

Reconstruction

A classroom play by Team HOPE

Cast List

Booker T. Washington (BOOK).....Emancipated Slave
Sidney Andrews (SID).....New England Journalist
Elijah Lovejoy (ANCH)..... anchor of “The History News Report”
Margaret Fuller (R1).....reporter for “The History News Report”
Nellie Bly (R2) reporter for “The History News Report”
Ernie Pyle (R3).....reporter for “The History News Report”

TEACHER NOTES

SETTING: A contemporary classroom. It is advised to set up the anchor in the front of the room facing the class, in front of some sort of background with “The History New Report.” You may choose to set up the different reporters conducting the interviews around the classroom and have the historical figures come to them. This way it gives the appearance of different locations. A name plate in front of each cast member is highly recommended. A 5x8 index card folded in half works great for this purpose.

COSTUMES: Although not necessary, any period costumes for the historical figures are a great addition. Even a simple hat or wig is excellent.

MASKS: Masks are an easy addition that will add to the drama and make the entire event more fun for the students. First, go to www.google.com and click on “image search.” Type in the historical figure’s name and find an image of the person. Copy and paste the picture in a Word document. You may need to crop and then enlarge the photo so you get a picture large enough to be used as a mask. Portraits obviously work best for this use. Print out the picture and paste it onto a cardboard backing. You can tape a plastic spoon or popsicle stick to be used as a handle. You may decide to make masks for the student correspondents as well, using pictures of television news personalities for the masks.

Note: If there is a historical person you cannot find a picture for, don’t despair! Almost any random “period” person’s picture (as long as it not someone easily recognizable) would work as a mask.

ROLES: Encourage students to act out the roles with as much energy as possible. Do not be too terribly concerned that the sex of the historical figure matching with the sex of the student.

The teacher may decide to take a part in the play, role-modeling one of the historical figures. It is recommended that five copies of the scripts are specifically set aside for each character in the play. For each character, *highlight all their lines* in order to facilitate a faster pace of dialogue. All other students should receive an unmarked copy of the play to read as the play is performed.

ANCHOR AND REPORTERS: In order to facilitate the historical discussions that exist in the plays, actual famous journalist names have been used in the plays. Teachers should point out that these journalists come from different times in American history and do not necessarily reflect the period they report on. It is as if they can travel in time to deliver “The History News Report.” A teacher may also decide to substitute the names given in the script for student names if desired. A brief description of the journalists is as follows:

- **Elijah Lovejoy** (1802-1837) A minister and journalist for the *St. Louis Observer* and later editor of the abolitionist newspaper the *Alton Observer* of Alton, Illinois. In 1837, pro-slavery forces attacked his warehouse in order to destroy his printing press and he was murdered on the scene.
- **Margaret Fuller** (1810-1850) An early woman rights activist, Margaret was the first female journalist to work on the staff of a major American newspaper, *The New York Tribune*. She was a widely read literary critic who was also sent on overseas assignments to Europe.
- **Nellie Bly** (1864-1922) After writing a fiery rebuttal to a sexist column in the *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, Nellie was hired by a very impressed editor at the newspaper. She went on to become a famous investigative journalist on the plight of working women, and gained further fame for having faked insanity in order to investigate the treatment of the mentally ill.
- **Ernie Pyle** (1900-1945) An American journalist who was a roving correspondent for Scripps Howard newspaper chain. His articles were read in over 200 newspapers. He is most famous for having been a war correspondent during World War II. He led the charge for Congress to give soldiers “battle pay” while in combat. He died under heavy fire from a Japanese machine gun nest in the Pacific on April 18, 1945.
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DISCUSSION: Use the attached worksheets to facilitate discussion before and after the play. Students who are not directly involved in the play can attempt to write preliminary answers as the play is performed. The audience should be told that they will be the primarily responsible for the discussion questions at the end of the lesson.

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(A Report by HNR News)

NOTE: All responses by historical figures reflect actual events and beliefs as closely as possible.

CAST ABBREVIATIONS

Booker T. WashingtonBOOK
Sidney AndrewsSID
Elijah LovejoyANCH
Margaret Fuller..... R1
Nellie Bly.....R2
Ernie Pyle.....R3

ANCH Welcome to the History News Report, I am your anchor Elijah Lovejoy. When the American Civil War finally ended, Booker T. Washington was a nine year old slave in Franklin County, Virginia. Now he was free. To talk about that day of freedom, Mr. Washington joins us now in studio. I'm joined in studio by Margaret Fuller, Nellie Bly, and Ernie Pyle, History News Report contributors all. Welcome!

BOOK Thank you Elijah.

ANCH Mr. Washington, can you describe the feeling you had on that day?

