Freedom and Federal Power

How three amendments changed rights and state laws

8.C.13.2.A "Explain the impact of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments on the status of formerly enslaved persons, as well as the relationship of the federal government to the states."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one change to formerly enslaved people's status in each paragraph, and circle one limit placed on state governments in each paragraph. Number the amendments in the order they were ratified.

New Rules After Slavery

1. Imagine a family leaving a plantation in 1865, unsure whether a state government will protect their freedom. The 13th Amendment, ratified that year, abolished slavery and involuntary servitude throughout the United States, except as punishment for a crime after conviction. A state could no longer make slavery legal, and Congress gained power to enforce the ban through laws. Formerly enslaved people were no longer legally held as property, but freedom alone did not guarantee citizenship, fair treatment, or a vote. Those questions brought further changes to the Constitution.

2. Suppose the family moves to a town where state officials refuse to treat them as citizens. The 14th Amendment, ratified in 1868, made people born or naturalized in the United States citizens, including formerly enslaved people born here. It also required states to provide equal protection of the laws and not take away life, liberty, or property without due process of law. These rules placed new limits on state governments. Congress could pass laws to enforce the amendment, although many states still denied Black residents equal treatment.

3. Now picture an adult son who wants to vote in a state election. The 15th Amendment, ratified in 1870, barred the federal government and states from denying a citizen's vote because of race, color, or previous condition of servitude. It protected Black men's voting rights, but it did not grant women the vote. Congress gained power to enforce this rule, yet some states later used poll taxes and literacy tests to keep many Black citizens from voting. Together, the amendments changed national rules, while enforcement remained a continuing struggle.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the 13th Amendment change the family's legal status, and what could a state no longer do?

2. How did the 14th Amendment change the status of formerly enslaved people born in the United States, and what did it require of states?

3. How did the 15th Amendment affect Black men's voting rights, and what reason for denying a vote did it forbid states to use?

4. Why did the 13th Amendment alone not settle the questions of citizenship and voting? Explain how the later amendments changed the rules states had to follow.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four- or five-sentence statement for a town meeting in 1870. Explain how all three amendments changed the status of formerly enslaved people and the power of states, then identify one reason the new rules might not immediately bring equal treatment.

ANSWER KEY

Freedom and Federal Power

GRADE 8 · 8.C.13.2.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one change to formerly enslaved people's status in each paragraph, and circle one limit placed on state governments in each paragraph. Number the amendments in the order they were ratified. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the 13th Amendment change the family's legal status, and what could a state no longer do?	**It ended their legal enslavement. A state could no longer make slavery legal.**
2	How did the 14th Amendment change the status of formerly enslaved people born in the United States, and what did it require of states?	**It made them citizens and required states to provide equal protection and due process of law.**
3	How did the 15th Amendment affect Black men's voting rights, and what reason for denying a vote did it forbid states to use?	**It protected Black men's voting rights by barring states from denying a citizen's vote because of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.**
4	Why did the 13th Amendment alone not settle the questions of citizenship and voting? Explain how the later amendments changed the rules states had to follow.	**The 13th Amendment ended slavery but did not guarantee citizenship or a vote. The 14th established citizenship and required states to provide equal protection and due process. The 15th barred states from denying a citizen's vote because of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The 13th Amendment ended slavery, so states cannot legally keep people enslaved. The 14th made formerly enslaved people born in the United States citizens and required states to give them equal protection. The 15th barred states from denying citizens a vote because of race or former enslavement, protecting Black men's voting rights. These amendments gave Congress power to enforce rules that states must obey. Still, some officials may resist those rules, so legal rights may not bring equal treatment right away.

Accept answers that distinguish ending slavery, establishing citizenship and protections, and prohibiting race-based voting restrictions. Students should explain that the amendments limited state power and gave Congress enforcement authority without claiming that equal treatment followed immediately.