THE CONSTITUTION WITH CARL

Volume 14 - The Thirteenth Amendment - Slavery Ends

Slavery Ends

Central question: What did it take to end slavery in law, and what came after the words?





Some amendments fix a rule of government. This one ended a great wrong. The Thirteenth Amendment wrote into the Constitution, for the whole country and for good, that slavery would not exist in the United States.

Slavery meant that one person was treated as the property of another. Enslaved people were bought and sold. They were forced to work and were not paid. Husbands and wives, parents and children, could be sold away from each other and never meet again. By 1860, nearly four million people in the United States were held in slavery. This book tells how that ended in law, honestly and plainly.

Carl in this volume is Freedom Carl. He stands in an open field at sunrise. The broken links on the ground behind him are finished and done with. His head is up, and he is looking toward the light. That is the picture this amendment leaves us: a hard past behind, and a free morning ahead.

One promise before we start. The Words section of this book prints the amendment exactly whole, the way the Constitution prints it. Nothing is left out and nothing is trimmed. That is the rule for every volume in this series, and it matters most in this one.

For ages 7 to 11. Level Up boxes reach to age 13.

START HERE

Meet Carl and the Four Strands

Carl the Cardinal is Freedom Carl in this volume. He is not wearing a costume and he is not pretending to be anyone else. He is a cardinal standing in a sunrise field, and the broken chain behind him belongs to the past. Carl's job in this book is to walk slowly, tell the truth, and treat every person in the story as a person.

Like every volume in this series, the book is built from four strands, and the strands are always kept apart and labeled, so you always know what kind of statement you are reading.

THE FOUR STRANDS IN THIS BOOK

THE WORDS prints the Thirteenth Amendment itself, complete, and then explains it in plain language. The explanation is marked as explanation. It is never dressed up as the Constitution's own wording.

THE HISTORY tells what happened: slavery in America, the long road toward freedom, the Civil War, the Emancipation Proclamation, and the fight in Congress and the states in 1864 and 1865.

COURTS HAVE SAID tells what judges have done with these words: striking down schemes that tried to bring forced labor back under new names, and deciding how far Congress's power to enforce the amendment reaches. The court stories included are named, dated, and labeled as interpretation.

STILL DEBATED appears once, where a real argument among grown ups continues today, and it states both sides fairly.

READING THIS BOOK TOGETHER

This is the heaviest subject in the series, and it is handled with care. There are no graphic pictures and no graphic details. What there is, is the plain truth, told at a depth a child can carry: slavery was real, it was wrong, it hurt real families, and ending it took a war, a proclamation, and finally a change to the Constitution itself. Grown ups, read first if you like. One part of the amendment's sentence is a grown up topic. It is printed in full on page 3, because the Words always print whole, and it is talked about only in the grown up note on page 17.

If you met the Thirteenth Amendment on the timeline in Civics No. 8, you placed this change in the story of the Constitution. Here is its whole story.