



TIMELINE ACTIVITY: RECONSTRUCTION

Middle School (6-8)

OVERVIEW:

This timeline is adaptable and can be used as an introduction, a review, or at any time throughout a Reconstruction lesson/unit. Cards can be printed and ordered to quickly give students an overview of important Reconstruction events. For students who need an extension or will be visiting Arlington National Cemetery, an optional set of Freedman's Village timeline cards can also be printed and used.

Teachers are encouraged to use the ideas and questions that would best support their learners. If students have never made a timeline before, Activity 1 would be the most relevant. If students are familiar with timelines, Activities 2 or 3 would provide them with more of a challenge. Similarly, do not expect to use all of the questions. It is recommended that you focus on one category of questions and choose 2-3 to discuss deeply or ask 1-2 a day as a warm-up or review.

Estimated time: 1 class period, 15-30 minutes depending on the activity chosen

STANDARDS:

Social studies standards vary by state. This lesson can be used to teach the following standards and similar wording may be found in your state standards.

National Council for the Social Studies Standards

- NCSS.D2.His.1.6-8: Analyze connections among events and developments in broader historical contexts.
- NCSS.D2.His.3.6-8: Use questions generated about individuals and groups to analyze why they, and the developments they shaped, are seen as historically significant.
- NCSS.D2.His.14.6-8: Explain multiple causes and effects of events and developments in the past.
- NCSS.D2.His.15.6-8: Evaluate the relative influence of various causes of events and developments in the past.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Students will explain the relationships between events leading up to, during, and/or after the period of Reconstruction, including causes, effects, and the possibility of different outcomes.
- Students will organize events related to Reconstruction on a timeline.

RESOURCES NEEDED:



- Whole class: 1 copy of Reconstruction Timeline_Middle School
- Small group: 1 copy of Reconstruction Timeline_Middle School per group
- Optional: Copy/copies of Freedman's Village Timeline_High School, if using

IDEAS FOR DISPLAYING TIMELINES:

- Flat on Floor: spread the years out evenly across a large floor area. Students put events in order on timeline. Events can partially overlap.
- On Wall: Use a large wall to display the timeline. Using tape or another material that adheres to your wall, attach the years equal distances apart. Students post events in order on the timeline. Events should not overlap but can be layered above/below each other as needed. String can be used to indicate the position of events on the timeline.
- On Clothesline: String a clothesline from one end of the room to the other. Attach years to clothespins equal distances apart. Students use additional clothespins to attach events.

ACTIVITY 1: BUILD THE TIMELINE

- Lead a class discussion using the following questions:
 - What is a timeline?
 - Why are timelines useful for historians?
 - Events are caused and influenced by other events. Timelines allow us to see these connections and influences. Seeing events in order can also help us understand that people made decisions with limited information - they didn't know what would happen in two years or five years; they didn't know how other peoples or countries would react to events; they didn't know how things would turn out.
- Build the timeline:
 - Pass out cards to students and have them place the events in order on the timeline.
- Discussion:
 - Decide what you want to highlight from the timeline.
 - Use relevant questions from the Timeline Exploration section at the end of this lesson plan to discuss the timeline and events with your students.

ACTIVITY 2: TIMELINE WITHOUT DATES

- The PowerPoint slides for the Timeline are editable and the dates may be removed. While the dates on the event cards make the timeline easy to build, removing the dates and using only a few events would require students to work cooperatively and focus on the relationships between different events as they try to order them.



- Small groups of 4-5 students would give students more of an opportunity to voice their ideas and defend their thinking.
- Whole class: review the timeline events in order and discuss the relationships between the events.
- **Suggested Cards to use:**
 - Emancipation Proclamation (1)
 - 13th Amendment Passes (2)
 - Surrender at Appomattox (5)
 - Lincoln Assassinated (6)
 - Black Codes (8)
 - Civil Rights Act of 1866 (9)
 - Congress's Reconstruction (10)
 - Violence and Intimidation Increase (11)
 - Ratification of 14th Amendment (13)
 - Democrats Win the House (18)
- **Possible Questions to Ask:**
 - What events were easy to place in relationship to each other? What made them easy to place?
 - Why is [specific event] included in the timeline?
 - What events were difficult to place? Why were they difficult?

ACTIVITY 3: CATEGORIZE EVENTS

- Timelines create an obvious way to show relationship between events, as they're organized sequentially. However, finding alternate ways to sort the events requires students to think about them differently.
- Alternate ways to sort timeline events could include:
 - Helpful/harmful
 - Actions/reactions
 - Impact on society (high to low)
 - All these alternate ways to categorize are up to interpretation as there is no clear right or wrong. These categories could be used to help students recognize that history is more than factual memorization.
- Small group: Students work in groups of 4-5 to discuss and sort events according to the categories you have chosen.
- Whole class: After sorting events, discuss as a class where groups placed different events. Have groups explain their justification for their sort.
- **Possible Questions to Ask:**
 - Where did you put [specific event]?



