

Forty Acres and Maybe a Mule by Harriette Gillem Robinet. (Aladdin Paperbacks, New York, 2000.) ISBN 0-689-83317-2

Grade Level: 8th Grade

Duration: 3-4 class periods

Literature Annotation

Pascal, a 12 year old orphaned former slave, travels with his brother and others from South Carolina to Georgia in search of the “Forty Acres and Mule” that was promised by General Sherman.

Maryland State Curriculum

Economics Standard: Students will develop economic reasoning to understand the historical development and current status of economic principles, institutions, and processes needed to be effective citizens, consumers, and workers participating in local communities, the nation, and the world.

4.A.4.c Describe the economic opportunities and obstacles faced by different individuals and groups before and after the Civil War

Geography Standard: Students will use geographic concepts and processes to examine the role of culture, technology, and the environment in the location and distribution of human activities and spatial connections throughout time.

3.C.1.c Explain how the regional demographic factors of constituents, such as race, ethnicity, education, occupation, and wealth affect public policy and voting issues

History Standard: Students will examine significant ideas, beliefs, and themes; organize patterns and events; and analyze how individuals and societies have changed over time in Maryland, the United States, and around the world.

5.B.5.b Explain how the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments addressed the issue of civil rights through abolition, the granting of citizenship, and the right to vote

5.B.5.c Identify the legal and illegal actions used to deny African Americans civil rights

5.B.5.d Evaluate the social and economic impact of sharecropping, tenant farming and the Freedman’s Bureau in the post Civil War South

Social Studies Skills and Process Standard: Students shall use reading, writing, and thinking processes and skills to gain knowledge and understanding of political, historical, and current events using chronological and spatial thinking, economic reasoning, and historical interpretation, by framing and evaluating questions from primary and secondary sources.

6.F.1 Interpret information from primary and secondary sources

Reading Standard: Students will use a variety of strategies to understand what they read (construct meaning).

- 1.E.3 Use strategies to make meaning from text (during reading) (Grade 8)
- 2.A.1.a Read, use and identify the characteristics of primary and secondary sources of academic information (Grade 8)
- 3.A.1.a Listen to critically, read, and discuss a variety of literary texts representing diverse cultures, perspectives, ethnicities, and time periods (Grade 8)

Objectives: Students will be able to...

- identify the obstacles faced by newly freed slaves after the Civil War.
- describe the economic, political and social impact of Reconstruction.

Vocabulary

Abolitionist: person who believed in and worked towards the end of slavery

Black Codes: southern laws that limited rights of African Americans after the Civil War

Emancipation Proclamation: document issued by President Abraham Lincoln on January 1, 1863, declaring "that all persons held as slaves" within the rebellious states "are, and henceforward shall be free."

Freedmen's Bureau: government agency that provided assistance to former slaves and impoverished whites in the Southern States and the District of Columbia in the years after the Civil War.

Lynch: put to death by hanging usually by an unlawful mob

Reconstruction: period of rebuilding after the Civil War during which the Southern states rejoined the Union

Refugee: a person who flees to a foreign country or power to escape danger or persecution

Scalawag: Southern white who opposed secession

Vagrancy: the state of wandering idly from place to place without lawful or visible means of support

Teacher Materials

Sentence Strips

Forty Acres and Maybe a Mule by Harriette Gillem Robinet

Teacher Resource Sheet #1: *Reader's Theater*

Teacher Resource Sheet #2: *Reconstruction Brainstorm*

Teacher Resource Sheet #3: *Forty Acres and Maybe a Mule Suggested Chapter Groupings*

Student Materials

Sentence Strips

Forty Acres and Maybe a Mule by Harriette Gillem Robinet

Student Resource Sheet #1: *Reconstruction*

Reconstruction Group Readings:

Note to teacher: Some of the readings are more difficult than others and should be assigned accordingly.

