

Pre-Visit
Lesson Plan



Freedom's Opportunity



Autry National Center

Introduction

Using the life of Ellen Cook as a framework, this lesson looks at the choices freed slaves needed to make at the end of the Civil War. The lesson asks students to reflect upon the new circumstances African Americans faced after gaining freedom in a role-playing exercise. Working in small groups, students will be given a fictional nineteenth century identity and will use problem-solving skills in order to make decisions about a fictional situation.

Objectives

Students will:

- Consider the new circumstances of African Americans after gaining freedom from slavery
- Utilize problem-solving skills in order to make group decisions about a fictional nineteenth-century situation
- Examine and think critically about issues of freedom, opportunity, and discrimination

Learners

This lesson is designed for eighth grade and upper-elementary-grade students. The main themes are anchored in history and social studies, but the lesson also involves language arts including writing, listening, and speaking applications.

Materials

- *Identity Cards*
- *Destination Worksheets*
- *Move or Stay worksheet*
- Large United States Map (optional)

Content Standards

History-Social Science

3.3 — Students draw from historical and community resources to organize the sequence of local historical events and describe how each period of settlement left its mark on the land.

- Trace why their community was established, how individuals and families contributed to its founding and development, and how the community has changed over time, drawing on maps, photographs, oral histories, letters, newspapers, and other primary sources.

4.4 — Students explain how California became an agricultural and industrial power, tracing the transformation of the California economy and its political and cultural development since the 1850s.

- Discuss immigration and migration to California between 1850 and 1900, including the diverse composition of those who came; the countries of origin and their relative locations; and conflicts and accords among the diverse groups (e.g., the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act).

8.11 — Students analyze the character and lasting consequences of Reconstruction.

- List the original aims of Reconstruction and describe its effects on the political and social structures of different regions.
- Identify the push-pull factors in the movement of former slaves to the cities in the North and to the West and their differing experiences in those regions (e.g., the experiences of Buffalo Soldiers).

8.9 — Students analyze the early and steady attempts to abolish slavery and to realize the ideals of the Declaration of Independence.

- Describe the lives of free blacks and the laws that limited their freedom and economic opportunities.

Procedure

Make sure that the class understands the term slavery.

- *What does slavery mean?*
- *Where did the majority of the slaves in the South come from?*
- *How did they get to the Southern States?*
- *What rights were not afforded slaves? Did they have any rights?*
- *What do you think life was like for slaves living on plantations?*
- *What type of work did they perform?*
- *Why do you think some people supported slavery?*
Why did some people oppose slavery?

Discuss the different types of work that Ellen Cook might have done as a slave. Because Ellen worked in her master's home, she probably spent her time doing general housework like cooking, cleaning, serving, and tending to the comfort of her owners. Reinforce the fact that slaves were not paid for their work, they were often separated from family, and generally lived and worked under degrading conditions.

Briefly discuss the Civil War. Although the Emancipation Proclamation freed many slaves, it did not apply to all states and slaves held by Native Americans. In 1865 Congress approved the 13th Amendment, outlawing slavery in the United States. Four million slaves were freed.

Discussion questions:

- *What might it have felt like to be freed from slavery?*
- *How do you think slave owners felt about this?*
- *What could you do that you could not do before?*
- *What examples can you think of to show how some people face discrimination today?* (Elicit several examples, such as finding a job, or a place to live, the types of transportation some use, in voting.)
- *If you were a freed slave, what would you now do for a living? Do you think there would have been a lot of competition for jobs? Why or why not?*
- *If you were a freed slave, would you stay in the South? If not, where would you choose to move? Why?*

Many free blacks decided to stay in the South, as that was their home. The period of Reconstruction saw many advances in civil rights, most of which were negated by black codes and "Jim Crow" laws passed once the Union army left the South. However, many people, like Ellen Cook, moved West. Use Ellen Cook's migration story to Texas and then California as an example to lead into the class activity. Refer to the section titled, The Biography of Ellen Cook, at the end of the lesson.

