

Reconstruction, Redemption and Agrarian Revolt (8th Grade)

Objective: Students will play the Sharecrop-Opoly Simulation and create a sharecropping cycle graph of poverty.

Essential Question: *How did the Upcountry sharecropping system create a cycle of poverty?*

SC Social Studies Standards

- 8-4.1 Explain the purposes of Reconstruction with attention to the economic, social, political, and geographic problems facing the South, including reconstruction of towns, farms and transportation systems; the effects of emancipation; racial tension; tension between social classes; and disagreement over voting rights.
- 8-4.2 Summarize the Reconstruction in South Carolina and its effects on daily life in SC, including the experiences of plantation owners, small farmers, freedmen, women, and northern immigrants.
- 8-4.3 Summarize the events and the process that led to the ratification of SC's Constitution of 1868, including African American representation in the constitutional convention; the major provisions of the constitution; and the political and social changes that allowed African Americans, Northerners, carpetbaggers and scalawags to play a part in SC state government.
- 8-4.4 Explain how events during Reconstruction improved opportunities for African Americans but created a backlash that, by the end of Reconstruction, negated the gains African Americans had made, including the philanthropy of northern aid societies, the assistance provided by the federal government such as the Freedmen's Bureau, and their advancement in politics and education.
- 8-4.5 Summarize the successes and failures that occurred in SC during Reconstruction, including the bribery of legislators, corruption in political parties, the development of public education, and violence during the election of 1876.
- 8-5.1 Summarize the political, economic, and social conditions in SC following the end of Reconstruction, including the leadership of Wade Hampton and the so-called Bourbons or Redeemers, agricultural depression and struggling industrial development, the impact of the temperance and suffrage movements, the development of the 1895 constitution, and the evolution of race relations and Jim Crow laws.
- 8-5.2 Compare key aspects of the Populist movement in SC, including the economic and political roots of Populism, the leadership of Ben Tillman, conflicts between the Tillmanites and the Conservatives, the founding of land-grant colleges, and the increased racial conflicts and lynching.
- 8-5.3 Summarize the changes that occurred in SC agriculture and industry during the late 19th century, including changes in crop production in various regions, and the growth of the textile industry in the Upcountry.

Background Information

From the Museum:

Reconstruction

After the Civil War, the federal government began rebuilding a divided and bloodied nation. Reconstruction brought sweeping changes to Southern life and politics. Congressional Reconstruction removed former Confederate officials from state government in 1867. Scalawags (white southerners who accepted Reconstruction), carpetbaggers (northerners who came south after the war), and African Americans were made a part of new state governments, with U.S. Army troops keeping order. To be readmitted to the Union, the Southern states had to accept the Fourteenth Amendment, granting black freedmen “full and equal benefit of the laws.” The Freedmen’s Bureau assisted emancipated slaves and poor whites with food, shelter, jobs, and education. These changes angered a self-proclaimed “social club” in South Carolina: the Ku Klux Klan. Klan violence brought terror to black freedmen in 1870 and 1871 in nine Upcountry counties. Greenville, however, remained quiet.

Redemption

Reconstruction radically changed Southern politics, but Governor Wade Hampton III “redeemed” South Carolina by restoring pre-war style state government and reinstating lost antebellum values. For many white South Carolinians, Reconstruction meant a government of inept and corrupt politicians and unacceptable new rights for former slaves. For blacks it offered freedom and equality. Hampton and his Conservative Democrats demanded an end to Reconstruction and sought to chase the Republicans and the federal government out of state politics. The Governor’s race in 1876 was marked by cheating, bribery, and vote buying. Hampton’s “Red Shirts” used terror and violence to keep African Americans from voting. Afterwards, both sides claimed victory, but in the end the Democrats won. The 1876 Presidential election was also contested. Republican Rutherford B. Hayes gained Southern support and the White House by removing federal troops in the South. Without military support, the Republicans had little hope of staying in office. Once Hampton became governor, he reduced African-American political participation and government programs begun under Reconstruction.

Agrarian Revolt

Ignored by the ruling Democratic Party and plagued by crippling debt, small farmers of the Upcountry attempted to solve their mounting problems with political action in the 1880s. Worldwide overproduction of cotton drove prices down. South Carolina farmers could not prosper financially, could not afford to purchase their own land, and were in debt to the supply merchants that furnished their seeds and farm equipment. As Wade Hampton’s “Redeemers” held fast to small government and low taxes, South Carolina’s

small farmers felt ignored and frustrated. The Farmer's Alliance fought for reforms during the 1880s, and a farmer from Edgefield brought his voice to the farmers' cause. Benjamin Ryan Tillman attacked Hampton's Democrats and their lack of an agricultural program. He became the champion of the common white farmer and was elected governor in 1890.

