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Decision Making in U.S. History

Civil War and Reconstruction

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK:

Be sure to use these lessons:

1. **BEFORE students read about or study the topics.** If students read about the topics before they do the problems in each lesson, they may know which options worked well or poorly. That will spoil the whole decision-making experience!
2. **INDIVIDUALLY.** These are stand-alone lessons. They are meant to be plugged into your U.S. history curriculum wherever you see fit. They are not intended as part of a sequence.
3. **FLEXIBLY.** Each lesson can either be used as a quick introduction to a historical topic or unit, or alternatively as a lengthier in-depth study of the topic.
4. **FOR SKILLS as well as history CONTENT.** These lessons focus on real historical problems, and are often accompanied by pages of historical context; as such, they provide situations to challenge students' decision-making skills along with the historical background necessary to understand those situations.

INTRODUCTION

RATIONALE: Hindsight versus Foresight

When we study history, it is all too easy to sit in judgment of those who came before us. We read it after the fact; we see it in hindsight. Given the benefit of such 20/20 hindsight, some historical figures seem to have been very misguided or downright silly in their decisions. Why didn't they anticipate the consequences of their choices? How could they have been so shortsighted? Sports enthusiasts call this sort of analysis "Monday morning quarterbacking."

However, it's not so easy to laugh at the follies of past decision makers if we are confronted with decisions in history before we learn the actual results. In such a situation, we find ourselves making some of the same mistakes that historical characters made, and we sometimes commit new errors they did not make. This method of studying history, which we might call "foresight history", is far more challenging—and engaging—than the traditional retroactive method to which we are inured.

In short, when we learn history by hindsight we risk becoming more arrogant and complacent. If, on the other hand, we learn history by *foresight*, by casting ourselves in the role of those historical figures and making decisions as they did—without knowing the outcome—we can learn humility and gain a great deal of empathy for them. Students in my classes constantly exclaim, "This is hard!" as opposed to, "This is boring!"

Foresight history also helps students improve key decision-making skills they will use again and again as citizens. Schools of law, medicine, business, and nursing, along with the military and many other institutions, use case-study methods, where students are forced to make decisions about a particular case and then analyze their thinking. If each of these varied disciplines values decision making so much, shouldn't we be training all our future citizens how to make good decisions?

History provides many benefits for those who study it. Historical knowledge can be liberating all by itself, letting us draw back the veil of ignorance and see the present with eyes enlightened by the past. The more knowledge of history we possess, the better we understand our societies and ourselves. Study and evaluation of primary sources, discussions of motives, debates about significance, analyzing causes and effects, and many other strategies are vital to history courses. The lessons here on decision making are meant to support and enhance these other methods of studying history, not to replace them with a more "practical" type of history.

THE CIVIL WAR AND RECONSTRUCTION

Introduction

OVERVIEW

This volume on the Civil War and Reconstruction consists of seven lessons: three focused on the Civil War and four on Reconstruction. As in the other volumes, no effort is made to cover all the major topics in this time period. Rather, lessons were chosen around interesting decision-making problems.

SKILLS GRID FOR THIS VOLUME

X = part of lesson
E = emphasized in the lesson

Skill	Lessons						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Underlying problem	X			X		X	X
Point of view	X	X	X	E	X		X
Assumptions/emotions	X			X	E		E
Ask—context	X	E	X				
Ask—sources							X
Ask—analogies		X		E			
Goals? Realistic?	E	X	X	X	X	X	
Options. Ethical?	X				X		E
Unintended consequences	X	X	E	X	E	E	X
Play out options	X	X	E	X	X		X

LESSON 1: POLICIES TOWARD AFRICAN AMERICANS

Teacher Pages

OVERVIEW

Decisions about African Americans were difficult for President Lincoln. He eventually issued the Emancipation Proclamation for which he is known as the “Great Emancipator.” Some people at the time and since felt he should have done more, however. This lesson puts students in President Lincoln’s shoes in 1861 when he had three history-making decisions to make, and then asks them to make the same three decisions again in 1862. How far will students go in helping African Americans achieve freedom and equality?

VOCABULARY

- Border states—States of Missouri, Kentucky, Maryland, and Delaware, all of which allowed slavery and considered joining the Confederacy
- Secede—To leave the Union
- Abolitionist—A person who believes in ending slavery
- Integrated—Having African Americans and whites in the same group, in this case army units
- Unionism—The desire among Southerners to rejoin the Union
- Confiscate—To take a person’s property away, often by force
- Confederacy—The group of Southern states that broke away from the Union
- Robert E. Lee—Confederate general during the Civil War
- Aristocrats—People with inherited privileges
- Antietam—1862 battle in which the North won a strategic victory
- Emancipation Proclamation—President Lincoln’s announcement that slaves were free in states rebelling against the Union
- 13th Amendment—Constitutional amendment prohibiting slavery in the United States
- Freedmen’s Bureau—Government agency to help newly freed slaves

DECISION-MAKING SKILLS EMPHASIZED

- Identify underlying problems
- Consider other points of view
- Recognize assumptions
- Ask about context
- Set realistic goals
- Generate ethical options
- Predict unintended consequences
- Play out options

LESSON PLAN

A. IN-DEPTH LESSON (one 40-minute class period):

Procedure:

Distribute Handout 1 and have students pair up and decide what they will do. Circulate around the room to answer questions students might have. Bring the class back together and discuss their decisions as well as their reasons for them. (OPTION: After students discuss their choices for the first decision, ask them how they will convey the war aims to the public.) Distribute Handout 2 with the outcomes or tell the class what actually happened. (OPTION: Divide the class into three groups and assign each group one of the decisions. Have each group tell the class what their decision is and why.)

