

Teacher Key: Civil War & Reconstruction

What each labeled part shows. These describe the image only. Each cartoon was made by someone with a point of view, noted under "Viewpoint." Let students build and defend their own readings.

Station 1: The Emancipation of the Negroes, January 1863: The Past and the Future (1863)

Context: Published weeks after the Emancipation Proclamation took effect on January 1, 1863. Scenes of slavery on the left are set against imagined scenes of freedom on the right.

A: At left (the past): an auction scene where people are being sold.

B: In the center: a family gathered at home around a stove, with a picture of Lincoln on the wall.

C: At right (the future): workers lined up at a window marked "Cashier" to be paid.

Viewpoint: Nast and Harper's Weekly strongly supported the Union and the Republican Party.

Source: Thomas Nast, Harper's Weekly, 1863. Library of Congress: www.loc.gov/item/2002695553/. Public domain.

Station 2: Writing the Emancipation Proclamation (1864)

Context: Lincoln is shown writing the Emancipation Proclamation. Another picture on the wall shows violence during the Haitian Revolution.

A: A framed picture on the wall of a bearded man with a halo, usually identified as John Brown.

B: A small winged devil-like figure on the inkwell beside the writer.

C: A book under the writer's foot, usually identified as the Constitution.

Viewpoint: Volck was a Baltimore dentist who sympathized with the Confederacy; he printed his etchings secretly.

Source: Adalbert J. Volck, Confederate War Etchings (privately printed in Baltimore), 1864. Wikimedia Commons (original etching): commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Adalbert_J_Volck_Writing_the_Emancipation_Proclamation_political_cartoon.jpg. Public domain.

Station 3: Compromise with the South (1864)

Context: Published in September 1864, aimed at the Democratic convention in Chicago, whose platform called for ending the war through negotiation.

A: A gravestone reading "In memory of Union heroes who fell in a useless war."

B: A woman (Columbia, a symbol of the United States) kneeling and weeping at the grave.

C: A Confederate soldier with his boot on the grave, shaking hands with a wounded Union soldier on a crutch.

Viewpoint: Nast supported Lincoln's reelection. Democrats argued that a negotiated peace would save lives.

Source: Thomas Nast, Harper's Weekly, 1864. Library of Congress: www.loc.gov/item/2002723256/. Public domain.

Station 4: Abraham's Dream! "Coming Events Cast Their Shadows Before" (1864)

Context: Printed during the 1864 election, when Democrat George McClellan ran against President Lincoln.

A: A man (Lincoln) running from the White House with a bag, saying "This don't remind me of any joke!!!"

B: A woman (Columbia) at the White House door chasing him out, while a man in uniform (General McClellan) walks in.

C: Lincoln asleep in bed, having the dream.

Viewpoint: Supports McClellan and the Democrats; Lincoln won the election that November.

Source: Currier & Ives, Currier & Ives, New York, 1864. Library of Congress: www.loc.gov/item/2003689256/. Public domain.

Station 5: The Union as It Was: The Lost Cause, Worse Than Slavery (1874)

Context: Drawn in 1874 during Reconstruction, when armed groups such as the White League and the Ku Klux Klan used violence against Black citizens and Republican officials in the South.

A: A man with a rifle wearing a badge labeled "White League."

B: A shield topped by a banner reading "The Union as it was" and "This is a white man's government," with a skull and the words "The Lost Cause, Worse than Slavery."

C: A burning building labeled "School House" behind a frightened family.

Viewpoint: Nast and Harper's Weekly supported federal enforcement of Reconstruction.

Source: Thomas Nast, Harper's Weekly, 1874. Library of Congress: www.loc.gov/item/2001696840/. Public domain.