

Role-Playing US History

Reconstruction *to* 20th Century
Seventh Edition

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Welcome to Role-Playing US History

This book is an exciting collection of role-playing simulations for Social Studies classrooms.

Eleven open-ended simulations involve students in reenacting certain world-changing events from Reconstruction to the twentieth century.

Students are actively engaged in assuming the roles of decision makers at crucial junctures in history, using critical thinking and group decision-making skills to resolve conflicts. Although most of the simulations are written for US History, some of them would work equally well in other social studies classes.

All of these simulations will work in classes ranging from junior high to high school and at ability levels ranging from sheltered classes to honors.

● Contents ●

National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies	viii
Common Core Standards	ix
Introduction	1
FAQ's	4
Simulation Lesson Plan	
Reconstruction	7
Taking Colonies	10
Great Powers Game	11
STRIKE!	15
Dust Bowl	19
World War II Debates	22
Cold War	24
Cuban Missile Crisis	29
Hippie Day	33
Vietnam Peace Talks	35
Twentieth Century Slang	38
US History Counterfactuals: "What if ...?"	40
Reproducibles	
Reconstruction Simulation	57
Group A: Radical Republicans	59
Group B: Defeated Southern Leaders	60
Group C: Freedmen	61
Group D: Moderate Republicans	62

Taking Colonies: A US History Writing Assignment	63
Great Powers Game	64
Great Powers Game Sample Turn	66
Country Description Sheet #1: Great Britain	67
Country Description Sheet #2: France	68
Country Description Sheet #3: Germany	69
Country Description Sheet #4: Italy	70
Country Description Sheet #5: Austro-Hungarian Empire ...	71
Country Description Sheet #6: Russia	72
Country Description Sheet #7: Ottoman Empire	73
Country Description Sheet #8: United States of America ...	74
Country Description Sheet #9: Japan	75
Great Powers Game Tokens	76
Great Powers World Map	88
Great Powers Game Turn Record Sheet	89
STRIKE! Simulation	90
Employer's Needs	91
Workers' Needs	93
Special Characters	95
Dust Bowl Simulation	96
Dust Bowl Oral History #1: Head for the West Coast	97
Dust Bowl Oral History #2: Join the Army	98
Dust Bowl Oral History #3: Stick It Out at Home	99
Dust Bowl Oral History #4: Head for the Rural Southeast ..	100
Dust Bowl Oral History #5: Heading for the Big City	101
Dust Bowl Oral History #6: Heading North to Canada	102

World War II Debates	103
Cold War Simulation	105
Cold War Sample Turn	108
Roles on a Team	110
Cold War Random Events Table	111
Cold War Playing Cards	112
Country Points	118
Cuban Missile Crisis Simulation	120
Country Description #1: The Soviets	121
Country Description #2: The Americans	123
Country Description #3: The Cubans	125
Cuban Missile Crisis Tokens	126
Vietnam Peace Talks Simulation	129
Vietnam Peace Talks Sample Turn	131
Vietnam Peace Talks Random Events Chart	132
Vietnam Peace Talk Playing Cards	133
Vietnam Peace Talks Turn Record Sheet	142
Twentieth Century Slang	143
Twentieth Century Slang Answer Sheet	144
Teacher Feedback Form	147
Release Form for Photographic Images	148

Introduction

What is a role-playing simulation?

Role-playing simulations attempt to put the student in the position of a person in a particular time and place. All of the simulations involve group problem solving and conflict resolution. The students are given a character sheet (which describes the group's needs and desires), a brief description of the historical problem, and a copy of the rules of the game. Familiarity with fantasy role-playing games is a plus, but certainly not required. The individual assumes the role chosen and makes decisions as the character would make during that particular time period. No pre-set limits are placed on a particular person's choices as long as they are within the realm of what was historically possible. Because of the freedom to choose in these games, the outcome is very unpredictable. No two classes finish the simulation in the exact same way, which leads to some very interesting classroom discussions about why things turned out the way they did, what could have happened differently, and how the simulation compares to what actually occurred in history.

How are these activities different from other simulations?

Unlike many simulations that are commercially available, these games can usually be played in one or two class periods. Their open-ended nature allows for playing up to one week if time permits, but after a couple of days you will find that most of the possibilities have been exhausted, and continued play will have only limited instructional value. Another key advantage to this system is the cost. Everything you need to play these simulations can be reproduced out of this book. There are no tiresome charts to deal with, and minimal setup and cleanup time is required, allowing for maximum role-playing time. As much as possible, pieces have been kept to a minimum to make cleanup and storage easier and to keep costs down for teachers on a budget. The emphasis is on role-playing so that students can get as much as possible out of their personal learning experience and not get tied up in the mechanics of a complicated rules system.

