The Emancipation Proclamation: Was it Really About Freedom?

The Emancipation Proclamation was issued on January 1, 1863. It was a turning point, not only in the Civil War and the presidency of Abraham Lincoln, but in the history of the world. Abraham Lincoln has become known as “The Great Emancipator,” but was his foremost thought in drafting the Emancipation Proclamation in the freedom of slaves? In this DBQ set, students will be reviewing a variety of primary resources from the Library of Congress in order to answer the question: The Emancipation Proclamation: Was it really about Freedom?

Suggested for students in grades 6-8
Book Backdrop

*Ben and the Emancipation Proclamation*, by Pat Sherman

**Background**

The Civil War began in 1861, when Southern States seceded from the Union. The States cited “States Rights” as their reason for withdrawing, but many thought the need to preserve the institution of slavery was the primary cause. Eleven states eventually made up the Confederate States of America. Four slave holding Border States refused to declare loyalty to either side. The President of the United States, Abraham Lincoln, believed secession to be unconstitutional and set forth to restore the Union. After almost two years of fighting, Lincoln sought to revitalize the Northern War effort. One solution was the Emancipation Proclamation. Lincoln issued the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation on September 22, 1962 and the Final Emancipation on January 1, 1963. The Emancipation freed all slaves in the Southern States in rebellion.

**Vocabulary**

- Emancipation-
- Proclamation-
- Rebellion-
- Secede-
- Preliminary-
- Constitution-
- Mulatto-
1. The Southern States are in blue. How many states were on the side of the South during the Civil War? List them.

2. The Border States are off white. What states are they?

3. The Border States are not classified as “North” or “South” on the map. Whose side were they on? Were they on anyone’s side?
Abraham Lincoln to Horace Greeley, Friday, August 22, 1862

1. What is the policy Lincoln “seem[s] to be pursuing?”

2. What does Lincoln state is his “official duty?” What are the possible ways he can carry it out?

3. What is Lincoln’s “personal” wish?

4. How can this evidence be used to support the claim that the Emancipation Proclamation was about the freedom of slaves?

5. How can this evidence be used to support the idea that the Emancipation Proclamation was about something other than freedom? What was it? Explain.
1. According to paragraph one, what is the purpose of the war?

2. Who shall be freed according to the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation?

3. The Border States had slaves, but were not in rebellion. They are not mentioned. What do you think this means?

4. How could this document be used to prove the Emancipation Proclamation was about freedom? About something else? Explain.
Document D

Abraham Lincoln, Thursday, January 01, 1863 (Final Emancipation Proclamation—Final Draft [Lithograph Copy])

Please refer to transcript that follows to answer questions.

1. Write the quote from part one where Lincoln frees the slaves.

2. According to part 4, why is Lincoln freeing the slaves?

3. Which states are listed as states where slaves are freed? Within this list there are several exceptions. What does this mean?

4. According to part seven, what does Lincoln want to “make known” to the freed slaves of the rebellious states?

5. Based on this evidence, was the Emancipation Proclamation primarily about freedom or about a military measure? How do you know?
By the President of the United States of America:

A Proclamation.

(1) Whereas, on the twenty second day of September, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty two, a proclamation was issued by the President of the United States, containing, among other things, the following, to wit:

(2) "That on the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thence forward, and forever free; and the Executive Government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons, and will do no act or acts to repress such persons, or any of them, in any efforts they may make for their actual freedom.

(2) "That the Executive will, on the first day of January aforesaid, by proclamation, designate the States and parts of States, if any, in which the people thereof, respectively, shall then be in rebellion against the United States; and the fact that any State, or the people thereof, shall on that day be, in good faith, represented in the Congress of the United States by members chosen thereto at elections wherein a majority of the qualified voters of such State shall have participated, shall, in the absence of strong countervailing testimony, be deemed conclusive evidence that such State, and the people thereof, are not then in rebellion against the United States."

(4) Now, therefore I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, by virtue of the power in me vested as Commander-in-Chief, of the Army and Navy of the United States in time of actual armed rebellion against authority and government of the United States, and as a fit and necessary war measure for suppressing said rebellion, do, on this first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty three, and in accordance with my purpose so to do publicly proclaimed for the full period of one hundred days, from the day first above mentioned, order and designate as the States and parts of States wherein the people thereof respectively, are this day in rebellion against the United States, the following, to wit:

(5) Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana, (except the Parishes of St. Bernard, Plaquemines, Jefferson, St. Johns, St. Charles, St. James, Ascension, Assumption, Terrebonne, Lafourche, St. Mary, St. Martin, and Orleans, including the City of New-Orleans) Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South-Carolina, North-Carolina, and Virginia, (except the fortyeight counties designated as West Virginia, and also the counties of Berkley, Accomac, Northampton, Elizabeth-City, York, Princess, Ann, and Norfolk, including the Cities of Norfolk, & Portsmouth; and which excepted parts are, for the present, left precisely as if this proclamation were not issued.

(6) And by virtue of the power, and for the purpose aforesaid, I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within said designated States, and parts of States, are, and henceforward shall be free; and that the Executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authorities thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of said persons.

(7) And I hereby enjoin upon the people so declared to be free to abstain from all violence, unless in necessary self-defense; and I recommend to them that, in all cases when allowed, they labor faithfully for reasonable wages.