- *Why do you think free blacks would want to move West? North?*
- *What jobs were available to them in these regions?*
- *How did they get there?*
- *How did they know where to go?*
- *Do you think they faced discrimination along the way? Once they got to their destination? In what forms?*
- *What other challenges did they face?*
- *Why would many people decide to stay in the South?*

Briefly discuss the different areas of the United States at that time, so the class can become more prepared for the activity. For example, the West was not as developed as the North and the South, the South was a largely agricultural area with many farms and plantations, the North had large industrial cities, etc. Refer to the Destinations page at the end of this lesson for more information about many areas of the country.

Activity

Ask the class to imagine they have lived their lives as slaves in the United States. Now, after the Civil War, they have been freed. Divide the class into collaborative learning groups of four or five students. Each group represents a “family” or a group of friends and neighbors. There can be a total of six groups.

Hand out a different *Identity Card* to each group. The description lets each group know where they live and some of the skills they have as former slaves. Have one student in each group read the card to the rest of the students in his or her group.

Once the group is ready, hand out the *Move or Stay?* worksheet. Have each group identify their fictional home on the class map.

Hand out a different *Destinations* worksheets to each member of each group. Explain that each family member or friend in the group has heard about different possibilities and should tell the group what they have learned. Like Ellen Cook, they have the opportunity to move if they would like to. As a group, students must evaluate the possibilities and decide the best option for their future. Remind them that they do not have to move anywhere.

Once they have decided, the group should clearly mark a destination on the map and show the route that they traveled.

Evaluation

- As a presentation, have each group come up and introduce where they are from and the skill they have. The group should let the class know if and where they decided to move to and why they made that choice.
- Spend some time discussing the information on the *Destination Worksheets*, and explain that sometimes the rumors about various places were not true. Many travelers were disappointed when they arrived after their long journeys.

Extensions

- Create a class map. Have the students map their migration trails and include pictures of their travel experiences. Make sure they include details about their fictitious group. What might they have taken with them on their journey, and what are their plans once they arrive?
- Research what happened to African Americans who chose the various options the class considered. Have each group research the option they decided upon. Did African Americans find what they were looking for in these new places?

Credits & References

African American Odyssey, Library of Congress
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/aahtml/exhibit/aointro.html>

Africans in America, PBS
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/tguide/4index.html>

Background

The Biography of Ellen Cook

In 1843, Ellen Cook was born a slave in Mississippi. A man named Mr. Cook owned Ellen and both of her parents, Lucinda and John Calvin White. Ellen and her parents had different last names because slaves were generally required to take the last name of their owners (her parents had previously belonged to a family named White). The inconsistency of last names in slave families has often made it difficult to trace African American family history.

Like many other slaves, Ellen's family was separated. It was a common practice to sell slaves to new owners, since slaves were viewed as property. When Ellen's parents were sold, their young son was taken away from them and sold to a different owner. Although the baby was sold before Ellen was born, the family always remembered him. Even into adulthood, Ellen hoped she would be reunited with her brother. She always promptly answered the front door when someone rang, hoping it might be her brother looking for her.

The type of labor and the amount of work done by slaves often varied. Ellen was considered lucky to work inside her owner's home, as this was considered better than working in the fields. Ellen's descendants have not been able to determine how old she was when she began working, but they believe that she was probably a young child. One of Ellen's main duties was to fan flies away from the dinner table while her owners ate. She recalled being whipped only once, when she fell asleep standing up.

When Ellen was 16, she married another slave, James Brown Cook. James was a shoemaker on the Cook estate. During this time, slave marriages were not considered legal, but marriage remained a vital part of slave culture and family life. Ellen and James eventually had six children: James Cook Junior (who died at 7 months), John Calvin, James Brown, Jr., Major Z., and twins Lucy and Dempsey.

