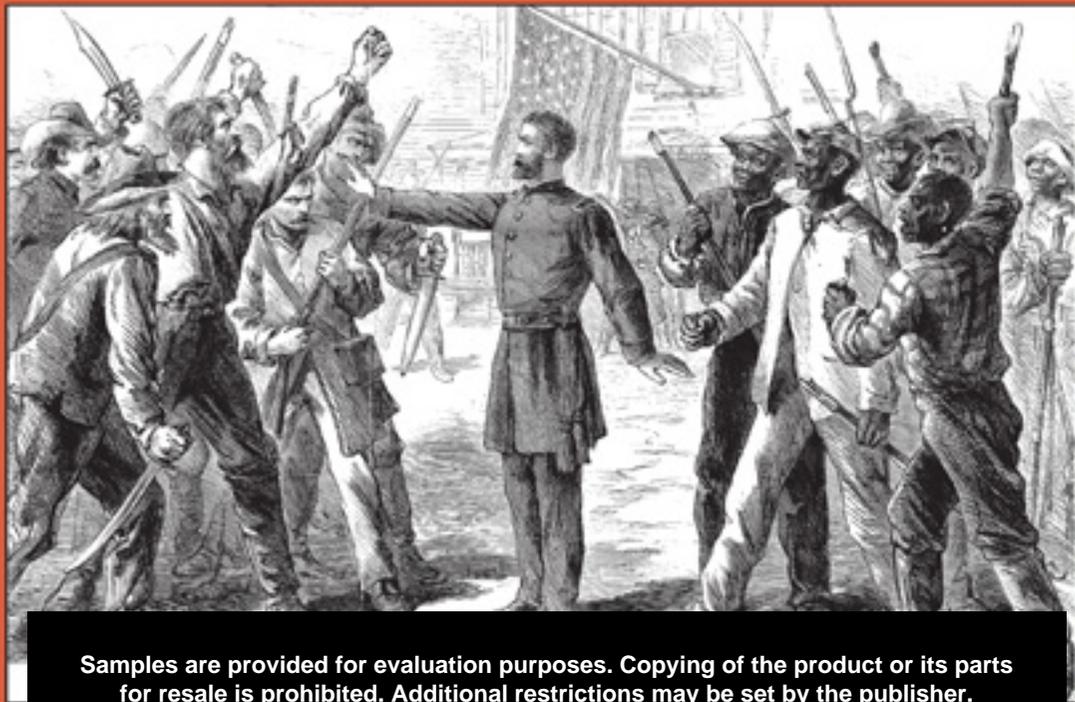


History
UNFOLDING

THE ERA OF RECONSTRUCTION



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MindSparks
CHALLENGING STUDENTS TO THINK HISTORICALLY

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The Era of Reconstruction

Introduction

Binding Up the Nation's Wounds

"With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds . . ."

That was Abraham Lincoln's hope expressed in his second Inaugural Address in 1864, as he looked forward to the end of America's Civil War. But the years ahead would prove how hard it is to bind up the wounds after a long war has torn a nation apart. The war meant that the South was essentially a conquered land. That alone would have generated bitterness and a sense of despair throughout the region. But of course, conquest, destruction, and occupation were only some of the factors working against any easy reintegration of the South. The Civil War had also freed several million slaves. Even under the best of circumstances, it would have been hard to find a way to help them and their former owners adjust to a new social arrangement. Under conditions as they existed in the South, it was next to impossible.

Given this, perhaps we should wonder at the successes, not the failures, of Reconstruction. But in any case, those successes did not last. The North tired of its obligation to find a decent and just peace. And too many in the South were determined to prevent such an outcome.

The 12 visual displays we have chosen for this booklet focus on some of the key aspects of this disappointing chapter in the nation's history. The visuals are presented in four lessons. Each lesson uses three visuals to explore one broad topic in the overall story. Briefly, the four lessons are as follows:

The Meaning of Reconstruction

The end of the Civil War meant the end of slavery. But these illustrations suggest that the bitter legacy of slavery and racism would affect the nation for many decades to come.

Between Slavery and Freedom

Slavery was at an end. However, black codes, night riders and riots plagued African Americans and thwarted their efforts to take advantage of the freedom they had supposedly been granted.

Reconstruction and the South

Thousands of Northerners, blacks as well as whites, went South to help the freed slaves. While some took advantage of the South's political powerlessness, many went simply to lend a hand. And African Americans themselves quickly proved that they could accomplish much even under the limited freedom they had won.

The Retreat from Reconstruction

The North was soon distracted by political corruption and by its own mixed attitudes toward race and the South's racial conflicts. Soon after the end of Reconstruction, a new and rigid form of racial segregation was in place throughout the South. It would last nearly another century.

Using Photos, Cartoons, and Other Visuals to Teach History

Many textbooks are full of colorful visuals. However, all too often these visuals function primarily as window dressing. They make the text more entertaining, or at least more palatable. Only occasionally do the visuals in textbooks do more than offer simple pictorial reinforcement of ideas already presented in the text. In many cases, they pander to the visual orientation of the young while doing little to help young people master the challenges of the visual media that dominate their lives.