How are the simulations used?

The best way to use these simulations is at the beginning of a unit when students have little prior knowledge of the historical outcome of a particular conflict. This allows a clean slate for actions instead of a predictable imitation of history just because "That's the way it had to be." When the teacher does begin the regular instructional part of the unit, the students will automatically make comments like, "Wow! That is just like what happened in the game," or "Now I understand why they did what they did." We all know that students remember better what they do rather than what they hear or read about, so these simulations allow for an unforgettable experience that will bring history alive for them.

Reconstruction Simulation

Overall goal

- To reconstruct the nation, which has been torn apart by the Civil War

The groups that we will represent are

- Radical Republicans:** The victorious Northerners of the Republican Party who want to make radical reforms to punish the South and guarantee the rights of the newly freed slaves
- Defeated Southern Leaders:** The war has been lost, and the North has freed the slaves. The South must decide whether to heal old wounds or fight for what was lost.
- Freedmen:** Former slaves who now must find work and find their place in politics, the economy, and society
- Moderate Republicans:** Leaders like President Lincoln and Vice President Johnson who wish to take it easy on the South so that they will peacefully rejoin the Union without too much resentment

How the game is played

Form groups of from 2–8 members. Read the overall goals for your group. Then begin reading the individual problems that your group must face. Discuss solutions to these problems openly. Record your responses on a separate sheet of paper. If members of your group disagree upon a particular solution record both responses and indicate that some will do one thing and some will do another. You are representing a whole class of society, so not everyone will respond to challenges in the same way.

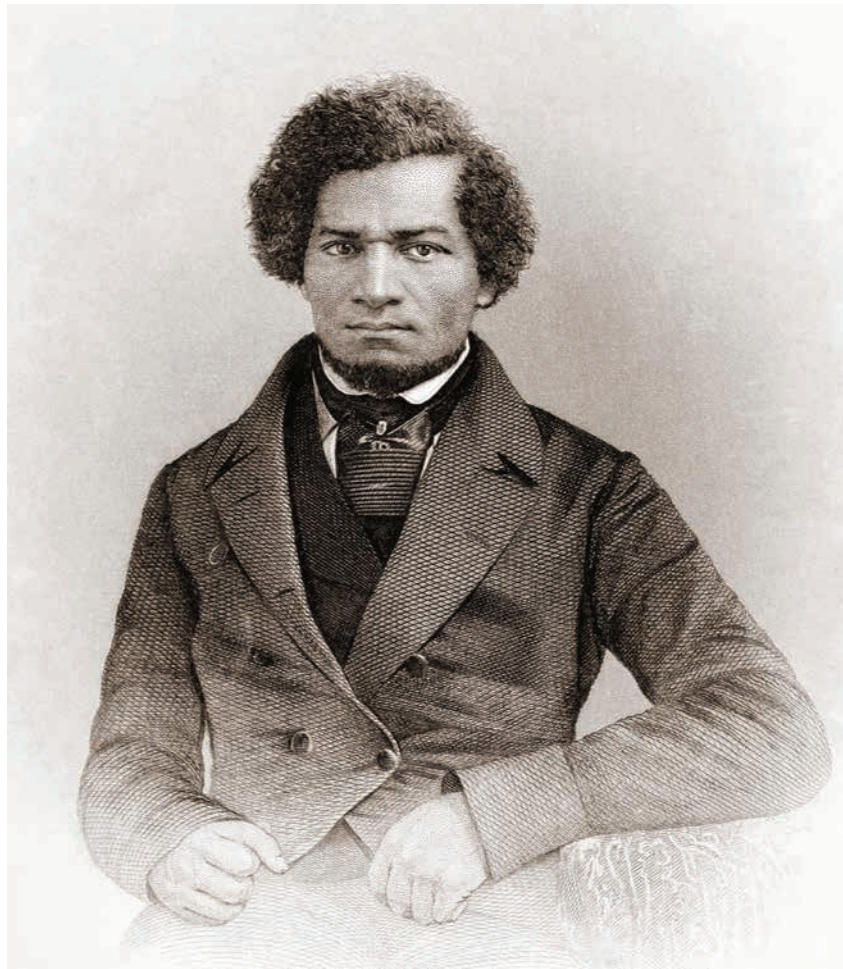
Please keep in mind that you must be as specific as possible in your proposed solutions. For example, it is not enough just to say, “We will create schools to educate freed blacks.” Which level of government will do this, local, state or, federal? Who will pay for it? Keep in mind the time period that you are dealing with. There are no income taxes; the federal government is relatively small and not used to dealing directly with social problems. There are no civil rights laws dealing with race or gender. Only white males with property can vote, for example. There are no government agencies that give financial aid to minorities of any kind.