Soon after they became free, James and Ellen moved to Texas. They first worked as sharecroppers. Between farming seasons, James hunted and sold furs as well as made bugles out of cow horns for extra income. Besides helping in the fields, Ellen was also a midwife, a skill she probably learned as a slave. She used herbs and other remedies to help treat those in need. The midwife was an important part of the African American community because doctors were expensive and often wouldn't help African Americans. Eventually, Ellen and James saved enough money to buy their own land. The Cooks purchased eighty acres close to a local school that their children could attend. Although James and Ellen had been barred from obtaining an education as slaves, they knew that education was essential to successful futures for their children.

James Cook wanted his children to have the same opportunities and rights as other American citizens had. In order to provide greater opportunities for their children, James and Ellen decided to continue to move west. In 1893, the Cook family sold their Texas land and moved to California, but only after all of the children had finished school. The family arrived in Los Angeles in December and lived in a hotel for several months before buying land and building a home.

Ellen became a member of the Second Baptist Church in Los Angeles. Later, she helped organize the New Hope Baptist church, where she was the oldest member and senior deaconess. For these reasons, she was considered to be the mother of the church and was referred to as "Mother Cook."

James Cook died in September of 1901. Ellen Cook lived until the age of 95, outliving all of her children. Until her death in 1938, she continued with the routines that she followed for her whole life, including always going to bed at dusk and getting up at dawn. She demanded a peaceful environment around her and never allowed anyone to argue. She never allowed smoking, drinking, card playing, or dancing in the house or on the property. She always washed her own hair with rainwater that she collected.

Ellen Cook's descendants have made contributions to the African American community as well as the country through politics and business. Her daughter Lucy was a missionary in the South who lectured about education. Ellen Cook's legacy continues due to her descendants' commitment to pass down her story to future generations and their strong dedication to the importance of family history for the education of children.

Civil War

The close of the Civil War brought freedom for enslaved African Americans in the United States. Although African Americans continued to face discrimination, this freedom provided them with a world of new opportunities and choices. For the first time in their lives, many blacks looked for their own employment in order to financially support themselves and their families. Rumors of free land and job opportunities led many to relocate to the West or to larger cities in the North. Some traveled to reunite with lost family members. An adventurous few became Buffalo Soldiers and cowboys.

Another factor that encouraged African Americans to move was the Homestead Act of 1862. This act offered 160 acres of Western land free to anyone, without racial restrictions, who would pay a small filing fee and improve the land for five years. If they had the money, they could pay \$1.25 per acre and own the land after living on it for six months. Many African Americans migrants knew about this act and moved west because of it. Although many found out that they still faced discrimination and unfair laws once they moved to take advantage of opportunities.

Other African Americans felt rooted to the communities where the families lived, where they were born, where there seemed to be job opportunities, and where life was familiar. Freed slaves had little or no money when they gained their freedom, and it was difficult to move far without supplies or other resources.

Of the African Americans who chose to move, some moved away as soon as they had the opportunity, whereas others waited over fourteen years until the end of Reconstruction in the South. During Reconstruction, which lasted from 1865-1877, African Americans in the South felt some sense of safety because federal troops occupied the area. Although they were not always successful or helpful, the troops had been sent there to help restore the Ex-Confederate States to the Union and maintain laws that protected the African Americans' new freedom.

The removal of federal troops marked the end of Reconstruction in the South. At this time, many African Americans in the South began thinking about moving to other places. Some feared for their safety, and others wanted to live in a place with more opportunity and less discrimination. "Jim Crow" laws and the rise of the Ku Klux Klan made many areas of the South unsafe for blacks.