By way of contrast, our approach to using visual materials emphasizes their unique strengths as historical documents. The lessons in this booklet focus students on the visual symbols and metaphors in editorial cartoons, the dramatic qualities of certain photographs, the potential of many images to make abstract ideas more specific and concrete, the implicit biases and stereotypes in certain images, their emotional power, and their ability to invoke the spirit of a time and place. In the process, we make every effort to strengthen students' visual literacy skills in general, as well as their ability to think critically and engage in spirited but disciplined discussions.

How to Use This Booklet

The booklet is divided into four lessons, with three illustrations per lesson. Each lesson consists of the following:

A BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET This page provides brief summaries explaining the three illustrations on which the lesson is based and their relevance to the lesson's objectives.

DIGITAL IMAGES The booklet's PDF allows you to project the images for use in your class discussions.

DISCUSSION-ACTIVITY SHEETS

Each sheet displays one illustration. It includes a sequence of questions to help you plan an all-class discussion while using the projected images. The questions take students step by step through an analysis of the illustration. If you wish, you may reproduce these pages and hand them out. In addition to the discussion questions on the illustration itself, one or two follow-up activities are suggested. Some of these can be made into individual assignments. Others will work best as small-group or all-class activities.

The Era of Reconstruction

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will understand how chaotic conditions were at the end of the Civil War.
 2. Students will better understand the mixed nature of attitudes about race and the freed slaves in the North at war's end.
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The Meaning of Reconstruction

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Illustration 1

“With malice toward none, with charity for all . . .” That was Abraham Lincoln’s hope in 1864, as he looked forward to the end of America’s Civil War. But the years ahead proved how hard it would be to “bind up the nation’s wounds.” The other photo here gives only a small idea of the massive destruction, sadness and lingering anger throughout the reunited country. The South was in ruins—railroad tracks torn up, farms and homes destroyed, fields unplanted, hundreds of thousands of heads of families gone. The bitterness this left would have been a challenge even for a statesman like Lincoln. But on April 14, 1865, an assassin’s bullet left the nation without that statesman.

Illustration 2

Even before the war ended, thousands of African American slaves left their farms and plantations and took to the road. Many followed the Union forces, as they are doing in one of the illustrations here. Freedom meant hope and an ability to pick up and leave. What else it would mean was probably unclear to most of the ex-slaves following Union lines. The Union soldiers fought and died in numbers never before imagined in America. And as the cartoon here suggests, the ex-slaves did have reason to be grateful for this sacrifice. Yet the cartoon’s self-satisfied tone suggests that sympathy for African Americans might not last once the challenges of helping the freed slaves adjust became clear.

Illustration 3

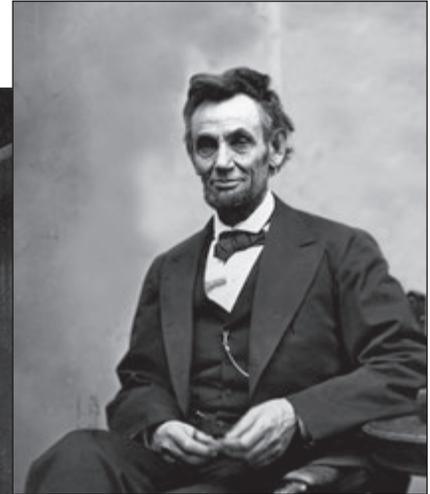
Millions in the North hated slavery and were glad to see it end. Many also regarded African Americans as full citizens, deserving of all the rights of citizens. Yet as these campaign ads make clear, hateful and bigoted feelings toward blacks existed in the North and were openly expressed. These ads are for Democrat Heister Clymer, a candidate running for governor of Pennsylvania in 1866. In the ads, Clymer presents himself as the candidate “for the White Man,” against the Radical Republican candidates who support giving blacks the vote. Those Republican candidates are listed by name and condemned for being “for the Negro.” The visual stereotyping on the posters is especially ugly.

Lesson 1—The Meaning of Reconstruction

Illustration 1



The National Archives



The National Archives

Discussing the Illustrations

1. The end of the Civil War left huge areas of the South in ruins, as the main photo here suggests. In what year did the Civil War end?
2. The era of Reconstruction that followed the Civil War might well have turned out differently had Abraham Lincoln finished his second term as president. When would he have finished that term and what kept him from doing so?
3. In his Second Inaugural Address in 1864, Lincoln had said, "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace." What do these words mean to you? Do you think they were a good enough guide to what the nation needed to do after the Civil War was over? Why or why not?

Follow-up Activity

1. One woman described the South in 1865 this way:

I can hardly give you a true idea of how crushed and sad the people are. You hear no bitterness towards the North; they are too sad to be bitter; their grief is overwhelming. Nothing can make any difference to them now; the women live in the past and the men only in the daily present, trying, in a listless sort of way, to repair their ruined fortunes.

— Francis Butler Leigh (Quoted in *The South: A Documentary History*, by Ina Woestemeyer Van Noppen, D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc. 1958)

Your task is to write letters to this woman. Each group member should write one letter while pretending to be one of the following: Thaddeus Stevens, Ulysses S. Grant, Robert E. Lee, Hiram Revels, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth. Before writing this letter, learn more about the person you will pretend to be. Read and discuss your letters with the rest of the class.