Continue the lesson by telling students that they will now make the same three decisions, but in 1862, rather than 1861. Distribute Handout 3 and have students pair up and decide what they will do. Bring the class back together and discuss their decisions as well as their reasons for them. Distribute Handout 4 with the outcomes or tell the class what actually happened.

Distribute Handout 5, an excerpt of the Emancipation Proclamation, and have students answer the questions. (Answers: (1) The areas listed were already under Union control or were sympathetic to the Union, (2) Lincoln believed it was constitutional as a war measure, so there would be a problem at war's end, and (3) most historians consider it a great document.)

Reflecting on Decision Making:

Ask students how well they did on decision-making with these problems. Which decision-making skills were especially important in making decisions about these issues? Which of the letters of **P-A-G-E** applied especially to this problem? (See the "Decision-Making Analysis" section below for ideas.) Ask students what they did well or poorly on in terms of the **P-A-G-E** analysis of decision making. Discuss their answers.

Putting the Actual Decisions Into Historical Context:

Ask students whether the decision to make the Emancipation Proclamation was the result more of historical forces or the result of decisions by President Lincoln. (Lincoln is known as the Great Emancipator for issuing the Emancipation Proclamation, but there are also a great many historical factors: the border states, the use of slaves in the Southern war effort, etc.)

Connecting to Today:

Ask students if they feel African Americans have achieved full civil rights. How does the election of Barack Obama impact their understanding of racial equality?

Troubleshooting:

Remind students that even in wartime, Congress has many powers. The president cannot do whatever he wants.

B. QUICK MOTIVATOR (15–20 minutes):

Skip Handout 1. Give Handout 3 for homework. In class, have students pair up and discuss their choices for five minutes or so. Ask for a show of hands on each decision. Discuss their reasons for each decision. Distribute Handout 4 and have students comment for homework on what they learned from these outcomes.

TEACHER NOTES FOR EXPANDING DISCUSSION

(For Outcomes, see Handouts 2 and 4)

President Lincoln nullified the actions of General John C. Fremont by emancipating slaves under martial law in Missouri.

Some critics said the cost would be too great in compensating slaveholders in the border states for gradual emancipation. Lincoln responded that the cost would be equal to only about three months of the cost of conducting the war.

Some historians think that President Lincoln's changing religious beliefs in 1862 were important to the decision for the Emancipation Proclamation (Handout 3, Decision 6), as well as almost all his other wartime decisions thereafter. According to historian Allen Guelzo (see Sources), up to 1862, Lincoln was interested in religion but felt that God was an impersonal force in the world; after the death of his son Willie that year, God became a personal one to Lincoln. Lincoln felt that God was using the war to accomplish good outcomes, one of which was the abolition of slavery. Since Lincoln's religious beliefs are a subject of controversy (some historians cite evidence that Lincoln never changed his skepticism of religion), they are not included in the outcomes (Handout 4), but you may want to share this hypothesis with students.

President Lincoln felt that the North was making little progress with Southern Unionists and therefore would lose very little with the South by issuing the Emancipation Proclamation. Since Unionists were already failing to join the Northern cause, there was nothing to lose if they were upset by the proclamation. This issue of Southern Unionists is not included in the problem, since it would have become too complicated.

DECISION-MAKING ANALYSIS:

P = Problem

- * - **Identify any underlying problem(s)**
- * - Consider other points of view
- * - What are my assumptions? Emotions?

A = Ask for information (about)

- * - Historical context (history of this issue; context in the world)
- Reliability of sources
- Historical analogies

G = Goals

- * - What are my main goals? Are they realistic?
- * - **Generate options to achieve these goals. Are they ethical?**

E = Effects

- * - **Predict unintended consequences.**
- * - **Play out the options. What could go wrong?**