Most importantly, try to think as people would have thought in the late 1860s. Don’t insert your own modern ideas of what is right. Be faithful to the role you are playing even if you disagree with the views of the group you are representing.

Group roles

Each group will need at least one of the following. Small groups may cover more than one role:

- A. **Facilitator:** Leads the discussion and makes sure everyone has a chance to participate
- B. **Recorder:** Writes down the final responses to the questions; clearly labels which question is being addressed and checks for completeness, spelling, and grammar errors.
- C. **Compromiser:** Tries to come to an agreement with which everyone can live



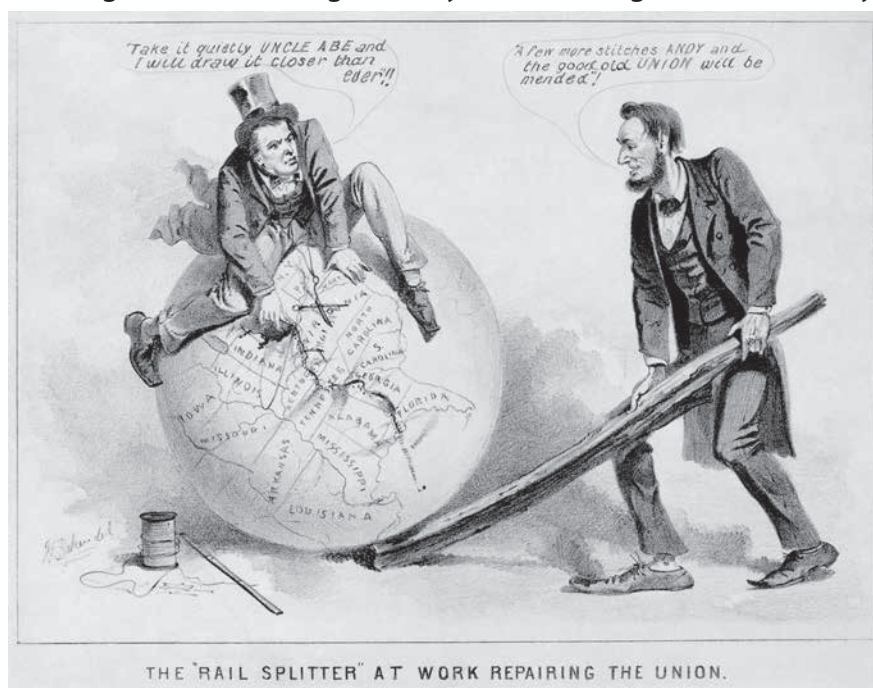
Frederick Douglass

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Group A: Radical Republicans

You have won the war and are proud of it. You intend to have the Republican Party take credit for saving the Union and never let anybody forget it. You are not beyond waving a bloody shirt during political speeches to remind people what the Confederacy did to this country. You believe in severely punishing the South for breaking away from the Union and starting the war. You are glad that the question of whether the federal government should be more powerful than the states has been settled once and for all in favor of the federal government. You are anxious to use that new power to show the defeated Southern states who is boss. You feel that if the South is treated too lightly they might rise up in rebellion again, and one civil war was enough. You are beginning to lose patience with the president for being too soft on the South and not moving quickly enough to help free blacks obtain their political and economic rights. Here are the problems you must discuss and solve together:

1. How will you treat the leaders of the old Confederate government? Some of them would like to run for office and rejoin your government.
2. How will you deal with the Confederate prisoners of war? How and when will you release them? Should they be punished for fighting against the United States? The usual punishment for treason is the death penalty. Does everyone get this, officers and enlisted men alike?
3. What do you do with the occupied areas of the South? What rules do you make for states that want to rejoin the Union? How do people get back their citizenship in the Union?
4. How will you guarantee the rights of free blacks? Many Southerners are still very prejudiced against blacks and do not want to give them their rights. They want to bring back the old way of life before slavery was abolished. How do you educate the blacks and teach them job skills? Most of them only knew farming before they got their freedom, but how can they farm if they don't own land? You would like to have blacks vote and participate in government like other men, but how can they vote and run for office if most can't read and don't have any political experience?



"The Rail Splitter Repairing the Union," 1865

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