And I further declare and make known, that such persons of suitable condition, will be received into the armed service of the United States to garrison forts, positions, stations, and other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in said service.

And upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind, and the gracious favor of Almighty God.

In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the city of Washington, this first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty three, and of the Independence of the United States of America the eighty-seventh.

L. S.
Abraham Lincoln
By the President;
William H. Seward,
Secretary of State.
(Partial Transcript) Private

Marshall County Miss Dec 16th 1862
Sir?

Accompanying this letter you will receive a petition from several residents of Marshall County Miss, in reference to your emancipation proclamation of Sept. last. I could easily have procured a large number of signatures to the petition, but for the short time in which I had to act. Indeed there is another petition (a copy of the one enclosed) in the hands of a friend that has not yet been returned to me, that will be, I doubt not numerously signed. The petition frankly & freely states the facts of the case & assigns truthfully the reasons, why a compliance with the requisions of your proclamation in this potion of the state is impossible by the 1st of January 1863.

If I understand your position correctly, you claim the power to emancipate the slaves in the rebel states, as a military measure & as a means of promptly crushing the rebellion & not as a power vested in you, ex officio, as the Chief executive of the U. States government, by the fed Constitution. It is doubtless known to you, that the Fed. Army now holds entire military occupation of the northern potion of this State & of course extends over it the laws & authority of the U. State's government & here of course the rebellion has ceased & as a consequence, emancipation is unnecessary as a military measure to quell the rebellion. And furthermore to execute on the people of this County the penality of emancipation & that too after the object sought to be attained by it, has been already effected by other means, would involve in indiscriminate ruin, those who have rebelled & those who have opposed & deprecated the revolution in the Southern States. That a larger majority of the Southern people have participated in or sympathized with the rebellion I frankly admit, but there is a large minority here & elsewhere, who were opposed to the ordinance of secession & to the whole doctrine of secession ab initio & who simply acquiesced under the pressure of uncontroulable circumstances & who now that the rebellion had been defeated here, naturally & cheerfully fall back on their original position. If you will pardon the presumption, I would suggest, the suspension of the operation of your emancipation proclamation so far as the northern portion of this State is concerned until the 1st of March 1863 & grant to all who by that period, give evidence of loyalty by voluntarily taking the oath of allegiance to U. States government, entire exemption from its penalty.

1. Was Mississippi one of the “Southern States in Rebellion?”

2. Was Mississippi exempted, as Parham wished, in the final Emancipation Proclamation? How do you know?

3. How can this letter be used to prove the Emancipation Proclamation was primarily about freedom?
1. According to Resolution #2 of the Secret Session of the Confederate Congress, what are "the proclamations" (9/22/62-Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation and 1/1/63-Final Emancipation Proclamation) designed to do?

2. How do the members of the Confederate Congress feel about it?

3. What will happen to whites who aid slaves against the Confederate States? What will happen to "negroes and mulattoes"?

4. What do you think is meant by the last statement: "they shall be captured to be dealt with according to the present or future laws of such state or states"?

5. Based on this document, did the Confederate Congress view the Emancipation Proclamation as a document of freedom or war measure? Why?
1. Who are the men in the picture?

2. What is getting its “backbone” broken? Describe it. How are we (the viewers) supposed to feel about it?

3. What do you think the saying “break that backbone” is supposed to mean?

4. What are the first three men using to “break that backbone?” What is Lincoln using to “break that backbone?”

5. What is the artist trying to say about the primary aim of the Emancipation Proclamation?
The Emancipation Proclamation. Excerpt: Speeches of the Hon. Albert Andrus, of Franklin, and Hon. William H. Brand, of Madison, delivered in the Assembly, on the evening of March 4th, 1863, on the Hon. James Redington's resolutions in favor of a vigorous prosecution of the war, of the proclamation of freedom, and of the administration of Abraham Lincoln.

1. Why, according to the speech, is the Civil War "the greatest rebellion in the world's history?"

2. As the President, what is Lincoln's job in regards to the constitution and the South?

3. According to the speech, "the liberation of the slaves" will serve what end?

4. What will be the reaction should the government "let slavery perish"?

5. Does this speech support the view that the Emancipation Proclamation was primarily about freedom? Why or why not?
Document I

Abraham Lincoln to Salmon P. Chase, Wednesday, September 02, 1863 (Emancipation Proclamation in Virginia and Louisiana) Library of Congress

1. What does Lincoln say about the Emancipation Proclamation?

2. Why, according to Lincoln, were exemptions made? Do the same reasons apply now?

3. Why would Lincoln extend the Emancipation Proclamation in areas that were formally exempt?

4. What does Lincoln think will happen if he does extend the Emancipation Proclamation to states that were exempt?

5. Does this document support the Emancipation as primarily about freedom or military measure? Why?
1. Describe three scenes shown around this copy of the Emancipation Proclamation.

2. What common theme do all the scenes on this print have?

3. How does the main message of the Emancipation Proclamation text, differ from the message of the artwork on this copy?

3. Could this document be used to prove that the Emancipation Proclamation was primarily about freedom? Explain?
The Emancipation Proclamation: Was it about freedom?

Part 1: Planning

Yes, it was about freedom.

No, it was about ________________________________________________________________.

Reason #1/Evidence_____________________________________________________________________

Reason #2/Evidence_____________________________________________________________________

Reason #3/Evidence_____________________________________________________________________

Part 2: Essay

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