

WEEK 23

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The Best Day of My Life

The Civil War ended on April 9, 1865. Confederate general Robert E. Lee surrendered to Union general Ulysses S. Grant at the Appomattox Court House in Virginia. The Union won the war! At last, the fighting and bloodshed could end. Two years earlier, President Abraham Lincoln made the Emancipation Proclamation. Lincoln warned the Southern states that most of the people they had enslaved would be forever free if the “rebellious states” did not rejoin the Union by January. Lincoln also announced that formerly enslaved people were free to join the Union army. Many people didn’t hear about the order for years. It wasn’t until June 19, 1865 — more than two months after the war ended — that enslaved people in Texas learned they were free. Sally is a 10-year-old girl who lived with her mother on a plantation in Texas. Read about the day she found out she was free.

I couldn’t believe the news! We were free! We didn’t have to work for Mr. Smith any longer.

Mama and I were outside hanging laundry to dry. Mama was singing me a song she used to sing when she was a little girl in Africa. Just then, a tall, thin man in a Union uniform rode up on his horse. There were three other soldiers with him. They were talking about the war. I started asking all kinds of questions, but Mama told me to hush up and listen.

The man’s name was General Gordon Granger. He gave us the exciting news. The Civil War was over at last! The Union had won! Then the general went up to the house to speak with our owner, Mr. Smith. After a while Mr. Smith called for all of his enslaved people. We had to

meet with him out under the big oak tree. He told us we were all free now. He explained that President Lincoln had given an order he had to follow. He said we could leave right away if we wanted.

Mama says the first thing we’re going to do is look for Papa. We haven’t seen him in more than three years, when he was sold to another man. Mama says we are going to have to work real hard because we don’t have much money. I’m a little bit scared because we don’t have a house now. But I’m excited too. I’m always going to remember this day — June 19, 1865. Mama’s free now. Papa’s free now. I’m free now too! Today is the best day of my life!



Connections

A Slave No More!

A letter written after the Civil War has shed light on the between enslaved people and those who owned them. Jourdan Anderson was an enslaved person who gained freedom when he and his family escaped to Ohio from Tennessee. In August 1865, his former owner, Colonel Anderson, wrote a letter asking Jourdan to come back to Tennessee to work on his farm.

The formerly enslaved man’s reply gave a clear message about his feelings. He said he hoped that God had opened the colonel’s eyes to the wrongs done to enslaved people for generations. While he was glad his old master was alive, he was surprised that the Yankees hadn’t hanged him yet. Jourdan wrote that there was one

thing that might bring him back to Tennessee. He and his wife wanted to be paid for the 52 years of combined work that they provided while they were enslaved (over \$11,000). Without that, he said they had little faith in the colonel’s promises. He ended by asking the colonel to give his best regards to a man named George Carter. Mr. Carter had apparently taken a pistol away from the colonel when he tried to shoot Jourdan ... twice.

Reading letters and newspapers from the past can help us understand the people who lived during that time. Jourdan and his family may have once been enslaved, but their spirits were not broken.





Matthew Gaines – Texas' First Black Senator

As a young boy, Matthew Gaines learned to read and write. That may not sound very amazing, but Matthew was enslaved on a plantation in Louisiana. Enslaved people weren't allowed to go to school, and most did not get an education. Matthew made friends with an Anglo boy living on the plantation. They often read together. But they had to hide because it was illegal for enslaved people to learn to read.

In 1850, when he was only 10 years old, Matthew tried to escape from his owner. He hid out on riverboats for six months before he was caught. When he was sold at the age of 23, Matthew tried to escape again. He headed toward Mexico, but the Texas Rangers caught him. Matthew was then sent to live and work in Fredericksburg, Texas.

In Fredericksburg, Matthew worked as a shepherd and blacksmith. The people liked him. African Americans would come to Matthew with their problems. He always tried to help. He also worked as a church minister. After the Civil War, Matthew Gaines had big plans. He wanted to run for the Texas Senate. He did, and in 1869, he was elected.

Mr. Gaines worked hard to protect the rights of all people, especially African Americans.

He wanted African Americans to be able to vote. He wanted people to feel safe. During his time in office, he was responsible for helping pass important laws, including ones that gave people the right to a free education.

Gaines was a Texas senator for four years. Even after he was no longer on the Texas Senate, he still worked hard for people. Every Sunday in church he talked to people about ways they could make their lives better.



An End to War and Slavery

Emancipation Proclamation

The Civil War had been raging for more than a year when President Abraham Lincoln issued a special order called the Emancipation Proclamation. This order helped put an end to most slavery in the United States about 250 years after organized slavery began. It allowed enslaved people in some states to join the army and fight in the Civil War, which helped guarantee freedom for all.