- Group #1 "Author's Note" from *Forty Acres and Maybe a Mule*
- Group #2 "The Freedmen's Bureau" *Footsteps*, September/October 2004
- Group #3 Student Resource Sheet #2: *Up From Slavery: An Autobiography*
- Group #4 Student Resource Sheet #3: *The Freedmen's Bureau*

Group #5	“The Ku Klux Klan” <i>Footsteps</i> , September/October 2004
Group #6	Chapter or section of chapter on Reconstruction from class textbook
Group #7	“A Voice in Government” <i>Footsteps</i> , September/October 2004

Note to teacher: Prior to the lesson, cut out the roles from Teacher Resource Sheet #1: *Reader’s Theater*. You may wish to paste each role on an index card and laminate them for future use.

Motivation

Pass out the role cards from Teacher Resource Sheet #1: *Reader’s Theater*. Have children stand and read their cards. Tell students that each of these people participated in a time in United States History that is called Reconstruction. After all students have finished, display Teacher Resource Sheet #2: Ask students to brainstorm things that they would like to know about Reconstruction. They may use the information from the Reader’s Theater activity as ideas.

Development

1. Tell students that they are going to read a story that took place during Reconstruction. *Forty Acres and Maybe a Mule* is about a group of former enslaved people and what happened to them after the Civil War.
2. Have students re-visit Teacher Resource Sheet #2. Would these categories be good for use in writing a summary of *Forty Acres and Maybe a Mule*? Would they add or delete any categories? Add or delete those categories from the master list on the board/ overhead. Tell students to jot down things from Chapter One that would fit into those categories as you read.
3. After you have read Chapter One, review student responses. Using the categories that were brainstormed, create 2-4 sentences that summarize the chapter. Write the sentences on sentence strips and post them on the board.
4. Break students into 14 pairs. Assign each pair one of the segments of *Forty Acres and Maybe a Mule* (See Teacher Resource Sheet #3: “*Forty Acres and Maybe a Mule* Suggested Chapter Groupings.) Students should read their segment silently and then discuss the main idea and major events with their partner. They should use sentence strips to write 2-4 sentences that summarize their segment.
5. After all pairs have finished, re-visit the summary of Chapter One. In sequence, student pairs should read and post their summaries. Allow time for student questions.
6. Read Chapter Twenty to the class. As a class, write 2-4 sentences to summarize the chapter. Post on the board.
7. Have pairs work together to create a written summary of the entire book. Debrief.
8. Remind students that *Forty Acres and Maybe a Mule* is a work of historical fiction. That means that it is a fictional story based on real events. Tell them that they are going to be learning more about the history behind the book that they have just read.

9. Assign each member of the home group a number (1-7). That number will correspond with one of the articles on the Reconstruction. Students will form a group with classmates who have the same number that they have. (That group will be referred to as their “expert group.”) Distribute Student Resource Sheet #1: *Reconstruction* and a different article to each group. In their expert group, students will examine their article and complete the second column in Student Resource Sheet #1.
10. After all groups have read their article and completed the second column on Student Resource Sheet #1, students will move back into their home groups. In their home groups, students will discuss the answers to the questions that they found in their article. They should record new information in the third column of their graphic organizer.
11. After the home groups have had time to discuss their articles, lead the entire class in a discussion of the questions. Focus on the economic, social, and political impact of Reconstruction.

Assessment

Have students respond to the following prompt.

You are on the staff of your school television station. It is your turn to write the book review segment. You have been asked to review *Forty Acres and Maybe a Mule* by Harriette Gillem Robinet. Your review should include the following:

- A summary of the story
- A description of the historical accuracy of the story
- A summary of the obstacles faced by freed slaves and the economic, social, and political impact of Reconstruction on American society

Closure

Have student volunteers present their book reviews. Ask students to think back to the economic, social and political impact of Reconstruction. Do we still live with any of those legacies (You may need to discuss the term “legacy/legacies.”) today? Discuss.

Reader's Theater

My name is General Oliver O. Howard. I lost an arm in the Civil War. I worked to help newly freed slaves in my job as the commissioner of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands.

My name is Charlotte Forten. I am from a prominent African American family in Philadelphia. I taught school to freed slaves in South Carolina.

My name is Benjamin F. Perry. I am the provisional governor of South Carolina. I believe that God created the African inferior to the white man in form, color, and intellect and no legislation can make him my equal.

My name is Calvin Jones. I helped to found the Ku Klux Klan. We fought to uphold white supremacy.

