

# FROM JUNETEENTH TO RECONSTRUCTION: THE PROMISE OF EQUALITY



## ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How did new opportunities inspire Black people to turn hope into achievement during Reconstruction?



## OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Explore the historical importance of *Juneteenth* and ways in which it is observed today.
- Discuss the meaning of Reconstruction and how it relates to the history of enslavement.
- Produce a work product that reflects their learning about one aspect of Reconstruction, such as education, the growth of Black communities or the right to vote and run for elected office.



## LEARNING STANDARDS

See the [standards alignment chart](#) to learn how this lesson supports New Jersey State Standards.



## TIME NEEDED

60 minutes



## MATERIALS

- *All Different Now: Juneteenth, the First Day of Freedom* by Angela Johnson (one copy of the book or access to online read-aloud: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRIExoTfm3g>)
- *Booker T. Washington Route Map* handout (copies for 1–2 small groups)
- *Nicodemus: The First Black Community West of the Mississippi* handout (copies for 1–2 small groups)
- *Fifty Cents and a Dream: Young Booker T. Washington* by Jabari Asim (multiple copies of the book or access to online read-aloud: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZ7OYUDVWBE>)
- *The First Black Members of Congress* handout (copies for 1–2 small groups)
- Drawing paper and implements
- Different colored sticky notes



## VOCABULARY

13 <sup>th</sup> Amendment	emancipation	homestead	Union
14 <sup>th</sup> Amendment	Emancipation Proclamation	Juneteenth	U.S. Congress
15 <sup>th</sup> Amendment	enslaved	plantation	U.S. Constitution
amendment		Reconstruction	

# Procedures

- 1 Write “Juneteenth” on the board. Have students do a turn-and-talk to discuss what they know about this term, and allow a few volunteers to share their thoughts with the class.
- 2 Read aloud the book *All Different Now: Juneteenth, the First Day of Freedom*, by Angela Johnson, (or show the online read-aloud at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRIExoT\\_fm3g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRIExoT_fm3g)). Discuss the following questions as you read:
  - What does the title “All Different Now” mean? What changes took place that made things different?
  - How did the local people react to the news of freedom? How did their reactions make you feel?
  - The author says that the people ate, laughed and told stories “as a free people.” How do you think ordinary acts like eating and telling stories felt different to them after the news of freedom?
  - What do you think the people were thinking as they passed by the cotton fields that night after the celebration?
  - What do you think the people did the next day, week or month? How do you think they transformed their lives once things were “all different now”?
  - What individuals or groups of people do you know about in today’s world who have to adapt to big changes in their lives? How are things “all different now” for those people?
- 3 Tell students that Juneteenth marks the beginning of a period called *Reconstruction*. Explain that in the years following the end of slavery, Black people took advantage of their new freedoms and rights to get an education, build new communities and job opportunities, vote and run for elected office and more.

## NOTE

*All Different Now* tells the story of the first Juneteenth (June 19, 1865) through the eyes of a young girl, as news of emancipation spreads to her Texas plantation and the last of the enslaved people in the South. See the Background Information section of this unit for more information on Juneteenth.

## NOTE

The links to online resources provided for option (c) below may be challenging for students. Encourage them to scan for relevant facts rather than read through the entire articles. If you have access to a children's encyclopedia or other elementary-friendly reference materials, redirect students toward these sources.

## 4

Set up learning stations as described below. (Depending on your class size, you may want to create two stations for each activity.) Tell students that they will choose one activity to help them learn more about Reconstruction and some of the ways in which Black people improved their lives following the end of slavery. Form groups based upon students' interests and have them complete the station activities. Circulate and guide students as they work.

