

**“I’se Free, Now What?”**  
by Nealie Perkins

**Objectives:**

Students will identify challenges facing freed slaves after the war.  
Students will discuss **black codes** that took away rights provided by Reconstruction.

**TEKS:**

5.4d, 5.14d, 5.23b, 5.25b, 5.25c, 5.25d, 5.26a, 5.26d

**Time and Materials:**

One class period  
Plain white paper  
Transparency of pictures  
Overhead projector

**Context:**

When the Civil war ended, many ex-slaves were wandering around through the country looking for a new life. They had no money and no land that had been given to them as promised, (40 acres and a mule). Many had to go back to the plantation to get work. In the South, laws were passed that would limit the rights of the newly freed slaves. These laws were called **black codes**. They differed from state to state, but most would not allow African-Americans to vote, travel freely, own certain kinds of property, or work in certain businesses. Some African-Americans were even forced to work for free if they couldn’t find a job. It was wonderful to be free, but many African Americans were vulnerable, particularly in the economic arena. They had no tools, no shelter, no cooking utensils, and were surrounded by hostile men who were determined to prove that slavery should never had abolished.

**The Lesson:**

Divide students in small groups and read pgs. **478-480** in 5<sup>th</sup> grade U.S. History textbook. Discuss reading with students and have them record notes in history journal.

Have students analyze two Library of Congress pictures of slaves leaving their former homes in search of a new life.

Ask the following questions for first photo:

*What do you see in this picture?*

*How would you describe the people in the wagon?*

*What is happening?*

*Why are the soldiers there?*

For second photo:

What type of document is this? What was the artist trying to show? What do you think is in the background on the far right? (These are the makeshift camps that freed slaves would live in)

Point out to students that both wagons are filled to capacity with people. *What other similarities to find in the two photos?*

Then have several students to “step into” the image for an act it out. Teacher assumes the role of an on-scene reporter. Ask students to play the role of the ex-slaves or soldiers and have them respond to the questions: *Who are you? Why are you here? Where are you going? What do you do for a living? Did you leave anything or anyone behind?*

**Extending the Lesson:**

Students imagine that they were aboard the wagon in the picture.

1. Have students write a letter to their former master explaining why you are leaving.
2. Write a letter to a friend or relative explaining how your life is now that you're free.
3. Write a letter to President Andrew Johnson requesting the land to start a new life.

**Assessment:**

**Name three ways the black codes affected African Americans.**

**Multiple Choice:**

**What were Southern laws that described the rights and duties of freed African Americans?**

- a. Reconstruction
- b. Emancipation Proclamation
- c. Black Codes
- d. Civil rights



**Slaves crossing the Rappahannock River, Virginia  
Library of Congress/ Stereograph 1862  
Photograph#1**



**Document #2**  
**Library of Congress**  
**Former slaves sitting in and around a wagon drawn by a mule.**  
**Alfred Rudolph, artist**