

Teaching notes:

In *America: civil war & westward expansion 1803-1890*, Alan Farmer offers an interesting and succinct judgement on Lincoln's aims that might be a useful starting point in the classroom:

'From start to finish his main aim was to preserve the Union, not free the slaves. But by mid-1862 Lincoln believed that the two issues had become nearly one and the same. By freeing the slaves he could help to preserve the Union.' (Farmer, 2015, p. 189)

The card sort below (p.3) directs students into making a nuanced judgement of this kind.

The film *Lincoln* (Spielburg, 2012) also has some good scenes to illustrate Lincoln's efforts to get the Thirteenth Amendment passed; it might be a useful extension or homework task to assess the film as an interpretation.

References:

Farmer, A., *America: civil war & westward expansion 1803-1890*, Hodder, 2015

Interpretations of Lincoln's aims

'In 1865 the triumphant federal government faced the problem of restoring the Confederate states to the Union. This process was known as Reconstruction. The period from 1865-1877 is often called the 'age of Reconstruction'. However, Reconstruction was not something that began in 1865: it was an issue from 1861 onwards and it was really what the war was about. Nor did the process of Reconstruction end in 1877: in most southern states it ended much earlier. The debate over timescale is by no means the only debate about Reconstruction. Virtually every aspect of the topic has been the subject of controversy'

From: Farmer, A., *America: civil war & westward expansion 1803-1890*, Hodder, 2015

Some historians think that, during Reconstruction, Lincoln's sole aim was to restore Confederate states to the Union. Other, more popular interpretations, like the T.V. series *Roots* (Chomsky & Erman, 1977) present Lincoln as 'the Great Emancipator', suggesting that his main aim was to free the slaves. In order to fully understand Reconstruction, especially after 1865, we must look at Lincoln's aims and actions in the early part of the process. We must therefore accept that Reconstruction started in 1861.

The exam will assess your ability to use evidence to corroborate and challenge interpretations of the past, like the ones offered above. You will then be required to offer a judgement about which interpretation is the most convincing. The tasks below will help you to practise this skill.

Tasks:

Sort your cards into two categories:

- (a) Lincoln's aim was to restore the Confederacy to the Union
- (b) Lincoln's aim was to free the slaves

2. Make notes giving examples of specific evidence.

3. Now sort the cards into chronological order. Answer the questions below:

- (a) What were Lincoln's aims in 1861?
- (b) How had his views changed by 1863?
- (c) What do you think Lincoln's aims for Reconstruction were?
- (d) Do any of the interpretations given above offer a satisfactory picture of Lincoln's aims? Why?

Card sort: What were Lincoln's aims for Reconstruction?



<p>In 1861, Lincoln was determined to maintain northern unity and make sure that there could be peace with the south in the future.</p>	<p>In April 1862, provision was made by Congress to compensate slave owners. In June, they banned slavery in all federal territories. Lincoln was unsure about these measures.</p>	<p>In March 1862, Lincoln asked Congress to compensate any state that adopted the principle of the gradual abolition of slavery.</p>	<p>'If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do so and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that.' (Lincoln, August 1862)</p>
<p>'We didn't go to war to put down slavery – but to put the flag back.' (Lincoln, December 1861)</p>	<p>In 1864, the Senate passed the Thirteenth Amendment which prohibited slavery. It failed to get support in the House and was not passed. Lincoln applied patronage pressure to Democrats in the South to try to get it ratified.</p>	<p>'I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery where it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so.' (Lincoln, April 1861)</p>	<p>On 31 January 1865, thanks in part to the work of Abraham Lincoln; the Thirteenth Amendment to the American Constitution was ratified.</p>
<p>In July 1862, Lincoln presented the Emancipation Proclamation to his cabinet. They said it needed to wait until after some military successes. Lincoln agreed.</p>	<p>In August 1861, General Fremont, a Republican and commander for the Union in Missouri, was removed from his command for declaring all the slaves of Confederate supporters in Missouri free. Lincoln saw this as a step too far.</p>	<p>The Confiscation Act (August 1861) threatened any property used 'for insurrectionary purposes' with confiscation. This did not free slaves that had run away to Union army camps in the South, but it did protect them from being returned to Confederate owners who may have punished them for running away.</p>	<p>On 22 September 1862, Lincoln declared that slavery was to remain untouched in states that returned to the Union before 1 January 1863 and that after that all slaves in enemy territory would be 'forever free'. This was the Emancipation Proclamation.</p>