### STATION WORK

TOPIC	MATERIALS	INSTRUCTIONS
a) Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>→ <i>Fifty Cents and a Dream: Young Booker T. Washington</i> by Jabari Asim (physical copies of the book or online read-aloud at <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-jiCJki0wJs">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-jiCJki0wJs</a>)</li><li>→ <i>Booker T. Washington Route Map</i> (handout)</li><li>→ Different colored sticky notes</li></ul>	Students read about Booker's efforts to become literate and his 500-mile journey to enroll in college. They sketch or write about two challenges he faced and two accomplishments he achieved, which are recorded on sticky notes and attached to a route map of Booker's journey.
b) Building New Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>→ <i>Nicodemus: The First Black Community West of the Mississippi</i> (handout)</li><li>→ Drawing paper and implements</li></ul>	Students read about a community developed for and by Black people. They sketch a town plan as they imagine it, including at least five people and places from the reading. Students may also use an online town-building platform to recreate Nicodemus if available, such as Minecraft, Townscaper, Urban Plan or Cities: Skylines.
c) Voting and Electing Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>→ <i>The First Black Members of Congress</i> (handout)</li><li>→ Access to the internet</li><li>→ Drawing paper and implements</li></ul>	Students study a portrait of the first seven Black members of Congress and choose one to research further. They write a one-paragraph campaign speech for their subject that includes one detail about his background, one personal quality and one way he will improve his country.

- 5** If time allows, create small groups of students who completed different activities and have them share their work with each other. Conclude the lesson by gathering the class and discussing some of the questions below.

## Discussion Questions

- 1** Why is Juneteenth an important day of celebration in the U.S.? If you have celebrated it, describe your experience.
- 2** What was Reconstruction? How did Black people rebuild their lives following the end of slavery?
- 3** What accomplishments during Reconstruction most stood out to you? What do you think it took for former enslaved people to achieve these things?
- 4** How did it feel for you to learn about the struggles and triumphs of newly freed Black people?
- 5** What struggles do Black people still face today? What modern-day triumphs do you know about?

## Lesson Extensions

- Assign students to do additional research on the history of Juneteenth and the way it is celebrated today, including conducting interviews with community members, if appropriate. Then have them plan a Juneteenth school observance, which might include designing informative posters, delivering a multimedia presentation on the story of Juneteenth, reading or telling stories about the holiday and organizing a picnic or luncheon with red foods (symbolizing resilience).
- Have students read picture books about Reconstruction and then create their own picture book featuring the accomplishments and progress of Black people during this era. Recommended books include: *The Amazing Age of John Roy Lynch* by Chris Barton; *Ellen's Broom* by Kelly Lyons and Daniel Minter; and *Follow Me Down to Nicodemus Town* by A. LaFaye.

