Shaping the Constitution
RESOURCES FROM THE LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA AND THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Lesson Plan: Life as a Liberated People

Primary Sources:

Carte-de-Visite: Watch Meeting, December 31, 1862
Cohabitation Record, Augusta County, 1866
Colored People's Celebration Broadside, October 1890

Understanding Goal:

The support systems that slaves developed in the antebellum period underlay the foundation for the African American communities that developed during and after Reconstruction.

Investigative Question:

Why did the newly freed slaves need to build their own communities? Why did they not rely on the government? Why is it important to have a sense of belonging?

Standards Addressed:

Virginia Standards of Learning:

VS.8 The student will demonstrate knowledge of the reconstruction of Virginia following the Civil War by
a) identifying the effects of Reconstruction on life in Virginia;

CE.1 The student will develop the social studies skills citizenship requires, including the ability to
a) examine and interpret primary and secondary source documents;
d) distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information;
e) review information for accuracy, separating fact from opinion;
f) identify a problem and recommend solutions;
g) select and defend positions in writing, discussion, and debate.

VUS.1 The student will demonstrate skills for historical and geographical analysis and responsible citizenship, including the ability to
(h) interpret the significance of excerpts from famous speeches and other documents.

VUS.7 The student will demonstrate knowledge of the Civil War and Reconstruction Era and its importance as a major turning point in American history by
b) analyzing the significance of the Emancipation Proclamation and the principles outlined in Lincoln's Gettysburg Address;

National History Standards
Era 5 – 3b (Grades 9–12) Describe the ways in which African Americans laid foundations for modern black communities during Reconstruction.

Overview:

In this lesson students will begin to explore life for the newly freed slave both during and after Reconstruction. While examining a reproduction of a painting, a broadside, and a legal document, students will begin to understand the hopes and challenges of new-found freedom.

Length of Activity:

One class, or 45–50 minutes of a block class

Materials Needed:
(Copies for all)

- Carte de Visite: Watch Meeting, December 31, 1862 (Project this image for greater detail)
- Cohabitation Record, Augusta County, 1866
- Colored People's Celebration Broadside, October 1890
- Photograph Analysis sheet
- Document Analysis sheet (2 for each student)
- Construction paper, markers, and/or colored pencils

Teacher Actions:
The teacher will want to read the background information on the primary sources at the Library of Virginia's Shaping the Constitution Web site.

1. Preactivity bell ringer: Write the definition for "emancipation" on the board. (According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "1. set free, especially from legal, social, or political restrictions; 2. free from slavery." *Webster's Dictionary* describes it as "being set free from controlling forces".) Ask the students to come up with some modern examples of being emancipated? Students may mention American slaves, Jews in 19th-century Europe, or being released from the control of their parents. Discuss what they have come up with and guide them to the idea of being emancipated once they graduate from high school. Have the class create two columns on a sheet of paper. On one side they will list what about their personal emancipation excites them. What are they looking forward to? On the other side list the things that make them nervous. What are they afraid of? As a class, discuss the lists and create an aggregate list on the board. Continue the discussion with the following questions. What will they need to have and need to know once they are emancipated? Where are they going to live? How will they pay their bills? How will they know the laws, rules, and obligations of living as an adult in their community? Will they need or have support from others once they are emancipated? Who will provide it? What happens if that support vanishes?
2. Pass out the Photograph Analysis sheet and project the image on the screen. Explain that this is a cart de visite, a photograph mounted on thicker card stock and then often traded. This one happens to be a photograph of a painting. Have the students work silently for a few minutes, particularly for the first question. Students can be intimidated by image analysis so it may be beneficial to discuss the sheet as a class.
3. Ask the students to note the date on the card; what is the significance of that date? Draw their attention to the title; what hour are they waiting for? If they are slaves in a "rebelling state" they will not be freed; why then is this date so important to them? Have you ever experienced a moment like this?
4. Hand out or project the Cohabitation Record and the Document Analysis sheet. (http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/written_document_analysis_worksheet.pdf) Ask the students if they know what "cohabitation" means. Why is it important to have your marriage recognized? Did the law recognize the marriage of slaves *before* emancipation? Is this an issue for people today? Are the reasons for recognition the same? What kind of support could a family provide for newly freed African Americans? How are these families similar to or different from your family? Or families you know?
5. Hand out or project the broadside and the Artifact Analysis sheet. Have students complete the analysis sheet while discussing the broadside. What can this tell us about the African American community in Richmond in 1890? This is 27 years after the Emancipation Proclamation went

into effect; why is it still being celebrated? Why would both the governor of Virginia and the mayor of Richmond wish to speak at this event?

Analysis:

Now that the students have had a glimpse into the lives of newly freed slaves, ask them what challenges they faced? Would everyone welcome the freedom? Why or why not? Having too much freedom can be a scary thing. Have the students ever had so many choices they could not make up their minds? Imagine you are faced with proposition to join a gang. This was not your original plan, but they make it sound really good. You will have a lot of money, plenty of friends, and you will never need anything. If ever you are in trouble they will be there to help. You want to stay in school and go to college, but this offer is tempting. Create a support group to help you make the best decision for you! Create a broadside (poster) with illustrations that explains all your group has to offer and how it is better than the gang. Give your group a catchy name and a slogan. The teacher could post the broadsides in the classroom.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Photograph/Illustration Analysis Sheet

Step 1. Observation: What is the title of the image?

Study the image for 2 minutes. Form an overall impression of the image and then examine individual items. Next, divide the image into quarters and study each section carefully. What is your initial impression of the image?

Complete the chart below with what you see in the image.

People	Objects	Activities

Step 2: Inference: Based on what you have observed above, list three things you might infer (conclude) from this image?

Step 3: Questions: What symbols do you see in the image?

Why do you think there is a single white woman in the image?

What is the atmosphere of this image?