- Why did you sort it that way?
- Were there other places you considered placing it?

FREEDMAN'S VILLAGE TIMELINE (OPTIONAL)

- These timeline cards have a wide bar that identifies their connection to Freedman's Village.
- You may choose to have students sort the Village Timeline cards at the same time as the Reconstruction cards or after they have arranged the Reconstruction cards.
- The cards can be incorporated in any of the activity ideas outlined above.
- **Possible Questions to Ask:**
 - How do the Village cards reflect what was happening in the U.S. during Reconstruction?
 - How do they highlight differences that existed in individual locations?
 - How would [specific event] have impacted the people living at Freedman's Village?
 - Freedman's Village was located next to Fort Myer, a military fort, and was under military control during part of its existence. While this caused some problems for residents, are there events on the timeline that indicate residents might have benefited from the military presence?
 - How did the end of Reconstruction influence the Freedman's Village events after 1875? Are there any events that surprised you?

TIMELINE EXPLORATION:

- **Explore the timeline:**
 - Do you notice any patterns in where events are on the timeline?
 - Do you see any themes in the events of the timeline?
 - Are there any events that you think might not belong on a timeline of Reconstruction?
 - Why do you think it doesn't belong?
 - What's a justification for including it?
 - Are there any important events from Reconstruction that weren't included that you think should have been?
 - What event(s) would you add to the timeline?
 - Choose an event. Why was this included in the timeline?
 - What other events were happening between 1863-1875 (or 1900, if using Freedman's Village cards)? (What was invented, what was happening in American life, what conflicts were other countries involved in?)
 - How would the timeline look different if these events were included?
- **Explore relationships:**
 - Choose two events from the timeline. Is there a relationship between these events?
 - If so, what is it? If not, why are they both included in this timeline?
 - How does the timeline for Reconstruction compare to other periods of U.S. history that we've studied?



- Which events on the timeline still affect us in the US today?
- What's the message of the timeline?
 - What theme could describe the timeline?
 - What title/subtitle could we give this timeline?
- Which events are related to primary sources we've studied?
- **Explore alternate history:**
 - Choose one event from the timeline. How would history be different if this event hadn't happened?
 - Choose one event from the timeline and change it. How would this have affected future events? (Events that occur later on the timeline.)
 - Knowing what happened during and after Reconstruction, if you could time travel back to this period, what advice would you give to people?
 - Would you give the same advice to everyone or have different advice for residents of different races or states?
 - What was a key historical mistake or error in the timeline?
 - How could it have been fixed?
 - How would that have changed history and even the present?
 - What decision could a leader have made differently that would have created a better outcome?
 - Would the outcome have been better for everyone or only some people?

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND FOR TEACHERS:

RECONSTRUCTION:

The Civil War (1861-1865) fundamentally changed the United States. An estimated 750,000 people died, more than four million enslaved people gained freedom, and the economies of the Southern states collapsed. With the end of the war, the United States embarked on a program of Reconstruction to unify and politically rebuild the nation, integrate freed blacks, and rebuild and expand the agrarian Southern economy.

This section provides an overview of key timeline events (*italicized in parenthesis*) and themes for use in student discussion. An overview of the Reconstruction period by historian Eric Foner is available from the National Park Service: <https://www.nps.gov/articles/reconstruction.htm>



Defining Reconstruction:

After the surrender of the Confederacy and President Abraham Lincoln's assassination in April 1865, the task of rebuilding a divided nation began with unanswered questions: How would 4 million freed people be integrated politically, socially, culturally, and economically? What should be the terms for readmittance of states that had seceded? Who would set readmittance terms and a Reconstruction agenda—Congress or the President?

In May 1865, President Andrew Johnson set readmittance terms for states that had seceded (*Johnson's Reconstruction*). His pardon of white Southerners restored political rights and property to them without requiring civil rights and legal protections for African Americans. In Congress, Radical Republicans — a faction of the Republican Party that supported the political, economic and social integration of black Americans — disagreed with Johnson's terms and believed Congress should control Reconstruction (*Reconstruction Bills Passed*).

When Johnson vetoed the Civil Rights Act of 1866, he lost the support of moderate Republicans (*Civil Rights Act of 1866*). For the remainder of Johnson's presidency, he and Congress were at odds. Johnson vetoed legislation related to civil rights and Reconstruction, while Congress overrode those vetoes with two-thirds majorities in both houses (*Freedman's Bureau Bill Passed, Reconstruction Bills Passed*). In 1868, the disagreements and acrimony came to a head, and the U.S. House of Representatives impeached Johnson. As the first president to be impeached, Johnson was saved from removal from office by just one vote in the Senate (*Johnson Impeached*). Ulysses S. Grant was elected president on November 3, 1868.