My name is Hiram Revels. I took Jefferson Davis' seat in the U.S. Senate, becoming the first African American to serve there.

My name is General William Tecumseh Sherman. I believed that all freedmen should receive land and an animal to help farm that land.

My name is Scott Bond. I was born a slave in Arkansas. After the war, I became a successful owner of a brick manufacturing business

My name is Susie King Taylor. I was born a slave in Georgia. I ran away from slavery when I was 14. I became a teacher and nurse for the Union Army. After the war, I taught school and organized a group that helped aging veterans and their families.

Reconstruction Brainstorm

RECONSTRUCTION

***Forty Acres and Maybe a Mule
Suggested Chapter Groupings***

Chapter 2
Chapter 3
Chapters 4 & 5
Chapter 6
Chapter 7
Chapter 8
Chapter 9
Chapters 10 & 11
Chapter 12
Chapters 13 & 14
Chapters 15 & 16
Chapter 17
Chapter 18
Chapter 19

Student Resource Sheet #1

Reconstruction

Questions	Expert Group Information	Home Group Information
<p>What was Reconstruction?</p> <p>List some important people during the Reconstruction period and explain why you think they were important.</p> <p>What were some of the obstacles faced by the newly freed slaves?</p> <p>What was the 13th Amendment?</p> <p>What was the 14th Amendment?</p>		

<p>What was the 15th Amendment?</p> <p>Explain the purpose of the Freedmen's Bureau.</p> <p>List some of the accomplishments of the Freedmen's Bureau.</p> <p>List some of the failures of the Freedmen's Bureau.</p> <p>Explain the meaning of "Forty Acres and Mule."</p> <p>Identify the KKK. Explain its purpose.</p>		
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<p>List some of the accomplishments of freed slaves.</p> <p>List additional information that you found interesting and/or important.</p>		
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Up From Slavery: An Autobiography (1900)
Booker T. Washington

Chapter V: The Reconstruction Period

The years from 1867 to 1878 I think may be called the period of Reconstruction... During the whole of the Reconstruction period two ideas were constantly agitating the minds of the coloured people, or, at least, the minds of a large part of the race. One of these was the craze for... learning, and the other was a desire to hold office.

...In every part of the South, during the Reconstruction period, schools, both day and night, were filled to overflowing with people of all ages and conditions, some being as far along in age as sixty and seventy years. The ambition to secure an education was most praiseworthy and encouraging...

Naturally, most of our people who received some little education became teachers or preachers. While among these two classes there were many capable, earnest, godly men and women, still a large proportion took up teaching or preaching as an easy way to make a living...

During the whole of the Reconstruction period our people throughout the South looked to the Federal Government for everything, very much as a child looks to its mother. This was not unnatural. The central government gave them freedom, and the whole Nation had been enriched for more than two centuries by the labour of the Negro. Even as a youth, and later in manhood, I had the feeling that it was cruelly wrong in the central government, at the beginning of our freedom, to fail to make some provision for the general education of our people in addition to what the states might do, so that the people would be the better prepared for the duties of citizenship.

It is easy to find fault, to remark what might have been done, and perhaps, after all, and under all the circumstances, those in charge of the conduct of affairs did the only thing that could be done at the time. Still, as I look back now over the entire period of our freedom, I cannot help feeling that it would have been wiser if some plan could have been put in operation which would have made the possession of a certain amount of education or property, or both, a test for the exercise of the franchise, and a way provided by which this test should be made to apply honestly and squarely to both the white and black races.

Though I was but little more than a youth during the period of Reconstruction, I had the feeling that mistakes were being made, and that things could not remain in the condition that they were in then very long. I felt that the Reconstruction policy, so far as it related to my race, was in a large measure on a false foundation, was artificial and forced. In many cases it seemed to me that the

ignorance of my race was being used as a tool with which to help white men into office, and that there was an element in the North which wanted to punish the Southern white men by forcing the Negro into positions over the heads of the Southern whites. I felt that the Negro would be the one to suffer for this in the end. Besides, the general political agitation drew the attention of our people away from the more fundamental matters of perfecting themselves in the industries at their doors and in securing property.

