From Proclamation to Celebration: The True Impact of Juneteenth

Grade Level: 6–8

Subject Area(s): Social Studies, U.S. History, Civics

Estimated Duration: 60 minutes

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What's Included

- Teacher Background & Context
- Student Lesson Introduction
- Key Vocabulary List with Instructional Notes
- Cloze Notes Student Worksheet with Word Bank
- Higher-Order Thinking Questions for Discussion
- Assessment Options (including an Exit Ticket)
- Answer Key and Teacher Support Materials

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Teacher Background & Context

Juneteenth (a portmanteau of "June" and "nineteenth") commemorates June 19, 1865, the day Union Major General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston, Texas, and announced the end of both the Civil War and slavery. His announcement, issued as General Order No. 3, informed the people of Texas that all enslaved persons were free.

It is crucial to understand the context. President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation had officially taken effect on January 1, 1863—more than two and a half years earlier. However, the proclamation only applied to states in rebellion against the Union and could not be enforced in areas still under Confederate control. Texas, as the most remote of the Confederate states, had a minimal Union army presence, and thus, emancipation was not enforced there until after the end of the Civil War in April 1865. General Granger's arrival with Union troops provided the strength to finally overcome local resistance and enforce the proclamation.

The celebration of June 19th began in Texas as early as 1866. Over the decades, it spread to other states as African Americans migrated. The day has been marked by community gatherings, parades, barbecues, and educational events. It represents not just the end of slavery but also a celebration of African American freedom, resilience, and achievement. On June 17, 2021, Juneteenth officially became a federal holiday in the United States, cementing its status as a pivotal moment in American history. This lesson should emphasize that freedom was a process, not a single event, and that Juneteenth marks a critical milestone in that process.

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Student Lesson Introduction

Essential Question: Why is a date that marks a *delayed* announcement of freedom so important to American history?

Today, we are going to explore the story behind Juneteenth. Many people know that the Civil War ended slavery, but the process was not simple or immediate. The Emancipation Proclamation, a famous order by President Lincoln, declared that enslaved people in the Confederate states were free. However, for this freedom to become real, the news had to travel and be enforced by the U.S. Army.

In some parts of the country, this news was delayed by more than two years. We will learn about the events of June 19, 1865, in Galveston, Texas, when enslaved African Americans throughout Texas were finally informed of their freedom. We will investigate why this day, known as Juneteenth, is celebrated as a "second Independence Day" and why it is now recognized as a national holiday.

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Vocabulary (with visual suggestions)

- **Emancipation** (Tier 3): The act of freeing someone from slavery. *Instructional note:* Connect this to the idea of being "liberated" or "set free." *Visual support:* An image of broken chains or a historical drawing depicting freedpeople celebrating.
- **Proclamation** (Tier 2): An official, formal public announcement. *Instructional note:* Explain that this is a powerful statement made by a leader, like a president or general. *Visual support:* A picture of a town crier or a scroll with an official seal.
- **Juneteenth** (Tier 3): A holiday celebrating June 19, 1865, when enslaved African Americans in Texas were told they were free. *Instructional note:* Break down the word: "June" + "Nineteenth." *Visual support:* The Juneteenth flag.
- **General Order No. 3** (Tier 3): The specific military announcement read in Galveston, Texas, that declared and enforced the freedom of enslaved people in the state. *Instructional note:* Frame this as the document that made freedom a reality in Texas. *Visual support:* A photograph of the historical marker for General Order No. 3 in Galveston.
- **Galveston** (Tier 3): The port city in Texas where General Order No. 3 was announced on June 19, 1865. *Instructional note:* Show students where Galveston is on a map of the United States. *Visual support:* A map highlighting Galveston, Texas.
- **Enforce** (Tier 2): To make sure that a law or rule is obeyed. *Instructional note:* Use the analogy of a referee enforcing the rules in a game. *Visual support:* A simple graphic showing a rule being followed, perhaps with a checkmark.
- **Delayed** (Tier 1): Happening at a later time than expected or intended. *Instructional note:* Ask students for examples of things that can be delayed (a flight, a package, a school bus). *Visual support:* A clock with an arrow showing time passing.
- **Federal Holiday** (Tier 3): A day of recognition that is established by the U.S. government, for which federal employees are paid for a day off from work. *Instructional note:* Compare it to other federal holidays students know, like the Fourth of July or Thanksgiving. *Visual support:* An image of the U.S. Capitol building.
- **Resilience** (Tier 2): The ability to recover from difficulties or challenges. *Instructional note:* Discuss how celebrating Juneteenth, even when freedom was delayed, shows incredible resilience. *Visual support:* A plant growing through a crack in the pavement.
- **Commemorate** (Tier 2): To remember and show respect for someone or something. *Instructional note:* Explain that a holiday is a way a country commemorates an important event. *Visual support:* A picture of a monument or memorial.

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Cloze Notes

Directions: As your teacher discusses the history of Juneteenth, fill in the blanks below using the words from the Word Bank.

The path to freedom for all enslaved African Americans was a long and difficult process. Although the _____ was issued in 1863, it could not be _____ in places still under Confederate control. Texas was the most remote of these states, and many slaveholders there ignored the new law. It wasn't until two months after the Civil War ended that Union soldiers, led by Major General Gordon Granger, arrived in _____, Texas.

