Reconstruction

The term *reconstruction* means to repair or rebuild something that has been damaged or destroyed. In the history of the United States, the term Reconstruction refers to the time after the Civil War in which the country was rebuilt. This rebuilding involved physical things that were destroyed such as railroads, houses, cities, and farms. The greatest challenges during the Reconstruction era however involved the social and political rebuilding that needed to take place. What should happen to the former Confederates? How should the North and the South be reunited? How should the wounds of secession and the war be healed? What should happen to the four million formerly enslaved people called freedmen? Finally, what would freedom mean for the freedmen?

You will be spending the next few weeks exploring the last question. This exploration will take place by analyzing primary and secondary sources on the experiences of freedmen. You will look at artistic depictions of events and political cartoons and read the words of freedmen. You will also read portions from amendments to the Constitution.

By analyzing these sources you will realize that Reconstruction was a complicated time with both positive and negative experiences for freedmen. After analyzing these sources and discussing them with your classmates you will need to answer the following document based question (also called a DBQ):

**What were the effects of Reconstruction Amendments on freedmen?**
Reconstruction Timeline

1865  The Civil War ends.

Republican President Abraham Lincoln is assassinated. Democrat Andrew Johnson becomes president.

13th Amendment to the Constitution passes.

Congress creates the Freedmen’s Bureau to help freed men and women transition from slavery.

1866  Civil Rights Act of 1866 allows African Americans to own property and to be treated equally in court.

The Ku Klux Klan is founded.

1867  Radical Republicans take over the United States government.

1868  14th Amendment to the Constitution passes. First African American elected to United States Congress.

1869  Ulysses S. Grant is elected president.

1870  15th Amendment to the Constitution passes.

1871  Congress passes the Ku Klux Klan Act of 1871 in response to reports of widespread violence in the South.

1872  The Freedmen’s Bureau ends.

1874  Democrats take control of the United States Congress. Radical Republicans are no longer in power.

1877  Rutherford B. Hayes is elected President and officially ends Reconstruction. Hayes pulls all remaining Northern troops out of the Southern states.
Emancipation, 1865 by Thomas Nast
DOCUMENTS B-D (Modified):

The 13th, 14th and 15th amendments to the United States Constitution are sometimes called the “Reconstruction Amendments.” They were passed in order to abolish slavery and to establish the rights of former slaves.

DOCUMENT B: 13th Amendment- Ratified December 6, 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 C: 14th Amendment- Ratified July 9, 1868

Section 1. All persons born or naturalized in the United States . . . 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 D: 15th Amendment- Ratified February 3, 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.

Vocabulary:

- involuntary servitude: being forced to work against your will
- jurisdiction: legal control
- naturalized: made citizens
- abridge: limit or take away
- immunities: rights
- due process: legal procedure that must be the same
Sojourner Truth - 14th Amendment Speech, 1867 (Modified)

My friends, I am rejoiced that you are glad, but I don't know how you will feel when I get through. I come from another field—the country of the slave. They have got their liberty so much good luck to have slavery partly destroyed; not entirely. I want it root and branch destroyed. Then we will all be free indeed… There is a great stir about colored men getting their rights, but not a word about the colored women; and if colored men get their rights, and not colored women theirs, you see the colored men will be masters over the women, and it will be just as bad as it was before. So I am for keeping the thing going while things are stirring; because if we wait till it is still, it will take a great while to get it going again… I want women to have their rights. In the courts women have no right, no voice; nobody speaks for them…

I am above eighty years old; it is about time for me to be going. I have been forty years a slave and forty years free, and would be here forty years more to have equal rights for all. I suppose I am kept here because something remains for me to do; I suppose I am yet to help to break the chain. I have done a great deal of work; as much as a man, but did not get so much pay. I used to work in the field and bind grain, keeping up with the cradler; but men doing no more, got twice as much pay; so with the German women. They work in the field and do as much work, but do not get the pay. We do as much, we eat as much, we want as much. I suppose I am about the only colored woman that goes about to speak for the rights of the colored women. I want to keep the thing stirring, now that the ice is cracked. What we want is a little money…
DOCUMENT F: (Modified)

Before the Civil War, Southern states outlawed the teaching of reading and writing to slaves. In 1865 the United States government created the Freedmen’s Bureau to help former slaves in Southern states. The quote below is an excerpt from a *Joint Report on Reconstruction* by Sidney Andrews, a Northern white man, to the United States government in 1866.

