Reconstruction
Lesson 1: Presidential Reconstruction

ESSENTIAL QUESTION
How do governments change?

Terms to Know
Reconstruction the effort, after the Civil War, to reorganize the seceded states and bring them back into the Union
pardon an official release from punishment for a crime
provisional government a temporary government
nullify to cancel
Juneteenth June 19th, the date celebrated as the anniversary of Emancipation Day for enslaved people in Texas
freedman a formerly enslaved person
demonstrate to show, prove, or make clear
black codes laws limiting the rights of African Americans passed by Southern governments after the Civil War
restrict to place a limit on a person or action

What do you know?
In the first column, answer the questions based on what you know before you study. After the lesson, fill in the last column.

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Texas and Reconstruction
Guiding Question What plans did Lincoln and Johnson have for restoring the Union after the Civil War?

After the Civil War, much of the South lay in ruins. The region’s transportation system, plantation system, and economy in general had nearly collapsed. The president and Congress led the efforts to restore the South to the Union. This process is called Reconstruction.

Defining
1. What was Reconstruction?
President Lincoln hoped to restore the Union as quickly as possible. He believed that punishing the South would only delay healing the nation. The president offered a *pardon* to all Southerners who were willing to swear an oath of loyalty to the United States. When 10 percent of a state’s voters had taken the oath of loyalty, the state could form a new government and return to the Union.

Lincoln was assassinated in April 1865 and his vice president, Andrew Johnson, took over as president. Johnson followed a Reconstruction plan very similar to Lincoln’s. Johnson set up a *provisional government* in each former Confederate state. He appointed government officials and ordered federal troops to protect them. The provisional government would stay in place until the state was readmitted to the Union.

Under Johnson’s plan, each former Confederate state could rejoin the Union after it met three conditions. Each state was required to:
- nullify, or cancel, its act of secession
- acknowledge that the U.S. government would not pay its Civil War debts
- ratify the Thirteenth Amendment

The United States Congress had passed the Thirteenth Amendment in early 1865. It abolished slavery throughout the nation.

Johnson also set requirements for voting. To regain the right to vote, most white Southerners only had to swear an oath of loyalty to the United States. However, Confederate leaders and wealthy Southerners needed a special pardon from the president. Johnson’s plan and the period when it was put into practice are called Presidential Reconstruction.

**Texas Reconstruction Begins**

**Guiding Question** What changes did Presidential Reconstruction bring to Texas?

Reconstruction began in Texas in June 1865. On June 19th, a Union force led by General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston to take control of the state.

Granger’s first act was to announce the Emancipation Proclamation, declaring that all 250,000 enslaved Texans were free. In the years that followed, African Americans in Texas observed the date as **Juneteenth**, or Texas Emancipation Day. It became a legal state holiday and the oldest-known observance marking the end of slavery.
Reconstruction

Lesson 1: Presidential Reconstruction, continued

Granger urged the freedmen to continue to work for their former slaveholders for pay. Most freed people tried to do this. However, a large number moved almost immediately. Some did so just to demonstrate their freedom. Others left to search for family members from whom they had been separated during slavery.

Most freed people wanted to live peacefully and support their families. Most hoped to own and farm some land. They also wanted an education for themselves and their children.

To help freed people build a new life, Congress created the Freedmen’s Bureau. The Bureau helped freed people find jobs. It gave food and clothing to the sick, aged, and poor. It also founded schools. Texas’s size and poor transportation and communications systems made the work of the Freedmen’s Bureau challenging. In addition, many whites resented the aid the Freedmen’s Bureau gave to African Americans.

President Johnson tried to appoint Unionists—southerners who opposed secession—to lead the provisional governments. In Texas, he turned to Andrew J. Hamilton. Hamilton’s opposition to the Confederacy had forced him to flee Texas during the war. Now he returned as the new provisional governor in July 1865.

Hamilton wanted Texas to rejoin the Union quickly and peacefully. He called for a the election of delegates to a constitutional convention. This convention would write a new state constitution as the first step in meeting President Johnson’s conditions for rejoining the Union.

The convention met in Austin in February 1866. Nearly all the delegates had supported the Confederacy. There were no African American delegates and few others who favored giving African Americans any rights.

Texas Government Restored

Guiding Question How did Texas government change after the Constitution of 1866?

Instead of writing a new constitution, the convention delegates amended the constitution Texas had before the Civil War. The amendments nullified secession and the state’s war debt and abolished slavery. However, the new Constitution of 1866 did not grant African Americans equal rights. Freed people could own property and sign contracts. However, they could not vote, hold public office, serve on juries, or testify in court against a white person.
The voters of Texas approved the constitution in June 1866 and elected a new state government. Many Confederate leaders returned to power. The new state legislature passed black codes that restricted the rights of freed people. Other Southern states passed similar laws. As a result, African Americans across the South could not vote, serve on juries, or testify against whites in court. In addition, African Americans could hold only certain types of jobs.

The Reconstruction era was also a time of opportunity and hope in Texas. The state still had public lands available for farmers. Many African Americans and whites from the older Southern states faced economic problems after the war. They saw opportunity in Texas and its public lands. European immigrants also came to Texas.

People moved within the state, too, usually from the countryside to towns and cities. More than 90 percent of the population in Texas was still rural, but urban centers such as Galveston and San Antonio were growing. However, some Texans left the state, including Confederates who refused to take the oath of loyalty to the United States. A few of these individuals moved to Brazil, where slavery was still legal. Other former Confederates moved to Mexico.

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