

Lesson Plan For Indivisible

Land: On My Own Ground

At times in the history of our country, both Native Americans and African Americans have been mistreated by their own United States Government. Two such times that involved land use and ownership were (1) in the 1830s when white settlers were seeking more land in the south for growing cotton, and Native American settlements were "in the way" and (2) as the Civil War was winding down and something had to be done with the freedmen following President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. In the first case, the problem was "solved" by the Indian Removal policy. In the second, Forty Acres and a Mule was first granted to the freed slaves and then taken away. Below are a few basic facts, some primary documents, and some questions to be answered. Using all the information, you are asked to write an article comparing the two situations, organizing your thoughts around what came to be called the "The Trail of Tears" and a Langston Hughes' poem called "A Dream Deferred."

The Indian Removal Act was signed into law by President Andrew Jackson on May 28, 1830, authorizing the President to grant unsettled lands west of the Mississippi in exchange for Indian lands within the existing states (Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, and Louisiana.) A few tribes went peacefully, but many resisted the relocation policy. During the fall and winter of 1838-1839, the Cherokees and their black slaves were forcibly moved west by the United States Government. Approximately 4,000 Cherokees and their slaves died in the forced march.

Question: What happened when the Cherokees were forced to leave their homes and move west?

"The Cherokees are nearly all prisoners. They have been dragged from their houses, and encamped at the forts and military posts all over the nation. In Georgia, especially, multitudes were allowed no time to take any thing (sic) with them except the clothes they had on. Well-furnished houses were left prey to plunderers who like hungry wolves, follow the trail of the captors. These wretches rifle the houses and strip the helpless, unoffending owners of all they have on earth." **(A Missionary with the Cherokees)**

Question: What happened when the Cherokees were forced to leave their homes?

"Long time we travel on way to new land. People feel bad when they leave old nation. Women cry and make sad wails. Children cry and many men cry. And all look sad like when friends die, but they say nothing and just put heads down and keep go on towards West. Many days pass and people die very much." **(A Cherokee survivor)**

Question: What was being forced to move like for members of the Cherokee Nation?

"The removal of the Cherokee Indians from their life- in the year of 1838 found me a man in the prime of life and a Private soldier in the American Army. Being acquainted with many of the Indians and able to fluently speak their language, I was sent as an interpreter into the Smoky Mountain Country in May, 1838, and witnessed the execution of the most brutal order in the history of American warfare. I saw helpless Cherokees arrested and dragged from their homes, and driven at the bayonet point into stockades. And in the chill of a drizzling rain on an October morning I saw them loaded like cattle or sheep into six hundred and forty-five wagons and started towards the west." (Private John Burnett, 2nd Regiment, 2nd Brigade, Mounted Infantry – Written when he was an old man,)

Question: How did a United States soldier view the forced march?

As the end of the Civil War grew nearer, tens of thousands of freed slaves left their plantations to follow Union General William Tecumseh Sherman's Army. To help solve problems caused by the masses of refugees, General Sherman issued Special Field Order No. 15 granting each freed family of ex-slaves forty acres of tillable land on islands and on the coast of Georgia. After President Lincoln was assassinated and Vice President Andrew Johnson became the President, he revoked General Sherman's order and returned the land to the plantation owners.

Question: What problem was General Sherman trying to solve?

(This is an excerpt from a report when Civil War Union General William T. Sherman and Lincoln's Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton met with a group of ex-slave leaders after the slaves had been freed by the Emancipation Proclamation.)

General Sherman: State what you understand by slavery and the freedom that was given to you by the President's Proclamation.

Ex-slave leader: Slavery is, receiving by irresistible power the work of another man, and not his consent. The freedom as I understand it, promised by the proclamation, is taking us from under the yoke of bondage, and placing us where we could reap the fruit of our own labor, take care of ourselves and assist the Government in maintaining our own freedom.

General Sherman: State in what manner you think you can best take care of yourselves, and how you can best assist the Government in maintaining your freedom.

Ex-Slave Leader: The way we can best take care of ourselves is to have land, and turn it and till it by our own labor. We want to be placed on land until we are able to buy it and make it our own.”

Question: What is most important for the newly freed slaves?

(Special Order No.15 in the field, Savannah, GA, January 16, 1865)

“The islands from Charleston, south, the abandoned rice fields along the rivers for thirty miles back from the sea, and the country bordering the St. Johns River, Florida, are reserved and set apart for the settlement of negroes (sic) now made free by the acts of war and the proclamation of the President of the United States.”

Question: What did the special order call for?

Links:

- [Home](#)
- [Historical](#)
- [Social Justice](#)
- [Land: On My Own Ground](#)
- [The Ramapough Lenape Nation](#)
- [African and Native American Folklore](#)
- [Glossary](#)
- [Works Cited](#)