Rights on Paper

How Reconstruction laws changed rights and why protection mattered

8.C.13 "Analyze the political, social, and economic transformations during the Reconstruction Era. Examine the challenges of rebuilding the nation following the end of the Civil War. Evaluate Lincoln's plans for reconciliation..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two federal actions that expanded rights, and circle two obstacles that limited those rights. Draw an arrow between one action and one obstacle to show why a legal change did not always change daily life.

Rebuilding Freedom

1 At the war's end in 1865, the United States faced two linked questions: Who would count as a citizen, and who would protect that person's rights? In his Second Inaugural Address, Abraham Lincoln called for healing "with malice toward none" and for care for people harmed by war. His assassination weeks later left Andrew Johnson to lead Reconstruction. Johnson pardoned most former Confederates and let southern states form new governments quickly. Those governments passed Black Codes that limited freed people's work choices. A quick reunion did not guarantee freedom in daily life.

2 Congressional Republicans argued that rebuilding required federal protection of rights, not just the return of states. Congress passed the Reconstruction Acts, which placed former Confederate states under military oversight and required new state constitutions protecting Black men's voting rights. The 13th Amendment ended slavery, the 14th established birthright citizenship and equal protection, and the 15th barred denying voting rights based on race. With these changes and federal protection, African American men voted and won seats in state legislatures and Congress. The Freedmen's Bureau also supported schools and helped formerly enslaved people negotiate labor contracts.

3 Still, voting rights did not put land in freed families' hands. Many worked as sharecroppers, giving landowners a portion of each crop and often falling into debt. The Ku Klux Klan used threats and violence to keep African American voters from the polls. Congress passed laws against such attacks, but enforcement weakened over time. In the political settlement following the disputed 1876 election, President Rutherford B. Hayes withdrew federal troops from the remaining occupied southern states in 1877. Without sustained federal protection, southern governments could more easily restrict Black political participation.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Johnson's approach to reunion differ from Lincoln's stated hope for healing? Use one detail about each leader.

2. How did the Reconstruction Acts and the 15th Amendment change who could participate in government?

3. Why might the Freedmen's Bureau's help with labor contracts not have solved freed families' economic problems?

4. How did the Klan's actions and the withdrawal of federal troops make voting rights harder to use?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you advise Congress in 1877. In four sentences, propose one action to protect voting and one to improve economic opportunity for formerly enslaved people, then explain how a challenge in the passage might limit one action.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 8 · 8.C.13

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two federal actions that expanded rights, and circle two obstacles that limited those rights. Draw an arrow between one action and one obstacle to show why a legal change did not always change daily life. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Johnson's approach to reunion differ from Lincoln's stated hope for healing? Use one detail about each leader.	**Lincoln called for healing and care for people harmed by war. Johnson quickly pardoned most former Confederates and allowed new southern governments, which then passed restrictive Black Codes.**
2	How did the Reconstruction Acts and the 15th Amendment change who could participate in government?	**The Reconstruction Acts required new southern state constitutions protecting Black men's voting rights. The 15th Amendment barred denying voting rights based on race, and African American men voted and won office.**
3	Why might the Freedmen's Bureau's help with labor contracts not have solved freed families' economic problems?	**The bureau helped people negotiate contracts, but many freed families still lacked land and worked as sharecroppers who often fell into debt.**
4	How did the Klan's actions and the withdrawal of federal troops make voting rights harder to use?	**Klan threats and violence kept African American voters from the polls. After troops left in 1877, southern governments could more easily restrict Black political participation.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Congress should send federal investigators to examine attacks that prevent African Americans from voting. It should also fund advisers to help sharecroppers understand labor contracts. Klan violence could still keep voters from the polls even if investigators report attacks. Both proposals would require Congress to keep supporting freed people's rights after troops leave.

Accept other historically plausible proposals that address both voting and economic opportunity. The explanation must connect a passage-based obstacle to at least one proposed action.