

Name _____ Date _____

Juneteenth

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. b'

Juneteenth is a celebration of the day that enslaved people in Galveston, Texas, learned they were free. President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863. Congress passed the 13th Amendment, which made slavery illegal, on January 31, 1865. But the information was slow to spread to the southern states during the Civil War. It is not clear why it took so long for the people of Texas to hear the news. It's possible that messengers bearing the news were injured or killed along the way. Another possibility is that enslavers kept the news hidden. After the war was over, Union officials traveled to the South. On June 19, 1865, Major General Gordon Granger and his troops came to Galveston with news that the war had ended and the enslaved people were now free.

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2. b'

The news of freedom was surprising and new. Formerly enslaved people reacted differently to it. Many were overjoyed, and many were in shock. Some stayed in Texas and tried to negotiate, or make a deal, with their former enslavers. They would continue to work on the plantations for compensation, or payment. Others left Galveston immediately. Some traveled to nearby states to find family members they had been separated from. Still others headed to northern cities, because the North represented freedom. All of the formerly enslaved people had the difficult task of figuring out their new place in society.

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3. b'

The next year, on June 19, 1866, some formerly enslaved people and their families went back to Galveston. They wanted to remember the day they learned of their freedom. Celebrations grew every year after that. At first, some cities stopped Black people from gathering in public parks and other spaces. Parties were held in backyards, African-American churches, and rural areas. As Black people gained more land-owning rights, they bought land to use for Juneteenth celebrations. Emancipation Park in Houston and Booker T. Washington Park in Mexia became known for their Juneteenth parties.

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4. b'

Juneteenth became a Texas state holiday in 1980. The day is now a federal holiday. Today, celebrations often include barbecues and picnics with special-occasion foods and drinks, like strawberry soda. People wear new or fancy clothes to celebrate their freedom from slave dress codes. Fishing, baseball, and other outdoor activities are often enjoyed. Families and friends gather to sing spirituals, pray, and dance. It is a day to celebrate freedom as well as remember the tragic history of slavery.

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