

Reconstruction and the African American Legacy

Lesson plans for primary sources at the Tennessee State Library & Archives

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Grade Level: 8th grade

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Visit: <https://sos.tn.gov/tsla/education> for additional lesson plans.



Introduction: Through Reconstruction, the federal government reorganizes the rebellious Southern states in preparation for readmitting them to the Union after the Civil War. Reconstruction brought significant changes to the lives of both blacks and whites in the Southern states. In this lesson, students will analyze the character and lasting consequences of Reconstruction.

Guiding Question:

- Did life change for the better or for worse for African Americans living in Tennessee during the Reconstruction Era?

Learning Objectives: In the course of the lesson, students will:

- Analyze and interpret primary sources
- Analyze the character and lasting consequences of Reconstruction
- Cite textual evidence and draw inferences in order to support claims in writing
- Compare and contrast constitutional rights from 1870 and present day
- Write an argument essay citing evidence to support whether Reconstruction changed life for the better or for the worse for African Americans living in Tennessee

Curriculum Standards:

- 8.68-** Explain the significance of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution. (E, H, P, T)
- 8.70-** Identify the significance of the Tennessee Constitution of 1870, including the right of all men to vote and the establishment of a poll tax. (H, P, T, TCA)
- 8.72-** Explain the restrictions placed on the rights and opportunities of freedmen, including racial segregation, black codes, and the efforts of the Freedmen's Bureau to address the problems confronting newly freed slaves. (C, H, P, T)
- 8.73-** Trace the rise of the Ku Klux Klan and vigilante justice in the South and in Tennessee, including the role of Governor William Brownlow. (C, H, P, T)
- 8.74-** Explain the roles carpetbaggers and scalawags played during Reconstruction. (C, E, G, H, P)

Materials Needed:

- TSLA website
- Student textbook for reference if needed
- Computers for students
- DBQ

Background for Teacher:

["Reconstruction"](#)

Author: Robert Tracy McKenzie

Source Location: [Tennessee Encyclopedia of History & Culture](#)

["Reconstruction and the African American Legacy in Tennessee"](#)

Source Location: [Tennessee State Library & Archives website](#)

*All articles can be used for follow-up student notes (Cornell, worksheets, guided notes, etc.) at teacher's discretion.

Lesson Activities:

Introductory Activity

Students will work in pairs for the following activity:

Each pair will be given a set of Lego's and asked to construct a structure (using all of their blocks) of their own design. Then, each pair will be asked to draw their design on a sheet of paper. The teacher will collect the drawings and at random, pass a drawing out to each pair. Students will be given a set amount of time, as determined by the teacher, (the shorter the time limit, the greater the pressure) to take apart their original structure and create the structure in the drawing they were given. Once time is called, conduct a whole group discussion with the following questions...

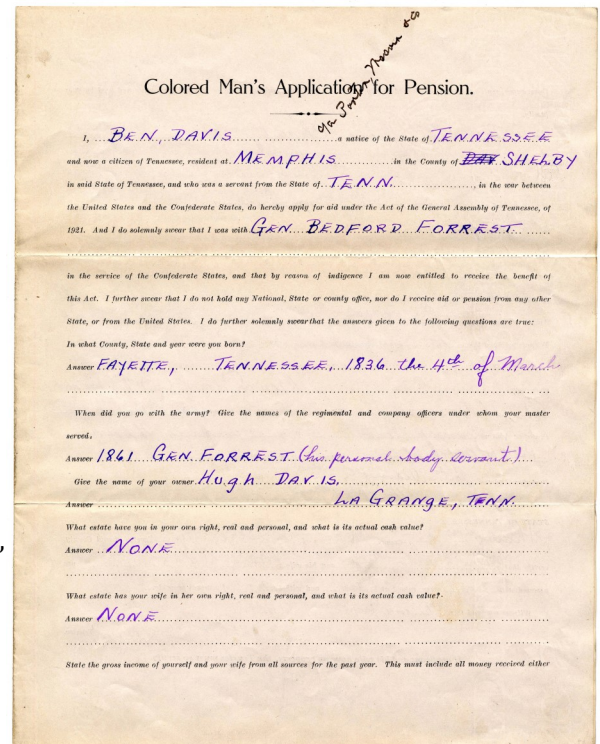
- What successes occurred throughout this activity for you and your partner?
- What difficulties/challenges did you have in building the new structure?
- What caused you the most frustration?
- What could you have done differently to decrease your frustration, change the outcome?
- How can you connect this activity to life in the United States following the Civil War?

This should lead into further discussion of the Civil War leading into the Reconstruction era and how the activity they just completed connects to the reconstruction of the South.

