



Establishing a Freedmen's Bureau In Athens, Georgia, 1867: A Document Analysis Exercise

A Lesson Plan for 8th Graders

by

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Background: In this document analysis, students begin investigating efforts to serve freedmen in Athens, Georgia around 1866-1868. Students address questions about how this effort worked and what the challenges were that Union officials (e.g., Union Major J. J. Knox) faced in the process of supporting freedmen in the south after the Civil War.

Note to Teachers: In addition to addressing Georgia Social Studies Standards, this exercise can serve as good initial preparation for a typical Document-Based Question (DBQ) found in Advanced Placement history courses taught in high school.

Lesson Goal: Students will identify the key social, cultural, and political differences between the South and the North after the Civil War.

Georgia Social Studies Standard

SS8H6: The student will analyze the impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on Georgia. (c). Analyze the impact of Reconstruction on Georgia and other southern states, emphasizing the **Freedmen's Bureau**; sharecropping and tenant farming; Reconstruction plans; 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments to the constitution; Henry McNeal Turner and black legislators; and the Ku Klux Klan.

Materials: See the three documents included below.

Suggested Lesson Sequence

Key Vocabulary: Students will be introduced to the following key words and concepts that correlate with the standards and articles.

Sanction	Annul
Seizing	Partially
Plundering	Oppressed
Ruffians	Aristocratic
Repudiation	Freedmen's Bureau

Introduction - Students will be review key concepts surrounding the establishment of the Freedmen's Bureau.

Work Session - Students will read each document and address the questions following each one. Students will work independently and then push out to groups and discuss what they found. The groups will then push into whole class discussion to clarify any remaining questions. Students will repeat this process for each document.

Final Class Discussion/Review – Review the Lesson Goal with students as a check on their understanding of the “key social, cultural, and political differences between the South and the North after the Civil War.”

Summary – Conduct a <Polleverywhere.com> word cloud of adjectives that describe John Knox.

Document #1

Jackson, Mississippi Office
Acting Assistant Commissioner Rawbringer
To: John J. Knox
March 1, 1867

“As the Acting Assistant Commissioner, I direct you not to interfere in any case with the Civil Authorities in apprenticing freedmen nor to annul any contract made by them. If abuses occur, you will collect all the facts and forward them to this office for instructions. If minor freedmen have been released from apprenticeship by your orders you will cause them to be returned to their masters, reporting your action to this office.”

1. Who is Knox told to not interfere with? _____

2. Why would Knox go against the ruling of Civil Authorities?

3. Why would Freedmen need to be part of an apprenticeship?

Document #2

John J. Knox Speech in Athens, Georgia
Subject: Beginning of a New School
Source *Athens Banner Herald*
Circa 1867

"It is almost unnecessary for me to tell you that these teachers, when they come South to teach a colored school, sacrifice the comforts of home and society.... Such, my friends, are a few of the objects of the American missionaries—they teach you how to live and how to die. And, as such, in behalf of the colored people of Athens, whom I partially represent, we welcome you, thrice welcome you, here and recognize you as the freedman's best friends, and in the discharge of a noble and Christian duty—that of elevating a long oppressed and downtrodden race from the condition of slaves to that of intelligent men and women.

To the teachers I would say, that while you need hardly expect to find any friends among your aristocratic white neighbors, you will find as kind and true ones as you ever left in your native land; and though dark their skins may be, their hearts are full of warm and generous impulses...."

1. What is the main idea that Knox is trying to get across in this speech?

2. Who are the two main groups that Knox addresses?

3. What statement from Knox best describes the importance of education? _____

4. How does John Knox describe the importance of teachers to the audience?

5. What does John Knox warn the teachers about? _____

6. Why is he warning them? What's the problem? And what's the evidence that the teachers should be worried? _____

Document #3

More Murders

Office Sub –Assistant, The Commissioners Bureau
Athens GA October 6, 1868

“Dear Sir - I extract from a letter just received from South Carolina, from a reliable citizen, giving an account of the murder of two citizens of my district, Jackson County. The letter is dated at Lowndesville, S.C. October 2d, 1868, and reads as follows:

‘Monday night, the most horrible cold-blooded murder was committed within half a mile of this place, that I ever heard of. Mr. Peleg Cornell and a colored man who was with him, by the name of John, from Jefferson GA, was murdered by parties unknown to anyone here. It appears that they were followed here, as a stranger was seen in our village, while Mr. C. was in our store, and at night, seven men were seen by a young man who came after a doctor at night, but who they were he does not know.... As some were going along the road by a pine thicket they discovered horses and men’s tracks. They went into the thicket and found Mr. C’s body. He had been stabbed in the left breast over the heart with a knife.... A pistol shot in his head, his brains running out and his hands tied together. I turned to leave this sad sickening scene and had gone some seventy yards and found the negro man. Oh! What a sight he was—dead and his clothes burned off. On examination eight shots were found through his head, two in his arm and four in his back.... I tell you that Mr. Cornell was an enterprising energetic, industrious union man and an active supporter of reconstruction.’”

1. What does the author mean when he states, “I extract from a letter just received from South Carolina, from a reliable citizen, giving an account of the murder of two citizens of my district, Jackson county.” _____

2. What crime was committed? _____
3. Who were the two victims? _____
4. What were Mr. Cornell’s unique characteristics that lead to his murder?

5. What message would these types of crimes send to other freedman and to those who supported the freedmen? _____

Digging deeper:

John Knox was a unionist, who had a deep devotion to the United States and America. Analyze John Knox's position and growth as a leader and supporter of Reconstruction. Write an obituary for John Knox summarizing his efforts to protect the Union and his fight for freedman's rights. Use the following links to learn more about Major Knox:

<http://oxfordleader.com/knox-concentrates-on-freedmens-bureau/>

<http://www.alhesterauthor.com/blog/the-freedmens-bureau-in-athens-georgia-a-tough-job1>

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Note: This work was produced through an educational collaboration between Clarke County (GA) School District and the T.R.R. Cobb House Museum.