Ben Tillman

South Carolina governor, U.S. Senator, and leader of an agrarian revolution, Benjamin Ryan "Pitchfork Ben" Tillman was a farmer from Edgefield, South Carolina. To many, he was a hero who fought for the rights of the common white man. To others, he was a political opportunist who divided races and classes. Tillman rose to power by uniting white Upcountry farmers against African Americans and "aristocratic" Lowcountry politicians. When elected governor, he enacted a program of reform in the name of a "Revolution for the Common Man." Throughout his political career, Tillman made inflammatory verbal attacks against African Americans. Leaving the Governor's mansion for the U.S. Senate, Tillman led the effort to rewrite the state constitution in 1895, effectively removing African Americans from the political process.

Tending the Fields

Sharecropping replaced plantation agriculture and slavery after the Civil War and kept South Carolina farmers in a vicious cycle of debt and obligation. Sharecropping was a practice well-suited to a region with land and labor but little money for wages. Sharecroppers lived and farmed on a landowner's property, turning over a share of their crop to the landowner. Landowners and local merchants, known as "Furnishing Men," often made advances of supplies to sharecroppers, who then were obliged to work off their debts. This system laid the foundation for the company stores that operated later in textile mill villages. Sharecroppers frequently needed to borrow more than their crops were worth and found themselves in perpetual debt. Regarded as the new "slave" class, these farmers often had no choice but to abandon their agricultural livelihoods for the new promise of textile mills.

Cotton Boom and Bust

Growing cotton was a risky venture, dependent on the forces of nature and the economy that affected profits from year to year. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, problems arose for cotton farmers. They harvested more, causing prices to plummet. The boll weevil devoured crops, foreign farmers competed for the cotton market, and improper land management left poor, eroding soil in place of rich, Upcountry earth. Many farmers could no longer survive the unpredictable successes and failures of cotton farming. They gave in to the lure of steady work and ready housing offered by the Upcountry's textile mills.

Other detailed background information about these topics can be found in:

The History of South Carolina in the Building of the Nation (8th Grade text) by Archie Vernon Huff, Jr Chapters 21-23

Greenville The History of the City and County in the South Carolina Piedmont by Archie Vernon Huff pp.151-177

A Union Officer in the Reconstruction by John William De Forest

Carolina Piedmont Country by John M. Coggeshall – sections on sharecropping

The South Carolina Encyclopedia edited by Walter Edgar

Greenville Cultural Exchange Center

Various books in the South Carolina Room at the Greenville Library

Primary Activity: Sharecrop-Opoly

Materials for Sharecrop-Opoly Simulation

- Teacher's Directions (attached)
- Foam or plastic cups (3 per student)
- Ziplock bags of dried beans (one bag per student)
- Pencil and a sheet of paper

Procedure

1. Print out the Teacher's Direction sheet to use for the game.
2. Provide each student with a ziplock bag of dried beans and two foam or plastic cups. Have them label the first cup with "Landlord" and the second with "Furnishing merchant".
3. Follow the directions and play the sharecropping game.
4. Invite discussion about the game after it is over. How did the sharecropping system make it hard for farmers to improve their standard of living?

Materials for Cycle Graph of Poverty

- Cycle Graph (attached)
- Sharecropping Experience (attached)

Procedure

1. Students read the Sharecropping experiences sheet.
2. Students pick out four pieces of information to complete the cycle graph.

Assessment

The assessment of this activity is that the student gleans 4 important bits of information from the text and correctly puts it into a cycle graph form. One point can be given for each square in the cycle graph for a total of 4.

Cross-Curricular Activities

Social Studies

* Read excerpts from *A Union Officer in the Reconstruction*. De Forest was stationed in Greenville's Mansion House Hotel for 15 months as a representative of the Freedman's Bureau assisting the poor in three counties of the Upcountry. Have students research Freedman's Bureau efforts in the Upcountry (the Allen School, etc) and report on them.

Writing

* Research and write a short essay on one of the following: Pres. Andrew Johnson, a wealthy white southerner, carpetbaggers, Black Code, scalawags, Freedman's Bureau, Ku Klux Klan, Gov. Wade Hampton III, Ben Tillman, the Redshirts, the Farmers's Alliance, the newly freed slave, the sharecropper. Detail each one's unique point of view during reconstruction. Students may want to present this information in character.

Drama

* Students can act out a television talk show with the above people as guests. Use one student as the host and the remainder as audience members who can ask questions to the guests. Record the show and share it with other classes.

Music

* Blues-style music was often used as a voice of protest in the sharecropping system. Research singers and songs related to this time in southern America. Some examples are "Cotton Field Blues", "Boll Weevil Blues", "Crossroads" – by artists Robert Johnson, Charlie Patton and Son House. Obtain lyrics or recordings of the songs to play for the class.

The Sharecropping Experience

Sharecropping and tenant farming arose at the end of the Civil War out of the plantation system. Many landowners had lots of land but little money to pay workers. At the same time, former slaves and poor whites were impoverished and uneducated. The solution was the sharecropping system.

Both tenant farmers and sharecroppers were farmers without land to farm. Tenant Farmers typically paid a landowner for the right to grow crops on a certain piece of property. In addition to having some cash to pay rent, they also generally owned some livestock and tools needed for successful farming.