Many of the negroes . . . common plantation negroes, and day laborers in the towns and villages, were supporting little schools themselves. Everywhere I found them hoping to get their children into schools. I often noticed that workers in stores and men working in warehouses, and cart drivers on the streets, had spelling books with them, and were studying them during the time they were not working. Go outside any large town in the South, and walk among the negro housing, and you will see children and in many cases grown negroes, sitting in the sun alongside their cabins studying.

DOCUMENT G:

An Ex-Slave seeks a son sold away during slavery, 1865

…I’m looking for information about my two sons, Sidney and Harrison who belonged to Mr. Carmen, who formerly lived in Shelbyville, Bedford county Tennessee. And were sold to Goodbar, a trader, and when last heard from were in Montgomery, Alabama.

The oldest son is about 25 years of age. My name is Sidney. When they left I belonged to a man named Elliott. Information of them will be thankfully received by myself and their mother, whose name is Eliza Cannon.

Please address information to Colored Tennessean [newspaper], Box 1150.

SYDNEY ELLIOTT.
In the years following the Civil War, many Southern states and cities passed Black Codes. These laws laid out what freed blacks were and were not allowed to do. The document below, passed July 3, 1865, is a Black Code from Opelousas, Louisiana.

SECTION 1. No negro shall be allowed to come within the limits of the town of Opelousas without special permission from his employers.

SECTION 3. No negro shall be permitted to rent or keep a house within the limits of the town under any circumstances.

SECTION 4. No negro shall reside within the limits of the town of Opelousas who is not in the regular service of some white person or former owner.

SECTION 5. No public meetings of negroes shall be allowed within the limits of the town of Opelousas under any circumstances without the permission of the mayor or president of the board of police. This, however, does not prevent the freedmen from attending the usual church services.

SECTION 7. No freedman who is not in the military service shall be allowed to carry firearms, or any kind of weapons, within the limits of the town of Opelousas without the special permission of his employer, in writing, and approved by the mayor or president of the board of police.

SECTION 11. All the foregoing provisions apply to freedmen and freedwomen.

DOCUMENT I: Excerpt from Texas “Black Codes”

Sec 2. …that nothing herein shall be so construed as to repeal any law prohibiting the intermarriage of the white and black races, nor to permit any other than white men to serve on juries, hold office, or vote at any election, State, county or municipal;

Approved November 10, 1866.
Eleventh Texas Legislature, TEXAS BLACK CODE (1866)
Alfred R. Waud, “The First Vote”, in Harper’s Weekly
November 16, 1867
The freedmen, who wanted autonomy and independence, refused to sign contracts that required gang labor, and sharecropping emerged as a compromise. Landowners divided plantations into 20 to 50 acre plots suitable for farming by a single family. In exchange for the use of land, a cabin, and supplies, sharecroppers agreed to raise a cash crop and give a portion, usually 50%, of the crop to their landlord. Landowners extended credit to sharecroppers to buy goods and charged high interest rates, sometimes as high as 70% a year, creating a system of economic dependence and poverty.

As a symbol of their newly won independence, freedmen had teams of mule grad their former slave cabins away front he slave quarters into their own fields. Wives and daughters sharply reduced their labor in the fields and instead devoted more time to home and childcare.
Excerpt from Senate Report 693, 46th Congress, 1880. Former slave Henry Adams testified before the U.S. Senate 15 years after the Emancipation Proclamation about the early days of his freedom, describing white planters’ unfair labor practices.