The Emancipation Proclamation didn't make slavery completely illegal, though. That didn't happen until 1865, when the 13th Amendment was added to the Constitution. Some of the signers of the Constitution actually owned enslaved people, while others believed slavery was wrong. But, the signers knew the Constitution wasn't perfect. That's what amendments like the 13th are for: to fix, or improve, our rules. This amendment officially abolished slavery and indentured servitude in our country.

A Day to Remember

For enslaved people in Texas, June 19, 1865, is a day to remember. This is the day Gordon Granger, a general in the Union Army, announced in Texas that the war was over and the enslaved people were free. This message took almost six weeks to reach all of the enslaved people in Texas and their former owners.

One year later, on June 19, 1866, formerly enslaved Texans gathered to celebrate their new lives. They sang songs, gave speeches and talked about how thankful they were for their freedom. This day is still special to Texans. Each year, people from all cultures gather to celebrate Juneteenth. Families enjoy parades, picnics and speeches. It is especially a time for citizens to discuss progress and difficulties for African Americans.

Life in Texas After Slavery

African Americans were joyful when they heard the news of their freedom. However, they faced many new challenges with their freedom. Life was hard. Most formerly enslaved people in Texas had no education. They had never been allowed to attend school. Most did not read or write. It was difficult for them to find jobs. Formerly enslaved people had to worry about where they would live. Some of these people decided to stay with their former owners. Now they worked for money. Some farmed on their owner's land and shared the money they made. Others headed north, hoping to find a better way of life in a new place. There were still many people who did not believe African Americans should be free. Many public places were still divided by color. Life would be difficult for many years to come.



Governor Edmund Davis

Reconstruction in Texas

The period of time after the Civil War is known as Reconstruction. It lasted more than 10 years. During this time, people had to rebuild the South. They also had to rebuild their own lives.

Formerly enslaved people had to find jobs and homes. Former landowners had to find ways to run their farms and plantations without slave labor. Many people had to rebuild homes and farms. People had to deal with the deaths or injuries of fathers, husbands and sons who fought in the war. There was still a lot of anger between the North and the South. Sometimes this anger led to violence against the newly freed African Americans.

The U.S. government decided to set up a special unit to help the newly freed people. In 1865, the Freedmen's Bureau helped African Americans find jobs and homes. They also established about 150 schools in Texas. These schools were for African American children and adults.

Texas Rejoins the Union

Many of the wounds from the war began to heal. The

African Americans faced many new challenges with their freedom.

most difficult things to heal were people's feelings. The Confederacy had lost the war. But leaders on both sides knew the best thing was to put the United States back together again. On March 30, 1870, Texas once again joined the United States of America. Edmund Davis became the new governor. He was not very popular. People thought he spent too much money. They also thought he gave too much help to African Americans. Eventually, in 1876, the state adopted and signed a new constitution. Now the Texas governor and other state leaders had much less power than they had before.

(Right) Jefferson Davis was president of the Confederacy.

(Left) The South was rebuilt during the time called Reconstruction, which lasted from 1865-1877.

Sharecropping – A Southern Way of Life

History

With the Civil War over, many formerly enslaved people had their freedom. But that was about all they had. Most of them did not have any money or even a place to live. Some African Americans decided the best thing to do was to stay right where they were. They became sharecroppers. Sharecroppers were farmers who did not own their own land. Instead, they farmed on someone else's land. Many landowners had owned enslaved people before and now needed help farming their land.