Sharecroppers, on the other hand, were even more impoverished than tenant farmers. With few resources and little or no cash, sharecroppers agreed to farm a certain plot of land in exchange for a share of the crops they raised. The exact amount of crops the sharecropper gave over to the land owner depended upon the contract or agreement between the two – sometimes it was half, sometimes more.

Most sharecroppers began the crop year needing to buy supplies, not only to help raise their crop, but also to keep themselves and their families alive until harvest time. Furnishing merchants (sometimes the landlord was the furnishing man) would exchange food and supplies to the sharecropper on credit – payable at the year's end.

The landlord handled the books (often carelessly or manipulating them) and the sales of all the crops. He would often charge the sharecropper a “cost of supervision” fee and interest on all debt.

After the crop came in, the sharecropper would receive half of the money made but would then have to settle his debts to the furnishing merchants and the landlord.

Oftentimes his debts exceeded the amount he made from the crops, and his only alternatives were to sign on for another year with the same landlord or move to another farm. In both cases, the cycle of poverty and landlessness remained unbroken.

SHARECROP-OPOLY SIMULATION

Teacher's Directions

Handout the bag of beans and cups for students to label with "Landlord" and "Furnishing Merchant". Have them place the two cups on the desk. They will need paper and pencil to fill out credit slips.

Tell the students that they are going to play a simulation game to help understand the plight of the sharecropper. The beans are currency in which they will earn or lose according to the situations that happen in the game.

The dialogue:

"Congratulations! You have just signed a contract to be a sharecropper on my land. I will provide you with living quarters for you and your family and land on which to work. You will pay me 50% of the money from your crop, plus a small supervisory fee. I will provide you with a mule but you are responsible for his upkeep. I am your landlord and what I say goes. There will be no negotiations or arguments. You should consider yourself lucky to have this opportunity to make a living."

1. "You came here with 10 beans in cash."
student takes 10 beans from the bag and places it on his desk.
2. "You will need to have some supplies to farm the land. You can purchase them at the Furnishing merchant. You will need:"

seed – 1 bean goes into the Furnishing merchant cup
plow – 2 beans goes into the Furnishing merchant cup
cart – 2 beans goes into the Furnishing merchant cup
fertilizer – 1 bean goes into the Furnishing merchant cup

3. "The planting of cotton has gone along fine but your family needs food to eat. Go to the Furnishing merchant and purchase:

flour – 1 bean goes into the Furnishing merchant cup
meat – 2 beans goes into the Furnishing merchant cup
vegetables – 1 bean goes into the Furnishing merchant cup
sugar – 1 bean goes into the Furnishing merchant cup
lard – 1 bean goes into the Furnishing merchant cup
milk – 1 bean goes into the Furnishing merchant cup

* "If you have run out of beans you can make the purchase on credit. Simply write the number of beans you owe (3 beans) on a small slip of paper and put it in the Furnishing merchant's cup. Don't worry, you can pay him back after the crop comes in!"

4. “A tree fell on the fence, allowing your mule to roam free. You must purchase supplies from the furnishing merchant to repair the fence.”

3 rails – 5 beans

*Fill out a credit slip (5 beans) and place it in the Furnishing merchant’s cup.

5. “Your mule is successfully contained but is now in need of food. Purchase the following at the Furnishing merchant:”

5 bails of hay – 5 beans

*Fill out a credit slip (5 beans) and place it in the Furnishing merchant’s cup.

6. “It has been a rough winter and your wife needs medication and your 3 children need clothes and shoes. I happen to have some shoes and clothes to supply you (for a small fee) and you need to purchase the medication at the furnishing merchant.”

clothes and shoes – 4 beans

* Fill out a credit slip (4 beans) and place it in the landlord’s cup.

Medication – 1 bean

* Fill out a credit slip (1 bean) and place it in the Furnishing merchant’s cup.

7. “Congratulations! After a year of hard work the crop has finally come in and I am selling it! Unfortunately the price of cotton has gone down significantly and only got 40 beans at market.”

Student counts out 40 beans and places it on his desk.

8. “Today is “settlement day” where you settle your debts to the landlord and the furnishing merchant. Whatever is left – is yours to keep!”

a. Student places $\frac{1}{2}$ of the crop money (20 beans) in the landlord’s cup – according to the contract.

b. The landlord requires 3 beans for a “supervisory” fee. Place 3 beans in the landlords cup.

c. Student removes the credit slips from the Furnishing merchants cup – it totals 14 beans – student places 14 beans into the Furnishing merchant’s cup.

d. Student removes the credit slip from the Landlord’s cup (4 beans for clothes and shoes) and places 4 beans into the Landlord’s cup.

“Oh, wait – you only had 3 beans left. Well, here’s what we’ll do. Put 3 beans into the landlord’s cup along with a credit slip of 1 bean. You can work another year and pay off your debt with the crop comes in!”