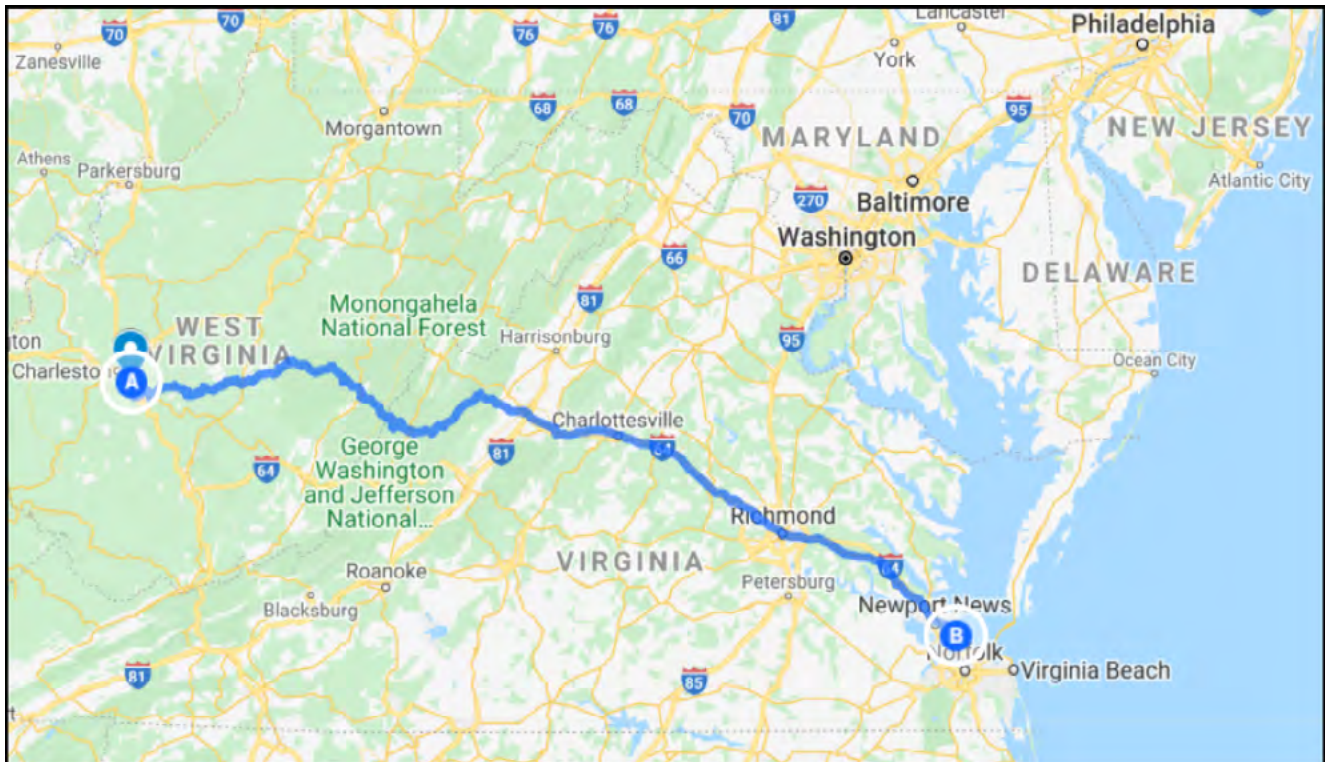
### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- + American Battlefield Trust. "Reconstruction: The Civil War in Four Minutes." April 25, 2017. YouTube video, 4:45. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6CKcGj4Cq8E>.
- + CBS Sunday Morning. "The story of Reconstruction." April 7, 2019. YouTube video, 8:13. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CietWrsQb-E>.
- + Cooper, Floyd. *Juneteenth for Mazie*. North Mankato, MN: Capstone Young Readers, 2015.
- + Dillard, Coshandra. "Teaching Juneteenth." *Teaching Tolerance*, June 12, 2019. <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/teaching-juneteenth>.
- + Scholastic, "Reconstruction: A History Mystery Activity," <https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/activities/teaching-content/reconstruction-history-mystery-activity>.



# Booker T. Washington Route Map

Read about Washington's 500-mile journey from his home in West Virginia to Hampton Institute in Virginia. This historically Black university was created in 1868 to provide education to former enslaved people. As you read, think about the challenges Washington faced and the accomplishments he achieved. Sketch or write about at least two challenges and two accomplishments on sticky notes and attach them to the route map.





# Nicodemus: The First Black Community West of the Mississippi

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

Read about the community of Nicodemus and sketch a town plan as you imagine it. Include at least five people and places from the reading.

After the Civil War, many Black people wished to leave the places where they had been enslaved and start life anew. At that time, the U.S. government was giving away plots of land called “homesteads” to people who agreed to settle and farm them. Two men—a Black minister named W.H. Smith and a white land developer named W.R. Hill—decided to start a new community in Kansas. The state had declared itself free in 1861 and was far from the plantations of the South. They named their town Nicodemus, after a figure in the Bible, and in 1877 the first Black community west of the Mississippi River was born.