BOOK Well, it was a momentous and eventful day to all upon our plantation. We had been expecting it. Freedom was in the air, and had been for months. Deserting soldiers returning to their homes were to be seen every day. The news of great events were swiftly carried from one plantation to another.

R1 Did the whites fear the invasion of the Northern armies?

BOOK They did and the silverware and other valuables were taken from the "big house," buried in the woods and guarded by trusted slaves. The slaves might give the Yankee soldiers food, drink, clothing—anything but that which had specifically entrusted to their care and honor.

R2 What was the attitude of the slaves like as the obvious end of the war grew nearer?

BOOK There was more singing in the slave quarters than usual. It was bolder, had more ring, and lasted later into the night. The night before the eventful day, word was sent that something unusual was going to take place at the "big house" the next morning. There was little, if any, sleep that night.

R3 So the next morning you gathered at the "big house?"

BOOK I did, accompanied by my mother, brother, sister, and a large number of slaves.

R2 I assume the master's family was there?
BOOK They were either standing or seated on the veranda of the house. There was a feeling of deep interest or perhaps sadness, on their faces, but not bitterness. They did not at the moment seem to be sad because of the loss of property, but rather because of parting with those whom they had reared and who were in many ways close to them.

R3 Who spoke?

BOOK A stranger, a United States officer, I presume, made a little speech and then read a rather long paper—the Emancipation Proclamation. After the reading we were told that we were all free, and could go when and where we pleased.

R1 How did everyone react?

BOOK My mother, who was standing at my side, leaned over and kissed her children, while tears of joy ran down her cheeks. She explained to us what it all meant, that this was the day for which she had been so long praying, but fearing that she would never live to see it.

R2 Did everyone else react similarly?

BOOK Oh, for some minutes there was great rejoicing, and thanksgiving, and wild scenes of ecstasy. But there were no feelings of bitterness. In fact, there was pity among the slaves for our former owners. The wild rejoicing on the part of the emancipated colored people lasted only for a few brief moments.

ANCH I would have expected it would have lasted all day!

BOOK Actually, by the time they returned to their cabins, there was a change in their feelings. The great responsibility of being free, of having charge of themselves, of having to think and plan for themselves and their children, seemed to take possession of them. It was very much like suddenly turning a youth of ten or twelve years old into the world to provide for himself.

R3 Yes, there would have been a lot of questions to solve in a rather quick order!

BOOK Exactly. Questions of a home, a living, the rearing of children, education, citizenship, and the establishment and support of churches. Was it any wonder that within a few hours the wild rejoicing ceased and a feeling of deep gloom seemed to pervade the slave quarters?

ANCH Thank you so much for your eyewitness account Mr. Washington. No joining us is Sidney Andrews, journalist from New England who traveled to Charleston, South Carolina to witness the beginnings of Reconstruction. Mr. Andrews, what did you see in Charleston?

SID A city of ruin and desolation, with vacant houses, widowed women, rotting wharves, deserted warehouses, and miles of grass-grown streets. That is Charleston, where the Rebellion loftily reared its head five years ago. Where cultured women gathered with passionate hearts to applaud the assault upon the little garrison of Fort Sumter!

R2 Did you see anyone? Were many people still in the city?

SID Well, one noticed immediately how few young men there were and how generally the young women were dressed in black. But there were also some Massachusetts men already in business here.

R3 What was the reaction to the Northerners?

SID One man who left Charleston in the first year of the war and soon returned after the occupation of the city—he pointed out that, “The presence of these men was at first not liked any too well; but we know they are doing a good work for the city.”

R1 What did the man think of the political situation in the country?

SID He certainly had a bitter spirit toward what he called “the infernal radicals.”

R2 What did he think should be done?

SID He was clear about this. He said, “You Northern people are making a great mistake in your treatment of the South. We are thoroughly whipped; we have given up slavery forever and now we want you to quit scolding us! Just let us back into the Union and then come down here and help us build up the country!”

R3 Who exactly controlled the city?

SID Oh, it was under thorough military rule; but the iron hand rested pretty lightly. Soldiers did police duty, and there was a nine-o’clock curfew, but, as far as I learned, anybody went anywhere at all hours of the day. One old colored man said to me: “There was never such good order here before!”

ANCH Thank Mr. Andrews. That is all we have time for today. For History News Report, I am Elijah Lovejoy.

Bennett, William J., *America: The Last Best Hope*, Nelson Current, Nashville: 2006, p. 403-407.

Colbert, David, “Freedom,” Random House, New York: 1997, p. 286-288.

Colbert, David, “The Reconstruction,” Random House, New York: 1997, p. 288-290.