African Americans typically did not travel in wagons as other migrants did. Sometimes they traveled by railroad or steamboat, but most often they walked. Many settlers from the old South came westward into Texas, the Indian Territory (Oklahoma), and Kansas, or north to Chicago. They traveled as individuals, in families, and in large groups through the help of immigration agencies. With the exception of Texas and the Indian Territory, most African American migrants settled in cities and towns. In these areas they often worked as domestic servants. Men worked as hotel waiters, railroad porters, messengers, cooks, and janitors. Some entrepreneurs started barbershops, restaurants, and boarding houses. By the 1890s, many African American communities had their own doctors, lawyers, newspaper editors, ministers, and schoolteachers. These professions were considered the elite within African American communities.

Between the dates of 1866 and 1917, 25,000 African Americans served as Buffalo Soldiers. These soldiers fought to secure safety in the West. They fought in a variety of circumstances. In Texas, they fought both Mexicans and Indians, in Oklahoma, they fought to protect white settlers from Indians and sometimes defended Indians against other Native American groups, in Kansas, they often fought Indians. Their aim was to pursue outlaws of any race or nationality; they were a frontier police force. These troops were typically organized in the East and stationed in the West. African American troops in the South would have been too controversial. Although these troops were very successful, many still did not believe black soldiers deserved the equal rights, which was reflected in their poor living conditions the troops were forced to endure.

Although the racial tension in other places in the United States was not as severe as in the South, African Americans - regardless of where they settled - faced discrimination. One reason for this widespread discrimination was the influence of Southern whites and the attitudes many brought with them as they migrated to other regions.

Despite these hardships, many did succeed in following their dreams and becoming successful. Ellen Cook and her family are an example of this.

Destinations

Will you move to Texas?

In 1845, Texas entered the Union as a slave state. The state, especially the eastern part, had a large population of African American slaves. After the Civil War, there was migration both to and from the state. Some left the state to reunite with family in the South. Many freed people came to the state because Texas wages of twenty dollars a month was double that of Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee.

Racial discrimination continued to exist in Texas after the war. Legislators enacted laws making life difficult for African Americans. Unlike other states in the West, Texas adopted a whites-only homestead act, which prohibited African Americans from gaining free land. For these reasons, many of the African Americans who moved to Texas after the Civil War became sharecroppers, renting land from others. Although this often brought them into heavy debt, it did provide a sense of autonomy for ex-slaves. In some cases, like that of Ellen Cook, sharecropping was a successful venture. Her family was able to make money and eventually acquire their own land.

Texas had the largest black cowboy population in the West. Because the cattle industry was booming, there were jobs available in the cattle drives to Kansas and other such places. African Americans worked as cowboys, cooks, drivers, etc. They were often asked to carry out the most dangerous tasks along the trail.

In cities, African Americans worked as domestic servants, as manual laborers for railroads, and as construction workers.

Will you move to Kansas?

The Homestead Act of 1862 encouraged the settlement of many newcomers. African Americans were aware of this act, and many moved into Kansas. For many years, Kansas was known for its strong abolitionist tradition. In 1861 it had been admitted as a free state. Many runaway slaves found refuge in Kansas before the end of the Civil War.

Kansas was the closest Western state to the old South that allowed African American homesteading. Most migrants came from Missouri, which was a slave state before the Civil War, or other bordering states like Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and also Deep Southern states like Mississippi and Louisiana.

African Americans heard rumors of fertile farmlands, and emigration agencies helped large numbers of African Americans settle within the state. Towns composed of all African Americans, like Nicodemus, which was founded in 1877 after Reconstruction, began to arise around the state. These towns were safe havens for African Americans. In general, African Americans faced less discrimination in Kansas than in other states.

In the spring and summer of 1879, there was a great "exodus" to Kansas. More than 6,000 African Americans - known as "Exodusters" - from Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas moved into the state. African Americans compared this "exodus" to the biblical exodus of the Israelites from Egypt.

In the cities, African Americans worked as mechanics, teamsters, laborers, and maids. In rural areas, they worked as agricultural laborers, ranch hands, and homesteaders. After the great exodus, immigration to Kansas slowed down.

