



8. Civil Rights for All Americans | Lesson Plan

What happens when a nation experiences a Constitutional crisis?

Students will understand how the Constitution was strengthened after the Civil War through the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments. Students will examine how these amendments clarified freedoms and helped ensure that the rights promised in America's founding principles were protected more clearly for all citizens.

Learning Objectives:

- Define key terms and ideas related to the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments.
- Explain why the United States added the Reconstruction Amendments after the Civil War.
- Identify how the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments strengthened the Constitution and protected freedom.
- Demonstrate constitutional thinking by writing a clear amendment that protects rights and closes legal loopholes.

Key Vocabulary:

- **Civil War:** A war between the citizens of the same country.
- **Amendment:** A change or addition to the Constitution
- **Abolish:** To officially end something
- **Civil Rights:** Rights that protect people from unfair treatment
- **Equal Protection:** The idea that the law must treat everyone the same
- **Reconstruction:** The period after the Civil War, when the country rebuilt and redefined freedom

Educational Standards: CCRA.R.7, CCRA.W.2, CCRA.W.4, CCRA.W.9, CCRA.L.1, CCRA.L.2, CCRA.L.4, CCRA.SL.1, CCRA.SL.2

Academic Subject Areas: U.S. Constitution, U.S. History

What You'll Need

- Video: History in 5: *The Constitution Explained: Civil Rights for All Americans* (Watch [Here](#))
- Worksheet: History in 5: *The Constitution Explained: Civil Rights for All Americans* (Click [Here](#))
- Supplies: Paper, pencil, timer

Lesson Plan (45-55 minutes)

Warm Up: (5 minutes)

1. Teacher Prompt (display on the board or read aloud): Imagine a school where each classroom can make its own rules. One day, the 4th-grade students decide that only students in their grade can use the swing sets. They vote on it and declare it is so. But



the 5th and 6th grades totally disagree. They think all students should be allowed to use the swing sets. What might happen at this school? Do you think there might be some arguments? What about fights?

2. Call on 2-3 students. Write short responses on the board. (Key idea to surface: if different groups can make their own rules, conflicts happen.)
3. Sometimes the problem is that the rule's language allows something deeply unfair. When that happens, a nation may need to amend its Constitution to better protect people's rights.
4. Explain that sometimes a nation must change or clarify its Constitution so that freedoms are clearly protected. Today's lesson explores how three amendments to the Constitution helped protect the rights of all Americans.

When Principles Are Tested: (7-10 minutes)

1. Divide students into groups of 3–4. Give each group all three Constitution Scenario Cards (on the last page of the lesson plan).
2. After students read their Scenarios, distribute the worksheet (one per student). Direct students to complete the **When Principles Are Tested** section as a group, but save the Comprehension Questions for later.
3. Directions for the Scenarios:
 - a. For each scenario, write one constitutional amendment sentence that closes the loophole and protects people's rights.
 - b. Use the sentence starters provided on the worksheet.
 - c. After writing each amendment, use the "Test Your Amendment" questions to check if your rule is clear and strong.
 - d. Encourage groups to revise language if they discover possible loopholes.
4. As the groups work, the teacher should circulate the room and prompt students to think about: Are your rules clear? Could someone possibly twist your wording? Is your wording vague or unclear? Make sure your words are specific.
5. Share Out and Class Comparison: Ask 2–3 groups to share their rules with the class. Ask the class if they spot any loopholes and how the sentence could be fixed.
6. Save the remaining worksheet sections until after students have watched the video and received direct instruction.

Founders Purpose: Civil Rights for All Americans (5-10 minutes)

1. **Direct Instruction:** Explain plainly that the United States was founded on principles of liberty, but the country struggled to live up to those principles from the beginning.
 - The Declaration of Independence states that "all men are created equal" and that people have natural rights such as life and liberty. The Constitution created a government designed to protect those freedoms. However, when the Constitution was written in 1787, slavery still existed in several states.
 - The Founders knew slavery conflicted with the nation's ideals, but the states were deeply divided over the issue. Many Southern states depended on slavery

economically and politically, and refused to give it up. Because the Founders believed the states had to remain united to survive as a nation, they made compromises that allowed slavery to continue for the time being. These compromises helped the Constitution be adopted, but they also left a serious problem unresolved.

