Objects and Actions/Activities sections. Call on different groups to contribute and again seek consensus before completing each section.
8. Have the students then consider and complete the Overall Assessment section. They may do this as a group activity. You may have them report out their overall assessment of the messages in the image.
9. Display or distribute the other two images related to African Americans during the Civil War. The groups will examine each image and determine which section (People, Objects, or Actions/Activities) on the activity sheet is the most useful for examining and understanding the image. Once they decide, they can complete that one section as well as the Overall Assessment. The note taker should record the group's suggestions. Circulate to ensure the students are on task.
10. Reconvene the class and discuss each of the images. Ask for a student from one of the groups to report out. Using the same technique of discussion and consensus, monitor responses to ensure the students provide appropriate answers and demonstrate understanding of the image and the symbolism.
11. Ask students if they are still undecided about the message or meaning of a particular image. Ask other students if they can help answer classmates' questions.
12. Ask the students to write a short paragraph in response to the following question: Based on the evidence in the images we have examined, what changes would African Americans expect once the Civil War ended?

## LESSON 2

### OVERVIEW

In this lesson students will carefully read and analyze selections from the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the US Constitution and a secondary source about the Emancipation Proclamation. They will consider how these documents expanded legal and political rights for African Americans, and by extension, all Americans.

### OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to

- Demonstrate an understanding of documents by answering critical thinking questions
- Summarize the essential message of documents

## MATERIALS

- About the Emancipation Proclamation.” Source: “The Emancipation Proclamation,” Online Exhibits, National Archives, [www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov)
- The Emancipation Proclamation: Critical Thinking Questions
- The “Reconstruction Amendments” to the US Constitution: Document Analysis

## PROCEDURE

1. Distribute “About the Emancipation Proclamation” and the Critical Thinking Questions
2. “Share read” “About the Emancipation Proclamation,” making certain that the students understand that this is a description of the Emancipation Proclamation, not document itself. To share read with the class, begin to read aloud, modeling prosody, inflection, and punctuation. Ask the class to join in with the reading after the first paragraph while you continue to read aloud, still serving as the model for the class. This technique will support struggling readers as well as English language learners.
3. Explain to the students that they are to answer the three questions on the worksheet based on the information they just read. To assist them, you may tell the students that the questions are “keyed” to the paragraphs; that is, the answer to question 1 can be found in the first paragraph, and so on.
4. After an appropriate period of time, call on volunteers to read their answers to the three questions, allowing for constructive comments from peers. Reach consensus and record the answers, thus ensuring that each student has accurate answers.
5. Divide the students into three groups and distribute copies of the “Reconstruction Amendments” to the US Constitution: Document Analysis activity sheet. Assign an amendment to each group and allow the group time to read the amendment and discuss the question for that amendment. Then reconvene as a whole class. Discuss the answers and address how these three amendments impacted African Americans. Ask: Why did Congress consider these important for the Reconstruction of the United States?

## LESSON 3

### OVERVIEW

In this lesson students will incorporate skills developed in prior lessons and demonstrate their ability to read and analyze complex written documents and answer critical thinking questions through a mock press conference. The students will work in small learning groups.

### OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to

- Analyze complex primary source documents
- Engage in group work in order to practice collaborative investigation and problem solving
- Develop and participate in a mock press conference

### MATERIALS

- Documents
  - o #1: Excerpts from a letter from A. C. Ramsey to his brother-in-law J. J. Wardlaw, January 3, 1867, The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC09311
  - o #2: Excerpts from Frederick Douglass's Speech at the 1876 Republican National Convention, June 14, 1876, in *Proceedings of the Republican National Convention, Held at Cincinnati, Ohio ... June 14, 15, and 16, 1876* (Concord, NH: Republican Press Association, 1876), pp. 26–27
  - o #3: Excerpts from a letter from Frederick Douglass to an unknown correspondent, November 23, 1887, The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC08992
  - o #4: Excerpts from a letter from Frederick Douglass to Robert Adams, December 4, 1888, The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC04997
- A Letter from a Former Slaveholder: Critical Thinking Questions activity sheet
- Press Conference with Frederick Douglass

## PROCEDURE

1. Inform the class that they will be reading excerpts from a letter written by a former slaveholder almost two years after the Civil War ended. Distribute the Document Analysis activity sheet with Document #1: A Letter from a Former Slaveholder and the Critical Thinking Questions. You can share read this letter as described in Lesson 2.
2. Divide the class into small groups of five or six to address the critical thinking questions. (They will remain in these groups for the press conference.) Review the answers with the class, paying particular attention to the final question.
3. Tell the students that they will create and take part in a mock press conference with the self-emancipated former slave and abolitionist Frederick Douglass. For this activity, student groups will work together to write both the questions and the answers ahead of time and then present their press conference to the class.
4. Distribute Documents #2, #3, and #4. These are excerpts from a speech and two letters by Frederick Douglass written in 1876, 1887, and 1888. You may ask a student to read each of the texts aloud. Evidence from these writings will be used to create questions and answers for the mock press conference.
5. The students in each group should select who will portray Frederick Douglass. The remainder of the group will take the role of reporters at the press conference. If possible, the students should see video of an actual press conference prior to this activity.
6. Distribute the Press Conference organizers, two per group. Tell the students that the press conference should focus on Frederick Douglass's opinions about the conditions faced by African Americans after Reconstruction.
7. In each group the students will compose both the questions and the responses to those questions using this form. They should be careful to cite evidence from the texts for the answers that will be given by Frederick Douglass.
8. Presentation:
  - a) The reporters raise their hands and one is selected by "Frederick Douglass" to ask the first question. "Douglass" then answers that question using the script the students wrote together.
  - b) Continue until all the questions have been posed to Frederick Douglass, one question per reporter. The students could script follow-up questions if time permits.
  - c) Repeat the process with each group.
9. Have the class debrief the presentations to help students learn how to effectively critique oral presentations. You might ask: Which of the presentations was most effective? What made the presentation effective? How could presentations be improved?