Western Kansas was flat, barren, and windswept. It was very hot in the summers and cold in the winter. Homesteaders had great difficulty growing crops there. They had equipment shortages, drought, prairie fires, crop failures, and grasshopper swarms; for these reasons, raising cattle was often more productive.

Kansas played a large role in the cattle industry. Cattle drives typically came up from Texas and loaded cattle onto railroads in Kansas. African Americans could find work helping to drive the cattle to the railroad and loading cattle onto the cars.

Unfortunately, this did not continue. New railroads bypassed Kansas, which made Kansas rails less useful. The state also experienced heavy droughts, which made farming and homesteading difficult.

Will you move to the Indian Territory (Oklahoma)?

Before 1889, Oklahoma was part Indian reservation and part federally owned; it was not open to any homesteaders. But some African Americans settled there anyway without authorization. Before the Civil War, the entire territory had been set-aside for the "Five Civilized Tribes," (Creek, Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw and Seminole) removed from the South in the 1830s. After the Civil War, the Five Civilized Tribes were forced to give up the Western parts of their reservations to create new reservations for Plains Indians like the Cheyenne and Comanche; this land was not available for homesteaders, either.

Many of the more assimilated members of the Five Civilized Tribes were slave-owners and had supported the Confederacy during the war. After the war, the situation of their ex-slaves was mixed, ranging from the Creek and Seminole who incorporated ex-slaves into their tribes (with the full tribal property and political rights this entailed), to the Choctaw and Chickasaw on the border with Texas, who enacted black codes for their ex-slaves and mounted a campaign of terror to drive out unwanted Texas ex-slaves who had settled on tribal lands. Any non-Indian who settled on reservation land would usually have been considered an "intruder" on the reservation and would not have had political, legal, or property rights. Some African Americans moved anyway and tried their luck.

After 1889, former Indian land deemed "surplus" was opened to settlers, including African Americans; this was one of the last chances they had for large-scale homesteading on public lands. At this point the Homestead Act applied to these areas, which resulted in many more African Americans moving to Oklahoma in the late nineteenth century. Although Oklahoma was a hot spot for migration from many places, the state received many African Americans from nearby Arkansas and Tennessee. Most settlers there became farmers.

Will you move to California?

California became a state in 1850, and at that time it was declared a free state. Technically, it was illegal to own slaves in California, although many people did own slaves, claiming that they were just passing through the state and did not plan to stay. Many free blacks had migrated to California before the Civil War to take part in the Gold Rush, hoping to quickly become wealthy as others supposedly had. Other settlers came to get away from discrimination and live in a place where they might have the same rights as others. African American communities developed first in cities like San Francisco, Sacramento, and Los Angeles and supported churches and other institutions.

Job opportunities in California included working as cooks, barbers, stewards, whitewashers, porters, waiters, maids, and servants in businesses and private homes. A small number of African Americans became business owners.

Will you move to Pennsylvania?

African Americans migrated from the South to northern states like Pennsylvania. They sometimes did this in order to join family members who were already established there. When they arrived, they typically moved into all-African American communities. Opportunities existed for African Americans to work inside the African American community as barbers, ministers, etc.

Of those who moved north, most moved to cities where free blacks had been living since the colonial era. Racial barriers kept most African American men from working in factories; many men ended up as casual laborers and janitors. Most women worked as maids and laundresses. A small but significant middle class was also developing, however, with professionals and business owners. African Americans in northern cities enjoyed a rich community life with a flourishing press, fraternal orders, and black churches.

African Americans in cities like Philadelphia worked as laborers. There were few jobs for African Americans because they competed with the Irish and other immigrants for positions. For example, white immigrants typically worked inside the homes of wealthy people in northern cities. This left fewer jobs for African Americans to work as maids and servants in these places.

