

“African Americans after the Civil War”

Lesson created by Christine Kadonsky

Grades: 3-6

Length of Time:

One 45 minute class period

Goals:

Reconstruction following the U.S. Civil War was a contentious issue both as a government policy debate and as the reality of living in the South. This lesson examines the significant ramifications of emancipation in Southern society immediately following the Civil War.

Objectives:

1. Students will read and understand one person’s perspective about the effectiveness of Reconstruction in the South.
2. Students will synthesize four opinions about Reconstruction to create a historically accurate textbook passage about life in the South after the Civil War.
3. Students will understand the social upheaval of the South after the Civil War and the challenges faced by African Americans in the South

Materials Used:

Classroom set of reading: the four primary source documents and the “You Be the Historians!” directions

For the extended activity, each student will need access to a computer with internet access.

Procedure:

Begin the lesson by reviewing with the students the “Three Hats of the Historian.” Historians are detectives who look for evidence, scholars who make a case based on the evidence, and chefs who present the information. (I learned this model from a Minnesota National History Day workshop in 2003.) In history class, we sometimes read textbooks for information. How are textbooks written? Historians work together, using their expertise, to write textbook entries. What types of sources would historians use while writing a textbook? The students will discuss the merits of using a variety of sources, both primary and secondary sources.

Explain to the students that today they will be the textbook authors. Their task is to incorporate multiple sources to write a textbook entry about Reconstruction. Review with the students the challenges associated with Reconstruction in the South, which were learned previously.

Activity:

Divide the students into groups of four. The students should move their desks into a circle. Give the directions aloud before distributing the four primary source handouts and the “You Be the Historians!” directions sheets. Each student will be responsible for reading one primary source. While reading, the students should consider the two questions at the end of the reading. The students should be certain that they can share responses to both questions with their group members.

Once all group members have completed reading their primary source, each member should explain their source to the group. What is the primary source and who wrote it? Be sure to share the answers to both posed questions with your group.

Once every member has explained his/her primary source, the group should work together to write a textbook passage entitled “Life in the South after the Civil War.” Information from each primary source should be included in the textbook passage. The students should answer the following three questions, which are listed on the “You Be the Historians!” directions sheet.

- What did Americans (Northern and Southern, black and white) think of the government during Reconstruction – military occupation of the South, civil rights laws, and the president’s plans?
- How did the views of white and black Southerners differ concerning the future of African Americans?
- For African Americans in the South after the Civil War, what help did they receive? What challenges did they face?

Students do not need to answer the questions in a particular order. Encourage students to include more information beyond the three questions posed by their teacher. Students may need 15-20 minutes to compose their textbook entries in their groups.

Closure:

Once all of the groups have completed the task, the teacher should facilitate a student discussion about what they learned. Each group should read their textbook passage aloud. Ask the students: based on the primary sources that you studied today, why was it difficult for Southerners to change after the Civil War during Reconstruction?

Assessment:

The teacher should informally evaluate student understanding by monitoring the groups as they work on writing their textbook passages. Once the students have completed their textbook passages, the teacher should facilitate a classroom discussion about their findings. Each group will have their members present and read aloud their textbook passage. The teacher may choose to collect the textbook passages and formally evaluate them.

Extension:

After the groups have written and revised their textbook passages, the students will then create an interactive online textbook entry entitled “Life in the South after the Civil War.” Working individually or in pairs, students will use publishing software or webpage generating software to

create an interactive textbook entry. Students will be encouraged to use historically accurate and appropriate resources such as photographs, paintings, primary source excerpts, and music. Students may provide hot links to other websites for more information. The students will share their online textbook entries with their classmates. The teacher will create a grading rubric in order to evaluate the interactive textbook entries.