On June 19, 1865, General Granger read _____, which announced that all enslaved people in Texas were free. This news was _____ by more than two and a half years. The date became a powerful symbol of freedom finally realized. The first _____ of Juneteenth began in Texas the very next year. Today, _____ is a _____ that honors the end of slavery in the United States and celebrates African American culture and resilience.

Word Bank: celebration | Juneteenth | federal holiday | enforced | General Order No. 3 | Galveston | delayed | Emancipation Proclamation

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Higher-Order Thinking Questions

Analysis

1. What factors contributed to the two-and-a-half-year delay in the enforcement of the Emancipation Proclamation in Texas?
2. Analyze the language of General Order No. 3. What does the phrase "an absolute equality of personal rights and rights of property" mean in this context?
3. Why was the presence of the Union army necessary to enforce the proclamation?

Comparison 4. Compare and contrast the significance of July 4, 1776, with June 19, 1865. For whom did each date represent independence? 5. How are modern Juneteenth celebrations similar to or different from the earliest celebrations in the 1860s?

Application 6. If you were to design a new public monument to commemorate Juneteenth, what symbols or images would you include and why? 7. How can the lessons of Juneteenth (about delayed justice and resilience) be applied to social issues today?

Evaluation 8. Evaluate the importance of making Juneteenth a federal holiday. What message does this send about American history? 9. In your opinion, which is more important: the date a law is written or the date it is enforced? Use Juneteenth as an example to defend your answer.

Reflection 10. How does learning about Juneteenth change or add to your understanding of the end of the Civil War and slavery? 11. Why is it important for all Americans, regardless of their background, to learn about and commemorate Juneteenth?

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Assessment & Extensions

Exit Ticket

1. What is Juneteenth and what event does it commemorate?
2. Why was the news of freedom delayed in reaching Galveston, Texas?
3. In your own words, why is Juneteenth still an important celebration today?

Writing Prompt Imagine you are a journalist in 1866 reporting on the very first Juneteenth celebration in Texas. Write a short news article (2-3 paragraphs) describing the scene. What are people doing? What is the mood of the celebration? What does this day mean to the people you interview?

Discussion Check Criteria During class discussions, the teacher will look for students who can:

- Clearly define Juneteenth and the Emancipation Proclamation.
- Explain the cause-and-effect relationship between the end of the war and the enforcement of freedom in Texas.
- Connect the history of Juneteenth to the modern federal holiday.

Extensions for Advanced Learners

- Research the life of Major General Gordon Granger and his role in the Civil War.
- Investigate the history of the Juneteenth flag and analyze the symbolism of its colors and design.
- Trace the legislative process that led to Juneteenth becoming a federal holiday in 2021.

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Answer Key / Teacher Support

Cloze Notes Answer Key: The path to freedom for all enslaved African Americans was a long and difficult process. Although the **Emancipation Proclamation** was issued in 1863, it could not be **enforced** in places still under Confederate control. Texas was the most remote of these states, and many slaveholders there ignored the new law. It wasn't until two months after the Civil War ended that Union soldiers, led by Major General Gordon Granger, arrived in **Galveston**, Texas.

On June 19, 1865, General Granger read **General Order No. 3**, which announced that all enslaved people in Texas were free. This news was **delayed** by more than two and a half years. The date became a powerful symbol of freedom finally realized. The first **celebration** of Juneteenth began in Texas the very next year. Today, **Juneteenth** is a **federal holiday** that honors the end of slavery in the United States and celebrates African American culture and resilience.

Exit Ticket - Sample Answers:

1. *What is Juneteenth and what event does it commemorate?* Juneteenth is a holiday on June 19th that commemorates the day in 1865 when enslaved people in Galveston, Texas, were finally told they were free.
2. *Why was the news of freedom delayed in reaching Galveston, Texas?* The news was delayed because Texas was a remote part of the Confederacy with few Union soldiers, so the Emancipation Proclamation (from 1863) wasn't enforced there until after the Civil War ended and the army arrived.
3. *In your own words, why is Juneteenth still an important celebration today?* It's important because it represents the true end of slavery for everyone and celebrates the resilience and freedom of African Americans. It reminds us that freedom and justice can be delayed and must be fought for.

Anticipated Student Questions:

- **"So, were they still slaves for two extra years?"** *Suggested Response:* "That's a great question. Legally, according to the U.S. government, they were free after the Emancipation Proclamation. But in reality, because there was no one there to enforce the law, they were still being held in bondage and treated as enslaved people. Juneteenth marks the day that their legal freedom became their actual freedom."
- **"Why didn't they just leave if they heard about the law?"** *Suggested Response:* "Information traveled very slowly then, and many slaveholders deliberately kept the news from the people they enslaved. It was also incredibly dangerous to try and escape, especially without the protection of the Union army nearby."
- **"Is this the same as the 13th Amendment?"** *Suggested Response:* "That's an excellent connection. The 13th Amendment, ratified in December 1865, is what legally abolished slavery everywhere in the United States, including in the border states where the Emancipation Proclamation didn't apply. Juneteenth is specifically about the enforcement of the proclamation in the last Confederate holdout."

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