*Denotes topics emphasized in this lesson

- **Identify any underlying problems:** President Lincoln did a masterful job of reframing the decision to recruit African Americans into the army. He said the ex-slaves were reinforcements for white soldiers, shifting the emphasis of the underlying problem from whites and African Americans having to fight together (integration vs. racism) to getting enough soldiers to fight (manpower shortage). The new emphasis also played on white racism to gain support: if African Americans were dying, that meant fewer whites dying.
- **Consider other points of view:** Students should consider the views of African Americans in both North and South, whites in the North and those in the South, abolitionists, Democrats, and women's rights advocates, among others
- **Recognize assumptions, emotions:** Abraham Lincoln held basic assumptions about African Americans. Historians disagree on the extent of his prejudice. Moreover, he seemed to change his views during his presidency. For example, he eventually gave up the idea of colonization for ex-slaves. Students need to consider their own prejudices (assumptions about African Americans). Lincoln also assumed that the war would cause slavery to be extinguished no matter what he did, simply due to its destructive power. He nevertheless proclaimed emancipation to undermine the Southern war effort.
- **Ask about context:** After reading Handout 1, students could ask questions such as these: Decision 1—Is there a realistic chance that the border states will join the Confederacy? (Yes for Missouri and Kentucky; no for Maryland [already pacified] and Delaware); Decision 2—Have Southerners given any indication of how they would react to African Americans in the Northern army? (Yes. They have

said they would execute or enslave captured African Americans.); Have African Americans fought in previous wars? (Yes. They have fought in all of America's wars: the Revolution, the War of 1812, and the Mexican War.)

- **Set realistic goals:** Was it realistic to set abolition of slavery as a goal alongside winning the war?
- **Generate ethical options:** There might have been opposition to emancipation, but it was the right action to take in terms of ethicality
- **Predict unintended consequences:** Several consequences are explained in Handouts 2 and 4
- **Play out options:** For the Emancipation Proclamation, students should consider short-term effects, such as upon recruitment of soldiers, upon morale in the North and South, and upon the loyalty of border states. President Lincoln hoped that the benefits would outweigh the bad effects. Students should consider whether the Supreme Court would rule emancipation unconstitutional. For example, can the executive branch (the president) declare slaves free, or is that something only the legislative branch (Congress) can do? What would happen if the Supreme Court declared emancipation unconstitutional? What should the government do then? President Lincoln was careful to frame emancipation as a military necessity in order to avoid having it struck down.

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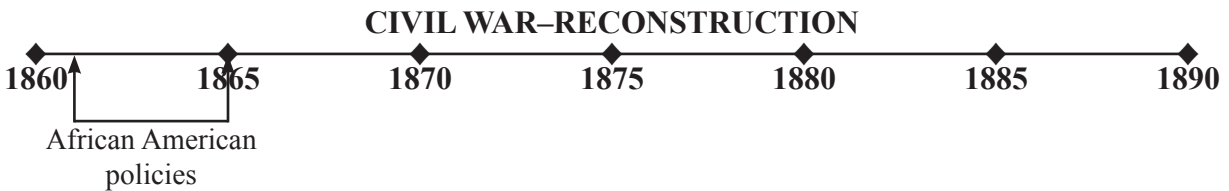
LESSON 1: POLICIES TOWARD AFRICAN AMERICANS

Vocabulary

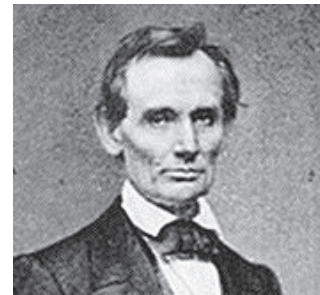
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LESSON 1: POLICIES TOWARD AFRICAN AMERICANS

Student Handout 1: Problem



You are President Lincoln in 1861. Unfortunately, the South seceded from the Union soon after you were elected, which has led to a civil war between the North (which you lead) and the South. It has been a difficult war so far, with the North losing the first battles. The North has to win this war, and you are ready to play a key role in making that happen. One area you need to consider is the role of African Americans in the war.



Lincoln in 1861

Decision 1—War aims: One of your main duties as president and commander-in-chief is to determine the aims of the war. Northerners need to know why they are fighting. Many, especially abolitionists, are pushing for abolition of slavery as a war aim. We need a moral reason to fight, they argue, and freeing four million slaves is certainly a noble goal. Abolitionist Lewis Tappan has argued, “Slavery is the cause of the present war. What is the remedy? We unhesitatingly answer; immediate and universal emancipation.” However, many Northerners and Northern soldiers hold racist views of African Americans; they won’t be motivated to fight for people they don’t even like. Almost half of Northern voters supported the Democrats—who opposed the abolition of slavery—in the 1860 election. Congress passed a resolution last month stating that the purpose of the war is to preserve the Union.

There are also the border states to consider. These states—Missouri, Kentucky, Maryland, and Delaware—have slaves, so they might join the Confederacy if you abolish slavery in all states. That would mean the North would face 14 or 15 states in the Confederacy instead of just 11. It would hurt Northern chances of winning the war. Which of the following will you do? Explain your choice.

1. Preserving the Union, not abolishing slavery: The North has to win the war. Since abolishing slavery might hurt the war effort (by lowering morale in the North and by adding more states to the Confederacy), it should be avoided.
2. Abolishing slavery only in the states that seceded from the Union, and continue to allow slavery in the border states
3. Abolishing slavery only in the states that seceded from the Union; offer to pay slaveholders in the border states for their slaves if they gradually abolish slavery