...But not all the coloured people who were in office during Reconstruction were unworthy of their positions, by any means. Some of them, like the late Senator B. K. Bruce, Governor Pinchback, and many others, were strong, upright, useful men. Neither were all the class designated as carpetbaggers dishonourable men. Some of them, like ex-Governor Bullock, of Georgia, were men of high character and usefulness...

THE FREEDMEN'S BUREAU
by W. E. Burghardt Du Bois

The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line; the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea. It was a phase of this problem that caused the Civil War; and however much...as we know, that the question of Negro slavery was the deeper cause of the conflict... No sooner had Northern armies touched Southern soil than this old question, newly guised, sprang from the earth,--What shall be done with slaves?

...the act of 1865 establishing in the War Department a "Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands." ...A Bureau was created, "to continue during the present War of Rebellion, and for one year thereafter," to which was given "the supervision and management of all abandoned lands, and the control of all subjects relating to refugees and freedmen," under "such rules and regulations as may be presented by the head of the Bureau and approved by the President." A commissioner, appointed by the President and Senate, was to control the Bureau, with an office force not exceeding ten clerks. The President might also appoint commissioners in the seceded states, and to all these offices military officials might be detailed at regular pay. The Secretary of War could issue rations, clothing, and fuel to the destitute, and all abandoned property was placed in the hands of the Bureau for eventual lease and sale to ex-slaves in forty-acre parcels...

On May 19 (1865) the new government--for a government it really was--issued its constitution; commissioners were to be appointed in each of the seceded states, who were to take charge of "all subjects relating to refugees and freedmen," and all relief and rations were to be given by their consent alone. The Bureau invited continued cooperation with benevolent societies, and declared, "It will be the object of all commissioners to introduce practicable systems of compensated labor," and to establish schools. Forthwith nine assistant commissioners were appointed. They were to hasten to their fields of work; seek gradually to close relief establishments, and make the destitute self-supporting; act as courts of law where there were no courts, or where Negroes were not recognized in them as free; establish the institution of marriage among ex-slaves, and keep records; see that freedmen were free to choose their employers, and help in making fair contracts for them; and finally, the circular said, "Simple good faith, for which we hope on all hands for those concerned in the passing away of slavery, will especially relieve the assistant commissioners in the discharge of their duties toward the freedmen, as well as promote the general welfare."

...Here, then, was the field of work for the Freedmen's Bureau; and since, with some hesitation, it was continued by the act of 1868 till 1869, let us look upon

four years of its work as a whole. There were, in 1868, 900 Bureau officials scattered from Washington to Texas, ruling, directly and indirectly, many millions of men. And the deeds of these rulers fall mainly under seven heads,--the relief of physical suffering, the overseeing of the beginnings of free labor, the buying and selling of land, the establishment of schools, the paying of bounties, the administration of justice, and the financiering of all these activities. Up to June, 1869, over half a million patients had been treated by Bureau physicians and surgeons, and sixty hospitals and asylums had been in operation. In fifty months of work 21,000,000 free rations were distributed at a cost of over \$4,000,000,--beginning at the rate of 30,000 rations a day in 1865, and discontinuing in 1869. Next came the difficult question of labor. First, 30,000 black men were transported from the refuges and relief stations back to the farms, back to the critical trial of a new way of working. Plain, simple instructions went out from Washington,--the freedom of laborers to choose employers, no fixed rates of wages, no peonage or forced labor. So far so good; but where local agents differed in capacity and character, where the personnel was continually changing, the outcome was varied. The largest element of success lay in the fact that the majority of the freedmen were willing, often eager, to work. So contracts were written,--50,000 in a single state,--laborers advised, wages guaranteed, and employers supplied. In truth, the organization became a vast labor bureau; not perfect, indeed,--notably defective here and there,--but on the whole, considering the situation, successful beyond the dreams of thoughtful men. The two great obstacles which confronted the officers at every turn were the tyrant and the idler: the slaveholder, who believed slavery was right, and was determined to perpetuate it under another name; and the freedman, who regarded freedom as perpetual rest...

