

Forty Acres and a Mule Activity

Students will learn about the plight of Freedmen during Reconstruction through a hands on simulation that turns them into Sharecroppers for the class period. Student handouts appear on the next two pages. Part of the simulation asks students to sign a contract they cannot read to help them better understand why sharecropping was unfair. The translation appears below. Feel free create your own “secret” contract for your students.

GSE Standards and Elements	<p>SSUSH10 Identify legal, political, and social dimensions of Reconstruction.</p> <p>b. Investigate the efforts of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (the Freedmen’s Bureau) to support poor whites, former slaves, and American Indians.</p>
Literacy Standards	<p>L11-12RHSS7- Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.</p>
Social Studies Matrices	<p>Information Processing Skills-</p> <p>3. Identify Issues and/or problems and alternative solutions</p> <p>5. Identify main idea, detail, sequence of events, and cause and effect in a social studies context</p> <p>11. Draw conclusions and make generalizations</p>
Enduring Understanding(s)	<p>Conflict and Change</p>

Contract Translation:

You agree to give me your first born child. You also agree to stand on one leg, rub your head, and say "My teacher is the greatest person who ever lived." every time I say "US History."

You agree to record this and place it on Snapchat, Twitter and YouTube. You agree that you can NEVER delete this. You also agree to remove all the gum from under my desks.

So here's the lesson: Never sign a contract you can't/haven't read!
And this contract is null and void. :)

Name _____

“40 Acres and a Mule” Activity Questions

Directions: After filling in your chart, answer the following questions.

1. Why did you decide to take the landowners deal? What other options did you have?
2. When purchasing your supplies, did you decide to rent or buy? Why?
3. Did you decide to buy the best you could get or economize? Why?
4. How did you do? Break even? Still in debt? Make a profit?
5. If you owe the landowner money, you have to work it off in the next harvest (a clause in the work contract you didn't/couldn't read). Is this fair? How were these clauses used to take advantage of workers?
6. If you broke even or made a profit, we still have a position open for next harvest. Interested? What other options do you have? Think about how much money you have left when making your decision.
7. After completing this activity and learning about the sharecropping system in class, would you say that this system is fair or unfair? Why? Did it leave workers with options? Why or why not? Please write one paragraph to explain your answer.