

Lesson Plan

Analyzing Amendments

Book: *Reconstruction*

Series: The Civil War

Level: Voyager

Objective

To help students use primary and secondary sources to analyze the text and implications of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the US Constitution.

Supplies

- *Reconstruction* book
- “Landmark Legislation” article from the US Senate:
<https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/generic/CivilWarAmendments.htm>
- Full text of the Constitution of the United States:
https://www.senate.gov/civics/constitution_item/constitution.htm
- Landmark Legislation Guided Reading Assignment (attached)
- Paper and pencils

Before the Activity

Read *Reconstruction* as a class, or assign it to students to read on their own. Divide students into groups of three or four. Print enough copies of the Landmark Legislation GRA for each group to have one set of questions. Cut the GRAs so the question sets are on separate slips.

Activity

During the period after the Civil War, the United States added three amendments to the US Constitution. Have students gather in their groups, assigning each group one amendment to study. First, students should read the section of the “Landmark Legislation” article about their amendment. Next, they should use the full text of the US Constitution to read the text of the amendment itself. Finally, students should write answers to the questions on the GRA on a separate sheet of paper.

Evaluation

Use the attached answer key to give each group up to 7 points.

Standards

This lesson may be used to address the Common Core State Standards’ reading standards for informational texts, grade 7 (RI 7.1, 7.4), and the National Council for Social Studies’ standard 2.

Landmark Legislation

Thirteenth Amendment

1. On what date was this amendment ratified? (1 point)
2. According to Section 1, which two practices does this amendment abolish? (1 point)
3. According to Section 1, in what areas does this amendment apply? (1 point)
4. How was this different than previous proclamations related to emancipation? (2 points)
5. According to Section 1, what one exception does this amendment make? (2 points)

Landmark Legislation

Fourteenth Amendment

1. On what date was this amendment ratified? (1 point)
2. According to Section 1, what people are considered citizens of the United States? (1 point)
3. What right does Section 2 protect, and for which group of people does it specify that this right cannot be denied? (2 points)
4. According to Section 3, what people are not allowed to hold civil or military office? (1 point)
5. According to Section 4, what debts will the state and national government pay? Which debts will the government not pay? (2 points)

Landmark Legislation

Fifteenth Amendment

1. On what date was this amendment ratified? (1 point)
2. According to Section 1, what right does this amendment protect? (1 point)
3. Section 1 specifies that this right cannot be denied “on account of” three things. What are these three things? And to which levels of government do these requirements apply? (2 points)
4. What loopholes did this amendment’s wording create? (2 points)
5. What are two examples of ways states took advantage of these loopholes? (1 point)

Landmark Legislation **Answer Key**

Thirteenth Amendment

1. On what date was this amendment ratified? (1 point)

December 6, 1865

2. According to Section 1, which two practices does this amendment abolish? (1 point)

It says “neither slavery nor involuntary servitude” will be permitted.

3. According to Section 1, in what areas does this amendment apply? (1 point)

It applies in all US states, as well as in “any place subject to their jurisdiction,” or control.

4. How was this different than previous proclamations related to emancipation? (2 points)

Previous legislation and proclamations only emancipated enslaved people in certain states or in areas rebelling against the Union.

5. According to Section 1, what one exception does this amendment make? (2 points)

It says, “except as a punishment for crime” when someone has “been duly convicted.”

Fourteenth Amendment

1. On what date was this amendment ratified? (1 point)

July 9, 1868

2. According to Section 1, what people are considered citizens of the United States? (1 point)

“All persons born or naturalized in the United States,” including formerly enslaved people

3. What right does Section 2 protect, and for which group of people does it specify that this right cannot be denied? (2 points)

This section protects the right to vote for any male citizens who are 21 years old or older.

4. According to Section 3, what people are not allowed to hold civil or military office? (1 point)

Anyone who “engaged in insurrection or rebellion” against the United States or who gave “aid or comfort” to people who did

5. According to Section 4, what debts will the state and national government pay? Which debts will the government not pay? (2 points)

Debts related to ending the rebellion “shall not be questioned.” However, debts for helping the rebellion or as a result of freeing enslaved people will not be paid.

Fifteenth Amendment

1. On what date was this amendment ratified? (1 point)

February 3, 1870

2. According to Section 1, what right does this amendment protect? (1 point)

It protects the right to vote.

3. Section 1 specifies that this right cannot be denied “on account of” three things. What are these three things? And to which levels of government do these requirements apply? (2 points)

The right cannot be denied “on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”

These conditions apply to both the federal government and the state governments.

4. What loopholes did this amendment’s wording create? (2 points)

The amendment’s wording left it possible for states to create requirements for voters that were based on factors other than race but which nonetheless targeted black voters.

5. What are two examples of ways states took advantage of these loopholes? (1 point)

Some states required all voters to pay poll taxes or take literacy tests.