I told him I thought that every man, when he was free, could have his rights and protect themselves. He said, "The colored people could never protect themselves among the white people. So you had all better stay with the white people who raised you and make contracts with them to work by the year for one-fifth of all you make. And next year you can get one-third, and the next you maybe work for one-half you make. We have contracts for you all to sign, to work for one-twentieth you make from now until the crop is ended, and then next year you all can make another crop and get more of it."

I told him I would not sign anything. I said, "I might sign to be killed. I believe the white people is trying to fool us." But he said again, "Sign this contract so I can take it to the Yankees and have it recorded." All our colored people signed it but myself and a boy named Samuel Jefferson. All who lived on the place was about sixty, young and old.

On the day after all had signed the contracts, we went to cutting oats. I asked the boss, "Could we get any of the oats?" He said, "No; the oats were made before you were free." After that he told us to get timber to build a sugar-mill to make molasses. We did so. On the 13th day of July 1865 we started to pull fodder. I asked the boss would he make a bargain to give us half of all the fodder we would pull. He said we may pull two or three stacks and then we could have all the other. I told him we wanted half, so if we only pulled two or three stacks we would get half of that. He said, "All right." We got that and part of the corn we made. We made five bales of cotton but we did not get a pound of that. We made two or three hundred gallons of molasses and only got what we could eat. We made about eight-hundred bushel of potatoes; we got a few to eat. We split rails three or four weeks and got not a cent for that.
The 15th Amendment Celebrated May 19, 1870
By Thomas Kelly after James C. Beard

Key
The corresponding text for the five images at the bottom of the document reads:

A. “Education will prove the equality of the races.”

B. “Liberty protects the marriage altar.”

C. “The ballot box is open to us.”

D. “Our representative sits in the national legislature.”

E. “The holy ordinances of religion are free.”
During Reconstruction, thousands of African Americans were elected to local and state governments throughout the Southern states. In addition, 17 African Americans were elected to the United States Congress from Southern states between 1870 and 1877. Here are photographs of 6 of these 17 elected officials.
“Beginning in the 1890s, southern states enacted literacy tests, poll taxes, elaborate registration systems, and eventually whites-only Democratic Party primaries to exclude black voters. The laws proved very effective. In Mississippi, fewer than 9,000 of the 147,000 voting-age African Americans were registered after 1890. In Louisiana, where more than 130,000 black voters had been registered in 1896, the number had plummeted to 1,342 by 1904.” - Source: Smithsonian

DOCUMENT Q: Louisiana Poll Tax Receipt, 1918

DOCUMENT R: Alabama Literacy Test Sample Questions, 1965

1. Which of the following is a right guaranteed by the Bill of Rights? 
   _____ Public Education  _____ Employment  
   _____ Trial by Jury  _____ Voting

2. The federal census of population is taken every five years. 
   _____ True  _____ False

3. If a person is indicted for a crime, name two rights which he has. 
   ____________________________________________

4. A U.S. senator elected at the general election in November takes office the following year on what date? 
   ____________________________________________

5. A President elected at the general election in November takes office the following year on what date? 
   ____________________________________________
Sam Scott, a freedman from Mississippi, testifies to Congress about the Ku Klux Klan’s intimidation.

Dick Sprauls said that I would get a bullet through me if I voted the Republican ticket; or I would be driven home without anything to eat and be liable to be bushwacked [ambushed]. I voted the Democratic ticket only to save the lives of myself and my family. My having voted the Democratic ticket against my feelings and sense of right, so worried me last night that I could not sleep.

Harper’s Weekly, October 21, 1876

Caption: “Of Course he wants to vote the Democratic ticket.”
Frederick Douglass comments on the problems faced by freedmen and women after the Civil War in a speech at the 1876 Republican Party Convention

You say that you have emancipated us. You have and I thank you for it. But what is your emancipation?

… [W]hen you turned us loose, you gave us no acres [land]. You turned us loose to the sky, to the storm, to the whirlwind, and worst of all, you turned us loose to the wrath of our infuriated masters.