Increased Rights for and Opposition to Black Americans

With Republicans in charge of the legislative agenda, rights and opportunities for black American expanded (*Emancipation Proclamation, 13th Amendment Passed, Freedmen's Bureau Created, Civil Rights Act of 1866, Freedmen's Bureau Bill Passed, Ratification of 14th Amendment, Ratification of 15th Amendment, Civil Rights Act of 1875*). Black men gained the right to vote, and in 1870 the first black American men won elected political offices. During Reconstruction, hundreds of black men served in state legislatures and local offices. 16 African American men also served in Congress, including Rep. Joseph Rainey (South Carolina), Sen. Hiram Revels (Mississippi), and Sen. Blanche K. Bruce (Mississippi). While Revels was the first African American senator, Bruce, a former slave, was the first African American senator elected to a full senate term. In 1870, when Mississippi was readmitted to the Union, Revels was elected to fill a senate seat that expired in 1871.

Even as black Americans' rights and opportunities expanded, opposition to civil rights increased, especially from white southerners. Before Congress set Reconstruction terms, Southern states passed Black Codes: restrictive laws that specifically targeted the rights of African Americans (*Black Codes*). As African Americans secured voting rights, Southern whites formed violent vigilante groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), to intimidate blacks and Republicans and increase white political, social, and



economic power (*Violence and Intimidation Increased*). Federal responses to Southern racism and violence were ineffective or temporary (*Enforcement Acts*).

The political balance both in the South and in Congress shifted as former Confederate states were readmitted to the Union, gaining seats and votes in Congress, and as Southern whites regained the political power that had briefly been shared with African Americans (*Freedmen's Bureau Shut Down, Democrats Win the House*). Federal oversight of Southern politics and enforcement of federal laws decreased.

Reconstruction's Failures and Impact

With his election in 1876, Republican President Rutherford B. Hayes promised to end federal intervention in the South, and Reconstruction officially ended in 1877. New legislation ceased and previously passed legislation was not enforced (*Civil Rights Act of 1875*).

Ultimately, Reconstruction failed to integrate African Americans into society and perpetuated societal and legal racial inequalities. Southern states implemented laws that allowed forced servitude (such as peonage and convict leasing), established racial segregation ("Jim Crow" laws), and relegated freed blacks to low-wage agricultural and domestic work. Southern whites also used non-legal measures such as poll taxes, literacy tests, violence and intimidation to disenfranchise most African Americans in the South until the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

FREEDMAN'S VILLAGE:

During the Civil War and directly afterward, the population of newly freed blacks in and around Washington, D.C. increased dramatically. These newly freed people were called "freedmen." Among the difficulties faced by these displaced refugees, the needs for housing, food, and employment were primary. To address these needs, the federal government established camps throughout the city. However, overcrowding and poor sanitation made these camps difficult places to live.

Arlington Plantation, the home of Confederate General Robert E. Lee and owned by his wife Mary Custis Lee, was seized by the U.S. Army shortly after Virginia seceded and the Lee family had fled south. The high ground overlooking Washington D.C. was an important strategic position for the military to hold. In 1864, part of the estate became a military cemetery.

By 1863, government officials were looking for a site for a new contraband camp and ultimately choose a portion of the Arlington Estate. Unlike other camps of the time, this Freedman's Village eventually became a more permanent settlement for formerly enslaved persons. While residents were encouraged to learn skills, find work, and only live in the village temporarily, some chose to remain there for years. Noted abolitionist and former slave Sojourner Truth lived in the village for a year. She helped educate and train residents. Over the years, the population of the village fluctuated between 1,000 and 3,000 residents. Residents established schools, churches, a hospital and a home for the aged and infirm. The



village provided many individuals with a chance to acquire necessary skills and experiences as they constructed lives outside of slavery.

However, the village was not free of problems. Without a civil government, the residents were under military rule and then the jurisdiction of the federal government's Freedmen's Bureau, established in 1865. Residents were required to work for the federal government or to have another means of employment. The government pressured them to sign work contracts, which many African Americans were reluctant to do, fearing that they were signing their way back into slavery. As early as 1868, the federal government made efforts to close the village and move residents out. However, the village survived until 1887.

In December 1887, the Army informed the residents of the Freedmen's Village at Arlington that they had 90 days to relocate. The deadline lapsed as Major Carpenter, the commanding officer at Fort Myer who was ordered to remove the villagers, called for an investigation that included a survey, a census, and an evaluation of property. As the investigation went on, however, many residents moved away. In 1888, 763 people still lived in the village. In 1890, the remaining 150 families moved, and the Army tore down the remaining buildings. In 1900, Congress appropriated \$75,000 to pay the villagers and settle the debt owed to them. Former residents or their descendants were also paid.

Today, no physical trace of Freedman's Village remains at Arlington National Cemetery, but the community that the residents built did not collapse. Residents used what they learned during their time at the village to form other black communities in the surrounding Arlington area. Freedman's Village remains an example of a community developed to assist newly freed black Americans as they transitioned from slavery to freedom. As such, it represents the lasting legacy of Reconstruction.

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Reconstruction Timeline

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Further Reading:

Speech by Frederick Douglass, given on Decoration Day in Rochester, NY.

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Surrender documents exchanged between Grant and Lee:

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Freedman's Village Timeline

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