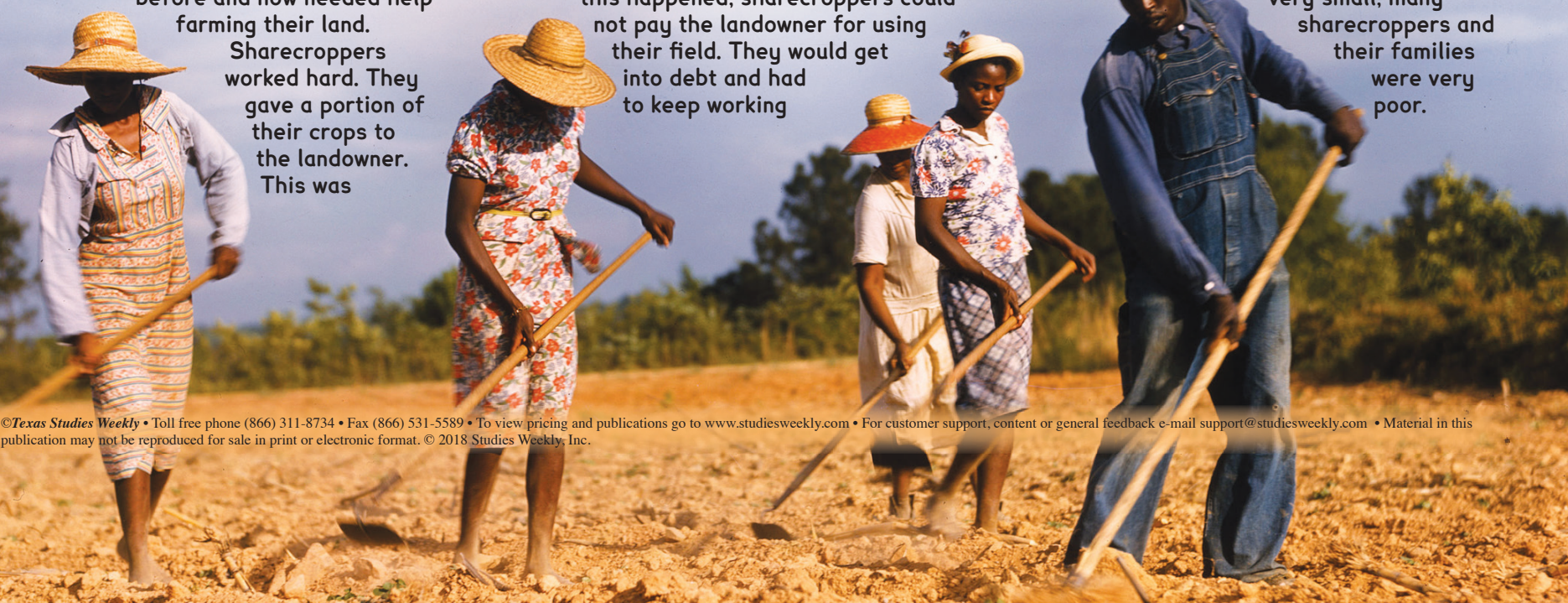
Sharecroppers worked hard. They gave a portion of their crops to the landowner. This was

payment for using their land. Sharecroppers were also able to live in houses provided by the landowner. These homes were usually not much more than a shack. The landowner also provided the tools, animals and seeds that were needed. This was important because formerly enslaved people did not have money to purchase these items.

Sometimes the crops did not grow because of bad weather or droughts. When this happened, sharecroppers could not pay the landowner for using their field. They would get into debt and had to keep working

there until they paid back the debt. Many sharecroppers were never able to leave the plantations where they had been enslaved before the war.

Sharecropping continued throughout the South for many years. Eventually Anglo-Americans also used the system to make their living. Because the sharecroppers' part of the crop was often very small, many sharecroppers and their families were very poor.



Six Flags Over Texas – Not Just an Amusement Park!

The U.S. flag proudly flies over the Texas capitol building in Austin, Texas. Directly below this flag flies the Texas state flag, known as the Lone Star Flag.

Today, flags are visible symbols of pride. Texans take great pride in the history of their state. Throughout this history, Texas has been home to six different flags.

The first flag belonged to Spain. In the 1500s, early Spanish explorers first set foot on the land that is now Texas. They planted their country's flag and claimed the land. The next flag was for the French. This flag flew over Texas when Robert de la Salle claimed the land for France in 1685.

By the early 1800s, the Mexican flag was flying over Texas. But when Texas claimed its independence, the Mexican flag came down.

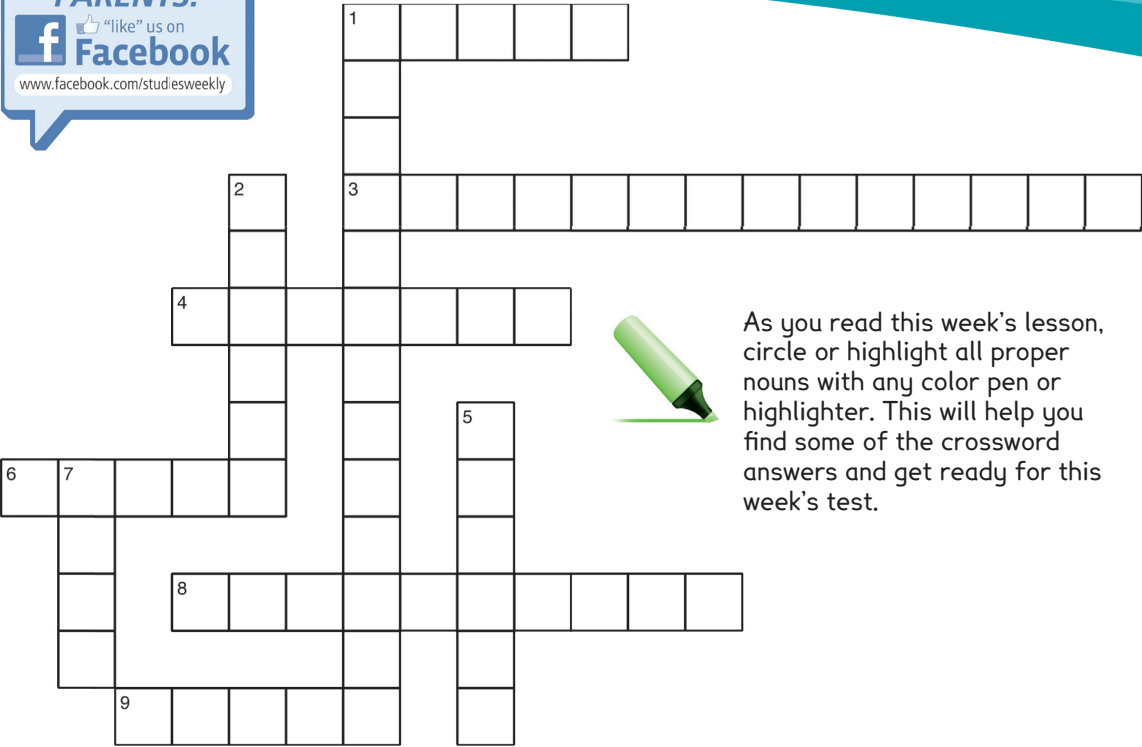
The first official flag of the Republic of Texas went up in 1839. When Texas became a state in 1845, it flew the stars and stripes of the United States' flag.