Whole Group:

As a whole group, read the informational text from the Tennessee State Library and Archives called, ["Reconstruction and the African American Legacy in Tennessee."](#) This piece would make for an excellent close read. Through the reading, seek to answer the following:

Describe what life was like for African Americans living in Tennessee following the Civil War? Be sure to cite evidence from the text to support your claims.



Lesson Activities Continued:

Modeling:

Model a primary source analysis of the following document, allowing students an opportunity to better understand the process of analyzing primary sources found throughout the DBQ they will complete either independently or in a small group/pair.

[Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction \(1863\) by Abraham Lincoln](#)

[Worksheet for Analysis of a Written Document](#) (for teacher use)

Independent or Small Group Activities/Assessments:

Students will work independently or in small groups/pairs to complete the following DBQ, exploring the Reconstruction era across the South, with an emphasis on documents pertaining to Tennessee.

Document-based Question (DBQ):

Reconstruction and the African American Legacy

Directions: Use your knowledge of the time period, in addition to the sources provided, to complete the following questions/activities. At the conclusion of the DBQ, you will be asked to write an argument essay on the following prompt. Be sure to cite evidence from multiple sources to support your claims.

Prompt: Did life change for better or for worse for African Americans living in Tennessee during the Reconstruction Era?

Be sure to cite evidence from multiple sources to support your claims.

Lesson Activities Continued:

Documents A-C

Document A- Amendment 13 (1865):

Section 1. Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

Document B- Amendment 14 (1868):

Section 1. All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

Document C- Amendment 15 (1870):

Section. 1. The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

(United States Constitution)

1. Explain the significance of the 13th Amendment?
2. Explain the significance of the 14th Amendment?
3. Explain the significance of the 15th Amendment?

Lesson Activities Continued:

Document D

[Document D](#) is the Civil Rights Act of 1866.

Your job is to write a summary of the act, focusing on the rights and freedoms it ensured.

Document E

[Document E](#) is an illustration of the Freedmen's Bureau. Don't forget to read the historical note!

Your task for Document E is to complete the following analysis of the document. You will need to print your analysis once completed. Be sure to click on the questions and follow the prompts.

[Library of Congress Primary Source Analysis Tool](#)

Document F

[Document F](#) is a political cartoon. Don't forget to read the historical note!

Your task for Document F is to complete the following political cartoon analysis (PAGE 1 ONLY). Record your answers on your own paper, attaching them to your DBQ packet.

[Worksheet for Analysis of a Political Cartoon](#)

Document G

[Document G](#) will teach students about laws referred to as, "Black Codes," that were put into place to restrict the rights of free African American men and women throughout the South.

Your task for these documents is to list at least 8 ways in which "Black Codes" restricted the freedom of freedmen throughout the South.

Document H

[Document H](#) is sheet music that provides context in regards to the movement of carpetbaggers from the North to the South. As always, be sure to read the description and historic note.

[Complete the worksheet for analysis of sheet music](#) for Document H.

Lesson Activities Continued:

Document I

[Document I](#) is Tennessee's 1870 Tennessee Constitution.

Explore the 1870 Constitution (switch to "text" view) and read the historic note and answer the following questions.

1. What was the most significant change that occurred with the ratification of the 1870 Tennessee Constitution?
2. In what section of the constitution does the change above appear?
3. Compare and contrast the 1870 Tennessee Constitution with what you know about your constitutional rights today. List two similarities and two differences in the space provided.

Similarities:

Differences:

Lesson Activities Continued:

Document J

[Document J](#) will take you to the Tennessee State Library and Archives exhibit titled, *"This Honorable Body": African American Legislators in 19th Century Tennessee* and its section on "Jim Crow and Disfranchisement of Southern Blacks." Here, you will read about Jim Crow laws throughout the south and gain perspective on what African Americans faced during this time in history.

Using the information from Document J, put yourself in the shoes of an African American living under Jim Crow laws. Now, write a diary/journal entry, depicting what life is like for you during this tumultuous time.

Document K

[Document K](#) will lead you to the Tennessee State Library and Archives exhibit titled, *"This Honorable Body": African American Legislators in 19th Century Tennessee*. Feel free to explore this site, as it provides an exorbitant amount of information connected to the Reconstruction era. However, you will focus your attention on reading the introduction on the "Home" page and progressing to the "Biographies" section.

Your job is to locate *three* biographies of African American legislators to read. You will then choose one legislator from the three that you would like to create a children's book in honor of. Your children's book should focus on the life and legacy of the legislator you have chosen.

Argument Writing

You have now reached the final task for this DBQ. Write an argument essay on the following prompt. Be sure to cite evidence from multiple sources to support your claims. Your writing will be graded using the [state rubric for argument writing](#).

Prompt: Did life change for better or for worse for African Americans living in Tennessee during the Reconstruction Era?