In the work of establishing the Negroes as peasant proprietors the Bureau was severely handicapped, as I have shown. Nevertheless, something was done. Abandoned lands were leased so long as they remained in the hands of the Bureau, and a total revenue of \$400,000 derived from black tenants. Some other lands to which the nation had gained title were sold, and public lands were opened for the settlement of the few blacks who had tools and capital. The vision of landowning, however, the righteous and reasonable ambition for forty acres and a mule which filled the freedmen's dreams, was doomed in most cases to disappointment... Yet, with help and striving, the Negro gained some land, and by 1874, in the one state of Georgia, owned near 350,000 acres.

The greatest success of the Freedmen's Bureau lay in the planting of the free school among Negroes, and the idea of free elementary education among all classes in the South... by 1870 150,000 children were in school. The opposition to Negro education was bitter in the South, for the South believed an educated Negro to be a dangerous Negro... Fisk, Atlanta, Howard, and Hampton were founded in these days...

Such was the work of the Freedmen's Bureau. To sum it up in brief, we may say: it set going a system of free labor; it established the black peasant proprietor; it secured the recognition of black freemen before courts of law; it founded the free public school in the South. On the other hand, it failed to establish good will between ex-masters and freedmen; to guard its work wholly from paternalistic methods that discouraged self-reliance; to make Negroes landholders in any considerable numbers. Its successes were the result of hard work, supplemented by the aid of philanthropists and the eager striving of black men. Its failures were the result of bad local agents, inherent difficulties of the work, and national neglect. The Freedmen's Bureau expired by limitation in 1869, save its educational and bounty departments...

The most bitter attacks on the Freedmen's Bureau were aimed not so much at its conduct or policy under the law as at the necessity for any such organization at all. Such attacks came naturally from the border states and the South, and they were summed up by Senator Davis, of Kentucky, when he moved to entitle the act of 1866 a bill "to promote strife and conflict between the white and black races . . . by a grant of unconstitutional power." The argument was of tremendous strength, but its very strength was its weakness. For, argued the plain common sense of the nation, if it is unconstitutional, unpracticable, and futile for the nation to stand guardian over its helpless wards, then there is left but one alternative: to make those wards their own guardians by arming them with the ballot. The alternative offered the nation then was not between full and restricted Negro suffrage; else every sensible man, black and white, would easily have chosen the latter. It was rather a choice between suffrage and slavery, after endless blood and gold had flowed to sweep human bondage away. Not a single Southern legislature stood ready to admit a Negro, under any conditions, to the polls; not a single Southern legislature believed free Negro labor was possible without a system of restrictions that took all its freedom away; there was scarcely a white man in the South who did not honestly regard emancipation as a crime, and its practical nullification as a duty. In such a situation, the granting of the ballot to the black man was a necessity, the very least a guilty nation could grant a wronged race. Had the opposition to government guardianship of Negroes been less bitter, and the attachment to the slave system less strong, the social seer can well imagine a far better policy: a permanent Freedmen's Bureau, with a national system of Negro schools; a carefully supervised employment and labor office; a system of impartial protection before the regular courts; and such institutions for social betterment as savings banks, land and building associations, and social settlements. All this vast expenditure of money and brains might have formed a great school of prospective citizenship, and solved in a way we have not yet solved the most perplexing and persistent of the Negro problems.

...The legacy of the Freedmen's Bureau is the heavy heritage of this generation. Today, when new and vaster problems are destined to strain every fibre of the national mind and soul, would it not be well to count this legacy honestly and carefully? For this much all men know: despite compromise, struggle, war, and struggle, the Negro is not free. In the backwoods of the Gulf states, for miles and miles, he may not leave the plantation of his birth; in well-nigh the whole rural South the black farmers are peons, bound by law and custom to an economic slavery, from which the only escape is death or the penitentiary. In the most cultured sections and cities of the South the Negroes are a segregated servile caste, with restricted rights and privileges. Before the courts, both in law and custom, they stand on a different and peculiar basis. Taxation without representation is the rule of their political life. And the result of all this is, and in nature must have been, lawlessness and crime. That is the large legacy of the Freedmen's Bureau, the work it did not do because it could not.

Atlantic Monthly 87 (1901): 354-365.