Texas seceded from the Union in 1861 to join the Confederacy. The fifth flag to fly over Texas was the Confederate States of America's flag. In 1870, the U.S. flag once again flew in the Texas skies. Texas was part of the Union again.

The people in Texas are proud of the many cultures each of these flags represents. In 1961, a man named Angus G. Wynne Jr. had the idea to turn the six flags into something very special. He opened an amusement park named after all of them. This park, Six Flags Over Texas, has areas devoted to Spain, France, Mexico, Texas, the Confederacy and the United States of America.



Name _____



As you read this week's lesson, circle or highlight all proper nouns with any color pen or highlighter. This will help you find some of the crossword answers and get ready for this week's test.

ACROSS

- 1. country that flew the first flag in Texas
- 3. the period after the Civil War
- 4. issued the Emancipation Proclamation
- 6. sometimes used as payment for farming someone else's land
- 8. June 19th celebration
- 9. governor of Texas after Reconstruction

DOWN

- 1. farmers who did not own their own land
- 2. first African American Texas senator
- 5. government agency to help people freed from slavery: Freedmen's _____
- 7. most enslaved people could not do this

Point of View



Directions: Read the following quotes by Abraham Lincoln and Confederate general Robert E. Lee about slavery. Answer the questions that follow. Write your answers on a seperate piece of paper.

"I am naturally anti-slavery. If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong. I cannot remember when I did not so think and feel. And yet I have never understood that the presidency conferred upon me (gave me) an unrestricted (unlimited) right to act officially upon this judgment and feeling."

—Abraham Lincoln
Source: April 4, 1864
— Letter to Albert Hodges

"So far from engaging in a war to perpetuate (continue) slavery, I am rejoiced (glad) that slavery is abolished (done away with). I believe it will be greatly for the interest of the South. So fully am I satisfied of this that I would have cheerfully lost all that I have lost by the war and have suffered all that I have suffered to have this object attained (reached)."

—Robert E. Lee, Confederate General, 1865

- 1. What is President Lincoln's point of view on slavery?
- 2. How do you know?

- 3. What is General Lee's point of view on slavery?
- 4. Why is this interesting?

Salem Poor, a Brave and Gallant Soldier

Do you know people who you admire because of their ethics? What actions show that a person can be counted on to do the right thing? History has very few details about Salem Poor, an African American soldier who fought in the Revolutionary War. However, 14 officers from the Battle of Bunker Hill signed a document presented to the General Court of Massachusetts. It recommended that a soldier named Salem Poor be rewarded for his heroism. He is described as "a Brave & gallant Soldier." That's strong proof of



Salem Poor's ethics.

Salem Poor was born enslaved in Massachusetts in the 1740s. He bought his freedom, married and had a son. When the war began, Poor left home to fight with the American colonists. Five times as many African Americans fought with the British because of promises of freedom. African Americans were not allowed to vote and faced many other types of discrimination.

For that reason, Salem Poor's award is even more remarkable. The details of his actions are unknown. The document reads "... to Set forth Particulars of his Conduct would be Tedious." But it does say "... under Our Own observation ... we declare that ... Salem Poor ... behaved like an Experienced Officer, as Well as an Excellent Soldier." From 14 officers present at the battle, that's high praise indeed.

Some sources claim that Salem Poor shot and killed the British Lieutenant Colonel James Abercrombie at Bunker Hill. Records show that Poor continued to fight bravely in other battles. Like many African Americans of that time, exact details of both his birth and death remain a mystery. He was honored with a commemorative postage stamp in 1975.

