

LESSON PLAN – HISTORIC DECISIONS GUIDE: MOVING TOWARDS FREEDOM (GRADES 8-12)

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION: Democratic deliberation is an inclusive method of decision making used to address an open question or decide on a way forward. It requires a diverse set of participants to consider both relevant empirical information as well as ethical and moral bases for decisions. Participants justify their arguments with reasons that are accessible to all participants and treat one another with mutual respect, with the goal of reaching an actionable decision on how to move forward (such as a rule, policy, or law). The method includes openness to future challenge or revision should additional information emerge. Practicing deliberation in the classroom requires active participation and helps prepare students to make collaborative decisions that embrace respectful exploration and discussion of opposing views. Deliberation calls for students to work toward agreement when it is possible and to maintain mutual respect when it is not. It encourages participants to adopt a broader perspective and work toward a mutually agreeable conclusion.

This decision-making method works well when a group is faced with an open policy question on which reasonable disagreement exists. The method addresses the question ‘what should we do?’ especially when there are several reasonable options for action. Deliberation requires articulation of values and ethical considerations in addition factual and empirical evidence, including lived experience. While science tells us what we can do, ethics helps us decide what we should do.

Deliberation is different than discussion or debate. Discussion is typically used to help participants develop an understanding of a topic. Debate is typically used as a means of swaying or convincing an opponent of the rightness of one’s position. Deliberation, on the other hand, is typically used to reach an agreed-upon way forward on a challenging topic for which there are several reasonable alternatives. Often it involves discussion (i.e., developing an understanding) but does not involve the typical winner-take-all approach often associated with debate. The aim is to reach a negotiated way forward that finds common ground and meaningful agreement.

OBJECTIVE: The setting is January 1, 1866 and it has been over six months since the Civil war ended. The North and South are still at odds about how to proceed with unifying the nation and what to do with the social realities confronting 4 million newly freed African Americans. In this lesson we will explore the creative and ethical uses of making decisions that contribute or limit the oppression of former enslaved African Americans and answering the question: “What rights and opportunities should be afforded to African Americans?”

TIME ALLOTMENT: 45-90 minutes.

VOCABULARY

Reconstruction: A series of policies designed to bring the Confederate states back into the national union.

Black Reconstruction: A term used by southern Democrats to describe an evil time in which ignorant black people ruled.

Enslavement: A condition in which a person is owned by another. A slave was considered by law as property, or chattel, and was deprived of most of the rights ordinarily held by free persons.

Racism: The belief that people with one skin color are better than people with another skin color, and should be treated differently.

Emancipation: Being set free from the control of someone or something.

Equality: The state of being equal and one of the principles in a democratic society.

IMPLEMENTATION

LEARNING CONTEXT: Reconstruction, the era following the U.S. Civil War, was an effort to reunify the divided nation and integrate African Americans into society. The controversial steps taken gave rise to the Ku Klux Klan and other divisive groups. By exploring the use of deliberation in the context of the Reconstruction era, we will help students (grades 8-12) understand the social realities of the past and how they are relevant today.

MATERIALS & RESOURCES

- a) Historic Decisions Guide (download at https://freedomcenter.org/sites/default/files/HistoricDecisionsGuide-Dig_200414_v02.pdf)
- b) Lincoln's Ten Percent Plan
- c) Wade-Davis Bill
- d) Reconstruction Amendments

ASSESSMENT

Do students understand the concept of deliberation and critical thinking? Using the era of Reconstruction as an example, do students understand the scope and impact of decision-making? Are they able to understand the lasting consequences of decisions and how those decisions impact rights and opportunities?