Vocabulary

Civil War

The U.S. war between the Confederacy (Southern states) and the Union (Northern states) that lasted from 1861-1865

Slave

Someone who is owned by another person and thought of as property

Plantation

A large farm found in warm climates where crops such as tobacco and cotton are grown

Sharecropper

A farmer who rents land and gives a share of the crop to the landlord as payment

Discrimination

Prejudice or unjust behavior to others based on differences in age, race, gender, etc.

Migration

To move from one region to another

Destinations

Will you move to Texas?

You have heard that many freed slaves are moving to Texas. You could become a sharecropper. A sharecropper is a farmer who rents land from another person. During harvest time, he or she gives part of the crop to the owner for payment.

There is also the opportunity to become a soldier for the United States Army. Buffalo Soldiers fought battles against Native Americans in the West.

Reasons to move here:

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Reasons not to move here:

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Destinations

Will you move to Kansas?

You have heard that there is free land in Kansas. You have also heard that this state welcomes African Americans who move there. One town, named Nicodemus, is an entirely African American community. You and your group might be able to have your own land if you work hard.

There are also opportunities to work on farms or take part in cattle drives. However, you have also heard about terrible droughts, failed crops, and a shortage of farming supplies in Kansas.

Reasons to move here:

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Reasons not to move here:

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Destinations

Will you move to the Indian Territory?

What is now Oklahoma belongs to the Native Americans, and it is not open to new settlers. Because some Indians owned slaves, there are many African American people there. Some African Americans are full members of these Indian tribes. You have heard that there is good land there that no one lives on. You could take your chances and live as squatters. A squatter is a person who lives without permission on empty land that does not belong to him or her.

Reasons to move here:

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Reasons not to move here:

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Destinations

Will you move to California?

There are many opportunities in California, but it is very far away. Even before the Civil War, California did not allow slavery.

Landowners need help taking care of their crops. Cattle ranchers need help herding and driving cattle to other places. There is work in San Francisco, Sacramento, and Los Angeles. These cities need cooks, barbers, hotel workers, maids, and other workers of all kinds.

Reasons to move here:

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Reasons not to move here:

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Destinations

Will you move to Pennsylvania?

Your group could move to the North. You have heard that big cities like Philadelphia need people to work in factories or in the homes of wealthy families. You have heard that it is safer for African Americans to live in the North. However, you have also heard that there is a lot of competition for jobs.

Reasons to move here:

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Reasons not to move here:

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Identity Card

You live in Missouri.

- You are a group of freed slaves.
- You are dockworkers in St. Louis.
- You spend the day loading and unloading cargo on ships.
- There is a lot of trading to and from the West. You have met people who tell you stories about free land and jobs in the West.
- You know how to read.

Identity Card

You live in Arkansas.

- You are a group of freed slaves.
- You work inside a wealthy person's home and earn your own money.
- You know how to cook, clean, serve food, do laundry, and sew.

Identity Card

You live in South Carolina.

- You are a group of freed slaves.
- You know how to farm rice and take care of horses.
- There are many laws in this state that make life difficult for African Americans.
- You fear for your safety.

Identity Card

You live in Alabama.

- You are a group of freed slaves.
- You work long, hard hours in cotton fields.
- You make very little money.
- You hope to one day own your own land and farm your own cotton.

Identity Card

You live in Massachusetts.

- You are a group of freed slaves.
- You and some friends have started a small business. You work as barbers and earn your own money.
- Your customers are African Americans.
- Your family has been separated. You have an uncle and a cousin who moved out West. You would like to reunite with them one day.

Identity Card

You live in Tennessee.

- You are a group of freed slaves.
- You have worked in a stable, taking care of horses, for most of your life. You have some money saved up.
- You are 40 years old, which is very old for the time, and have never been outside of Tennessee.
- You have no family.

Move or Stay?

1. Find the place where your character lives on the class map.
2. Read about the opportunities available to your character and consider all options.

Places we would like to live:

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Places we would not like to live:

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3. If the group decides to move, locate the new location on the class map. How far will you have to travel? How will you get there?
4. Why did the group make this decision? What factors did you consider?