

Liberty and Justice for All

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Overview

During and after the Civil War, the United States government recognized that African Americans ought to be guaranteed their freedom and basic rights as human beings. In this activity, students will examine The Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 and the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution. Why were these documents created? What impact did they have? What is the importance of each in relation to the others?

Standards

CCE (9-12): *IID, VA, VB*

NCHS (5-12): *Era V, Standard 2A, 3A*

NCSS: *Strands 2, 5, 6, and 10*

Recommended Time

One 45-minute period. Additional time as needed for background and homework.

Objectives

Students will:

- understand the historical background of The Emancipation Proclamation and the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution
- analyze the meaning of these documents
- evaluate the relative importance of these four documents
- assess the impact of these documents on American history

Materials

Student Handouts

- Copy of the Emancipation Proclamation
<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/emancipa.htm>
- Copy of Amendments Thirteen, Fourteen, and Fifteen
<http://www.billofrightsinstitute.org/sections.php?op=viewarticle&artid=46>
- Handouts A, B, C, and D: Document Questions

Additional Teacher Resources

- Answer Key

Lesson Plan

I. Background Homework

- A. Review for the students the circumstances in which the Emancipation Proclamation was issued and the three amendments approved and ratified.

The Emancipation Proclamation was issued by President Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War. It marked the first time that the United States government issued an order providing for the freeing of slaves. The three amendments were passed by Congress and approved by the requisite number of states near the end of the war (in the case of the Thirteenth Amendment) and in the immediate post-war period. All three were passed in order to guarantee the freedom and rights of blacks in general and former slaves in particular. Southern states that had seceded from the Union were required to accept the amendments as a condition of their being readmitted to the Union.

- B. Have the students read the first two paragraphs of the Emancipation Proclamation, the Thirteenth Amendment, Section 1 of the Fourteenth Amendment, and the Fifteenth Amendment (see links above).

- C. Students should write a one-paragraph summary of each of the four documents.

- *Emancipation Proclamation: Issued on September 22, 1862; all persons held as slaves in rebellious states (or areas of states) as of January 1, 1863 shall be freed, and the United States government shall protect their freedom.*
- *Thirteenth Amendment: Slavery is abolished.*
- *Section 1 of the Fourteenth Amendment: All persons born in, or who live for a certain period of time in, the United States are citizens of the United States and of the state in which they live. No state shall discriminate against anyone or deprive anyone of their rights or the equal protection of the laws.*
- *Fifteenth Amendment: The right of all citizens to vote shall not be denied or interfered with by the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or because they are former slaves.*

II. Warm-up [10 minutes]

Have the students share their summaries with the whole class.

III. Activity [20 minutes]

Divide the class into four groups. Assign each of the four groups one of the documents and the appropriate handout of discussion questions. Have the students discuss the questions and write out their answers on the handouts.

IV: Wrap-Up Discussion [15 minutes]

- A. Have each groups share its answers to the questions with the whole class.

B. After all groups have read their answers, ask the whole class this question:

- Is it more appropriate to say that these four documents “gave” freedom and rights to African Americans, or that they “recognized” the freedom and rights of African Americans? Explain your answer.

V. Follow-Up Homework

Students are to produce a spectrum, an assessment tool by which one shows his/her understanding of a subject. A spectrum requires the student to formulate an opinion by analyzing, arranging, and illustrating several subjects/ideas.

Directions:

Have each student draw a line—it may be straight or arched—from left to right across the top of a piece of paper. On the left of the line, the student should write “Least Significant Document”; on the right of the line, “Most Significant Document.”

Each student should design a unique symbol representing each of the four documents studied in this lesson. The symbol of each lesson should be placed on the spectrum line according to its relative importance.

The students should write a paragraph explaining why they placed the symbols in the order they chose.

VI. Extension

Have the students compose a one-page essay in which they describe what might have happened up to the year 1900 if (choose one):

- the Emancipation Proclamation had not been issued?
- the Thirteenth Amendment had not been issued?
- the Fourteenth Amendment had not been issued?
- the Fifteenth Amendment had not been issued?

The Emancipation Proclamation: Questions

1. Who issued this document?
2. When was this document issued and when did it go into effect?
3. Whom did this document propose to free?
4. Who was not freed by this document?
5. What is the historical significance of this document?

The Thirteenth Amendment: Questions

1. When was this document approved?
2. What did this document outlaw?
3. What does the phrase, “except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted,” refer to?
4. Why was this document necessary considering that the Emancipation Proclamation had gone into effect two years earlier?
5. What is the historical significance of this document?

The Fourteenth Amendment: Questions

1. When was this document approved?
2. What does this document guarantee?
3. What does the phrase, “equal protection of the laws,” refer to?
4. Why was this document necessary considering that the Thirteenth Amendment had gone into effect three years earlier?
5. What is the historical significance of this document?

The Fifteenth Amendment: Questions

1. When was this document approved?
2. What does this document guarantee?
3. How might the right guaranteed by this document be “abridged”?
4. Why was this document necessary considering that the Fourteenth Amendment had gone into effect three years earlier?
5. What is the historical significance of this document?

Teacher Answer Key

The Emancipation Proclamation

1. Abraham Lincoln
2. It was issued on September 22, 1862; it went into effect on January 1, 1863.
3. It proposed freeing slaves who lived in states (or in certain cases, parts of states) that were in rebellion against the United States as of January 1, 1863.
4. Slaves held in states that remained in the Union were not freed by this document.
5. By issuing this document, the federal government took a momentous first step in freeing some slaves when the rebellion continued after January 1, 1863.

The Thirteenth Amendment

1. 1865
2. It outlawed slavery and involuntary servitude.
3. This phrase refers to punishments for crimes. Criminals could still have their freedom taken away.
4. The Emancipation Proclamation did not free all slaves, so the Thirteenth Amendment was needed.
5. This document changed the Constitution so that it clearly outlawed slavery in the United States.

The Fourteenth Amendment

1. 1868
2. It guarantees that all persons born in, or who live for a certain period of time in, the United States are citizens of the United States and of the state in which they live. It also promises that no state shall discriminate against anyone or deprive anyone of their rights or the equal protection of the laws.
3. This phrase refers to the fact that all citizens must be protected equally by the laws.
4. The Thirteenth Amendment ended slavery, but it did not guarantee the status of African Americans as citizens or promise that their rights would be protected.
5. This document changed the Constitution so that it clearly guaranteed the status and rights of all Americans.

The Fourteenth Amendment

1. 1870
2. It guarantees the right of all citizens to vote.
3. A state might make laws that make it difficult for some people to exercise their right to vote. Some students may be aware that southern states in the Reconstruction Era passed laws establishing poll taxes and reading tests so as to prevent African Americans from voting.
4. The Fourteenth Amendment did not explicitly address the right to vote.
5. This document changed the Constitution so that it clearly guaranteed the right of all people to vote.