

Reconstruction Amendments: Rights in the Constitution

Match the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to what they accomplished, then explain their significance.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Part 1: Read the constitutional protections

Directions: The passages below are accurate classroom adaptations of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments. Match each legal text to the protection it accomplished. Write the protection number in the blank.

Legal text - adapted	Match
A. Thirteenth Amendment Slavery and involuntary servitude are prohibited, except as punishment for a crime after lawful conviction.	
B. Fourteenth Amendment People born or naturalized in the United States and subject to its jurisdiction are citizens. States must provide due process and equal protection of the laws.	
C. Fifteenth Amendment The right to vote cannot be denied or limited because of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.	

Protections

1. Barred race-based denial or limitation of voting rights.
2. Ended slavery and involuntary servitude, with a stated criminal-punishment exception.
3. Defined national citizenship and required states to provide due process and equal protection.

Notice the difference

These amendments placed protections in the Constitution. A constitutional protection does not mean that unfair actions or barriers ended at once.

Use this idea in Part 2.

Student source credit: National Archives, "Amendments 11-27," accessed 2026-09-25. Adapted from the public-domain constitutional text. <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/amendments-11-27>

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Part 2: Apply the protections

Directions: For each situation, name the amendment and explain what it accomplished. Use the legal protection, not just the amendment number. In Situation 2, also explain whether the amendment made every voting barrier disappear immediately.

1. In 1868, after the Fourteenth Amendment was ratified, a state says that a person born in the United States cannot be a citizen because the person was formerly enslaved.

2. After 1870, local officials use a rule selectively to block Black citizens from voting because of their race.

3. An employer claims that a worker who has not been lawfully convicted of a crime can be forced to work without choice.

Finish this important idea: The Fifteenth Amendment did not give voting rights to everyone because

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Answer key: Parts 1 and 2

Part 1

1. A - 2. The Thirteenth Amendment prohibited slavery and involuntary servitude, except punishment for a crime after lawful conviction.
2. B - 3. The Fourteenth Amendment established citizenship for people born or naturalized in the United States and subject to its jurisdiction. It also requires states to provide due process and equal protection.
3. C - 1. The Fifteenth Amendment prohibits denial or abridgment of voting rights on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

Part 2 sample responses

4. **Situation 1:** Fourteenth Amendment. Because this situation occurs after the amendment was ratified in 1868, the state's claim conflicts with the constitutional protection of citizenship for people born in the United States and subject to U.S. jurisdiction.
5. **Situation 2:** Fifteenth Amendment. It prohibits limiting voting rights because of race. The amendment created this constitutional protection, but it did not make all voting barriers disappear immediately; enforcement and further action were still needed.
6. **Situation 3:** Thirteenth Amendment. It prohibited slavery and involuntary servitude, except as punishment after lawful conviction.
7. **Finish sentence:** Accept responses explaining that the amendment addresses denial or limitation based on race, color, or previous condition of servitude, not every possible voter or every voting requirement. Example: "...it prohibited certain race-based voting discrimination; it did not say that every person automatically had the right to vote."

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Teaching notes and source credit

Setup: Print and supply all student pages, keeping teacher-key pages separate. Put one pencil and the student pages at each seat. Display or read the directions only; students need no outside research.

Materials supplied: student reference passages, matching task, scenarios, response lines, and teacher key.

Additionally needed: pencils and a way to display or read directions.

Teaching script: Say: "The Constitution states legal protections. Today, read each protection carefully and connect it to a situation. Do not assume that a law made every unfair barrier disappear immediately. For the Fifteenth Amendment, be precise: it prohibited race-based denial or limitation of voting rights. It did not grant voting rights to everyone." Say: "First complete Part 1. Then use the wording of the amendments to explain each situation in Part 2."

Observation method: While students work, listen for students using evidence such as "because of race," "citizen," "equal protection," or "involuntary servitude." Mark each student as: secure - correctly matches all three and distinguishes legal protection from implementation; developing - identifies a relevant amendment but needs a more precise explanation; reteach - confuses the amendment protections or says the Fifteenth Amendment gave voting rights to everyone. Prompt without supplying an answer: "Which words in the adapted legal text connect to this situation?"

Quick scoring: Items 1-3: 1 point each for correct match. Items 4-6: 2 points each for correct amendment and accurate accomplishment. Item 7: 1 point for stating that the Fifteenth Amendment did not make every person a voter or end all barriers immediately. Total: 10 points.

Source credit: National Archives, "Amendments 11-27," public-domain constitutional text, accessed 2026-09-25, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/amendments-11-27>