- Over time, disagreements about slavery grew stronger and eventually led to the Civil War in 1861. Abraham Lincoln was elected president during this time, and two years into the war, he issued the Emancipation Proclamation, declaring freedom for enslaved people in the states rebelling against the Union. But just because Lincoln declared them free did not mean freedom was immediately enforced everywhere. The war continued for two more long years, and many Northern soldiers paid the ultimate price. The Civil War became the deadliest conflict in American history, with more than 600,000 soldiers losing their lives, around 300,000 from the North.
 - After the Civil War, the country faced an important question: how could the Constitution better protect the freedom of all Americans? The Founders had already provided a way to strengthen the Constitution through amendments. The nation used this amendment process to add three important changes known as the **Reconstruction Amendments**.
 - The **13th Amendment** abolished slavery in the United States.
 - The **14th Amendment** required states to respect the rights of citizens and provide equal protection under the law.
 - The **15th Amendment** protected the right of citizens to vote regardless of race.
 - These amendments helped the Constitution more clearly secure the freedoms that the nation had promised from the beginning.
2. Next, introduce the video. Ask students to watch for the points just discussed above.

Watch and Discuss: (7-10 minutes)

1. Watch **History in 5: Constitution Explained: Civil Rights for All Americans**, uninterrupted.
2. After the video, discuss the following questions to check for understanding and prepare students to complete the worksheet:
 - What major problem was the United States struggling with from the beginning?
 - Why was slavery difficult to solve when the country was first founded?
 - What did Abraham Lincoln do during the Civil War to move the country toward ending slavery?
 - Why was the Emancipation Proclamation important, but not the final solution?
 - What did the 13th Amendment do?
 - What did the 14th Amendment do?
 - What did the 15th Amendment do?
 - How did these amendments help the Constitution better protect freedom?
3. **Teacher tip:** Encourage students to use at least one vocabulary word in their answers, such as *amendment*, *abolished*, *equal protection*, *civil rights*, or *vote*.

4. Allow time for students to complete the rest of the worksheet. Scaffold and differentiate as needed based on student needs.

Wrap Up: (5 minutes)

1. Have students complete an exit ticket or door check (spoken or written):
 - How did the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments strengthen the Constitution?
 - Why were these amendments important after the Civil War?
2. Success Criteria: A strong response should explain that these amendments ended slavery, protected equal rights under the law, and protected voting rights. Students should recognize that the amendments helped close earlier loopholes and better protect freedom for all Americans.
3. Let students know that they will continue building and improving their civilizations in the next lesson. **(Lesson 9): Constitution Explained: Taxes, Voting Rights, and More**

Don't have time for a full lesson? Quick Activity (30 minutes)

Distribute all three of the **Constitution Scenario Cards** to each group of students and invite them to complete the **When Principles Are Tested** section of the *Civil Rights for All Americans* Worksheet. Then watch the video "Civil Rights for All Americans" and discuss as a class why an upgrade was necessary.

Constitution Scenario Cards

Note: This lesson builds on the previous seven lessons in the Constitution Explained series.

Scenario 1 – Freedom

In one region of your civilization, leaders claim they have the power to force certain people to work without pay. They argue that the Constitution never clearly banned this practice.

Student Task: Write a constitutional rule that clearly forbids forced labor.

Scenario 2 – Equal Protection

In another region, leaders say the laws only protect certain citizens. They argue that the Constitution never specifically says the government must treat all people equally.

Student Task: Write a constitutional rule that requires equal protection under the law.

Scenario 3 – Voting Rights

In another region, leaders claim that only certain groups of people should be allowed to vote in elections.

Student Task: Write a constitutional rule that protects the right of all citizens to vote.