Now that they had a town, Hill and Smith set out to convince people to move there. They received help from Benjamin “Pap” Singleton, a carpenter from Tennessee. Pap traveled far and wide, handing out fliers about Nicodemus to other Black people looking for a fresh start. Pap couldn’t read or write himself, but he was an enthusiastic messenger. He handed out so many fliers, they nicknamed him the “Moses of the Colored Exodus” (exit), and those who followed were called “Exodusters.” Before long more than 300 settlers from Kentucky headed to Nicodemus, though many turned back when they saw how far-off and barren the land was. One of the settlers, Williana Hickman, remembered her reaction this way:

*“When we got in sight of Nicodemus the men shouted, ‘There is Nicodemus!’ Being very sick, I hailed this news with gladness. I looked with all the eyes I had. I said, ‘Where is Nicodemus? I don’t see it.’ My husband pointed out various smokes coming out of the ground and said, ‘That is Nicodemus.’ The families lived in dugouts... The scenery was not at all inviting, and I began to cry.”*





## Nicodemus: The First Black Community West of the Mississippi (continued)



Soon the settlers built houses from sod, the grassy surface of the ground, and they were called “sodbusters.” As their first winter approached, they didn’t have enough tools, seed or money. They survived by selling buffalo bones, working for the local railroad and with help from Native Americans. As time went on, the townspeople built a stable, town hall, post office, bank, schools, churches and shops. By 1880, there were 500 people living in Nicodemus, which grew to include an ice cream parlor, hotels, two newspapers and even a baseball team.

Today, Nicodemus is a National Historic Site and only about 20 people live in the tiny town. Every July the residents hold a homecoming for the family members of the first settlers. They remember the hardships faced by those former enslaved people and the bravery it took for them to build a new life on the frontier.

#### SOURCES:

“Ho For Kansas!” April 14, 1878. Copyprint of handbill. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/african/afam009.html#obj9>.

Early Area Homestead—Nicodemus Historic District, Nicodemus, Graham County, KS. Photocopy of Historic Photograph. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/hhh.ks0077/photos.069503p>.

Legends of America. “Nicodemus—A Black Pioneer Town.” <https://www.legendsofamerica.com/ks-nicodemus>.

National Park Service. “Kansas: Nicodemus National Historic Site.” <https://www.nps.gov/articles/nicodemus.htm>.

Washington Street Showing First Stone Church and Williams General Store—Nicodemus Historic District, Nicodemus, Graham County, KS. C. 1885. Photocopy of Historic Photograph. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/hhh.ks0077/photos.069504p>.



# The First Black Members of Congress

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

Read the information below and study the portrait “The First Black Members of Congress.” Choose one person to learn about using the links on this handout. Then create a one-paragraph campaign speech for him. Include one detail about his background, one personal quality and one way he will improve his country.

The United States Constitution sets forth the laws and rights that are most important to our country. An amendment is a change or addition to the Constitution. After the Civil War, three major amendments were passed:

- **The 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment**, approved in 1865, ended slavery in the United States.
- **The 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment**, approved in 1868, gave citizenship to all people born in the U.S., including former enslaved people.
- **The 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment**, approved in 1870, gave Black men the right to vote.

Once Black men were able to vote, they worked to elect members of their own communities to public office. From 1869–1899, more than 20 Black men—mostly former enslaved people—were elected to the United States Congress. Their presence in government did not last long, though, due to resistance among many white people and discrimination against Black people in the voting process. Women would not win the right to vote until 1920, and a Black woman would not be elected to Congress until 1969—a full century after the election of the first Black man.

**Learn about the first Black congressmen using these sources.** (If an article is long or challenging, scan for the facts you need rather than trying to read the entire page.)

## Black Americans in Congress

<https://history.house.gov/People/Search?filter=1>

## BlackPast

<https://www.blackpast.org>

## 5 Former Slaves Turned Statesmen

<https://www.history.com/news/5-former-slaves-turned-statesmen>





# The First Black Members of Congress (continued)



SOURCE: *The First Colored Senator and Representatives—in the 41st and 42nd Congress of the United States.*  
Color film copy slide. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., <https://www.loc.gov/resource/ppmsca.17564/>.