



CLASSROOM VIDEO • VIEWING GUIDE

DEFINING FREEDOM: FACILITATING A CONVERSATION ABOUT THE RECONSTRUCTION ERA

Overview

In this classroom video, history teacher Kevin Toro leads a classroom discussion exploring the meaning of freedom to formerly enslaved people during the Reconstruction era. By learning about the choices and

aspirations of freed people immediately after Emancipation, students grapple with what it means to be free, and they also consider what role freedom plays in their own lives.

Questions to Consider

1. At **0:27**, Mr. Toro says of formerly enslaved people during the Reconstruction era: “People were resisting. There was resiliency, and resiliency is a huge part of this

whole semester’s course—because I feel like we often teach [Reconstruction] as victimhood . . . instead of focusing on how they survived, and why they survived, as

well as how they thrived . . . These people were using this newly acquired freedom in ways that we can see, throughout US history, are legitimate . . . I want to normalize this behavior of resiliency in marginalized communities.” What do you think Mr. Toro means by that? What are the teacher’s goals in teaching this history, and how does he organize the lesson to meet those goals?

2. At **3:45**, Mr. Toro attempts to summarize two different students’ points during the classroom discussion, and at **3:56**, he asks whether his summarization is fair. Why do you think Mr. Toro does this?
3. At **6:06**, Mr. Toro conflates the concepts of risk and opportunity as students examine the newly acquired freedom of formerly enslaved people. What roles do risk and opportunity play in the Reconstruction era?

Featured

Kevin Toro

Teacher

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Video Goals

- **Witness** how to facilitate a discussion on a challenging history.
- **Consider** how you might facilitate such a discussion in your own classroom.
- **Understand** why it is essential to teach about the Reconstruction era.
- **Determine** how to link a particular history to universal themes and to students’ own lives.

Lesson Resources

- “How Free Is Free?”, from [**The Reconstruction Era and the Fragility of Democracy**](#) (page 41)
- Lesson 3: Defining Freedom, from [**The Reconstruction Era and the Fragility of Democracy**](#) (pages 35–40)