

**Title of Lesson: *Alabama Tenant Farmers and Sharecroppers, 1865 to Present***  
(Suggested grade level: 11)

This lesson was created as a part of the Alabama History Education Initiative, funded by a generous grant from the Malone Family Foundation in 2009.

**Author Information:** Vicki Looser (Cohort 1: 2009-2010)

Lanett High School  
Lanett City Schools  
Lanett, AL

**Background Information:**

- The teacher should become familiar with the material by reading the article on sharecropping located at <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/face/Article.jsp?id=h-1613>.

**Overview of lesson:** This lesson explores the reasons for the development of the tenant farming and sharecropping system in the post-Civil War era. Using primary sources (pictures and labor contracts), the lesson presents some of the situations that caused the system to develop. It covers the lifestyle of the farmers and investigates the reasons for the decrease in the system of tenant farming and sharecropping after the Depression and World War II.

**Content Standards**

*Alabama Course of Study: Social Studies* (Bulletin 2004, No. 18)  
Eleventh Grade: Standard 1, p. 75

*Social Studies Item Specifications for the Alabama High School Graduation Exam*  
(Bulletin 2000, No. 49)

Standard V-1: Identify and evaluate the events that led to the settlement of the West

- Changing role of American farmers  
Examples: early mechanization of agriculture, farmers' grievances, American agrarian rebellion, Populist Movement, and Alabama farmers

***National Standards for History, 1996***

Era 6: The Development of Industrial United States (1870-1900) p. 105

2C The student understands how agriculture, mining, and ranching were transformed.

***National Council for the Social Studies, 1994***

Standard VII: Production, Distribution, and Consumption – High School (p. 130)

- a. Explain how the scarcity of production resources (human, capital, technological, and natural) requires the development of economic systems to make decisions about how goods and services are to be produced and distributed.

**Primary Learning Objective(s):**

The student will be able to:

- List the reasons for the development of the tenant farming and sharecropping system;
- Describe the lifestyles of the tenant farmer and sharecropper;
- Discuss the reasons for the decline of the system of tenant farming and sharecropping;
- Analyze primary sources (pictures, labor contracts) and comprehend the role of primary sources in examining historical events.

**Time allotted:** 97 minutes (one block class period or two regular class periods)

**Materials and Equipment:**

- Make a copy of the National Archives [Photo Analysis Worksheet](#) to guide the teacher in the discussion of the photographs in the engagement activity.
- Make copies of the Farmer Primary Source Document Analysis Sheet (attached) for each student or group.
- Download copies of the following primary source documents from the Alabama Department of Archives and History Web site:  
[Contract for Fred](#)  
[Contract for John Henry and his aunt, Elizabeth](#)  
[Contract for J. Miller](#)  
[Contract for six African Americans](#)  
[Sharecropping contract between Mary P. Walls and J. C. Jones](#)  
[Receipt for payment received by John Edmondson](#)  
[Receipt for payment received by G. N. Ward](#)  
[Receipt for payment received by E. Donoho](#)  
[Receipt for payment received by A. E. Henry](#)  
[Receipt for payment received W. C. H. Rosser](#)
- [Alabama Tenant Farmers PowerPoint](#)
- Sharecropper/Tenant Farmer Letter Assignment and Rubric (attached)

**Technological Resources:**

- LCD projector
- Screen or white surface for viewing.

**Background/Preparation:**

- Students should be familiar with the Congressional plan for Reconstruction and the role of the Freedmen's Bureau during Reconstruction.

**Procedures/Activities:****Engagement/Motivation Activity:**

Show the first two pictures on the [Alabama Tenant Farmers PowerPoint](#).

Discuss each picture, asking questions such as:

- What do you see in the picture?
- Who are the people in the picture?
- What are they doing?
- Where do you think they are?

- What time period do you think this picture represents?

After discussing the pictures, use the next slide to guide your comparison of the two pictures.

Both photos are taken about 1890. Students may observe larger numbers of people in the first photo with multiple ages of people in both photos. The main goal of this activity is for students to decide how the lives of the freedmen had or had not changed.

<b>Step 1</b>	Pass out primary documents (linked above) to the students. This may be a paired, small-group, individual, or class activity. Each student or group should get a copy of one labor contract, the contract for the six African Americans, and one receipt for the teachers pay. The students should use the Farmer Primary Source Document Analysis Sheet to answer questions based on the information in the documents.
<b>Step 2</b>	Once the students have evaluated their documents, the class should share the information and discuss the plight of the tenant farmers and sharecroppers in Alabama.
<b>Step 3</b>	Show the remainder of the <i>PowerPoint</i> presentation. The students should take notes on the reasons for the development of the system, problems with the system, and reasons for the decline of the system.
<b>Step 4</b>	Assuming the role of a sharecropper or tenant farmer in the post-Civil War era, the students will write a letter to a relative describing their week including details about work, food, hardships, sickness, housing, and pay.

#### Assessment Strategies:

- The students' letters should be assessed using the attached rubric.

#### Extension:

- Students could evaluate additional photographs of the period.
- Students could write a letter to the Governor of Alabama about the plight of the tenant farmers and sharecroppers.
- Students could put together a photo essay of pictures relating the life of the tenant farmers and sharecroppers using *Photo Story*, a free program which can be downloaded at <http://www.microsoft.com/en-us/download/search.aspx?q=photo%20story>

#### Remediation:

- Provide the students with a copy of the *PowerPoint* to assist them in taking notes.
- Prepare a check-off list of possible answers for the main parts of the *PowerPoint* notes.
- Transcribe the primary documents (contracts and receipts) to make them more readable for the students.

#### Accommodation:

- Arrange peer tutor/partnerships during the lesson.
- Review Individualized Education Plans, Gifted Plans, 504 Plans, ELL Plans for instructional and assessment accommodations or modifications.

**Modification:**

- Students may be given a smaller number of primary sources to analyze.
- Review Individualized Education Plans, Gifted Plans, 504 Plans, ELL Plans for instructional and assessment accommodations or modifications.

**Primary Source Analysis Sheet**

**Alabama Farmers**

**Labor contract:**

- 1. Who were the two (2) people involved in the contract?
- 2. What did each promise to do?
- 3. How much money did the contract state they would be paid?
- 4. What was the duration of the contract?

**Contract for six African Americans:**

- 1. Complete the following chart:

<b>Name of African American</b>	<b>Payment for Work</b>	<b>Length of Time of Work</b>

- 2. What did the six African Americans promise to do in the contract?
- 3. How did they sign the contract?
- 4. Why did some of the six have someone else sign for them?
- 5. Why did some make less than others?

**Receipts for the teachers:**

- 1. Complete the following chart:

<b>Name of Teacher</b>	<b>Payment for Work</b>	<b>Length of Time of Work</b>

**Analyzing the documents:**

Compare the salaries and the length of time of work of the teachers and the sharecroppers. What conclusions can you draw from the comparison of the two groups of people?

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Sharecropper/Tenant Farmer Letter Assignment and Rubric

**Directions:** Assume the role of a tenant farmer or a sharecropper in the post-Civil War era. Write a friendly letter to a relative or friend in which you describe your life. Be sure to include details about:

- Work
- Housing
- Food
- Hardships
- Pay
- Relationship with land owner

CATEGORY	4 points	3 points	2 points	1 point	Score
<b>Content Accuracy</b>	The letter contains at least 5 accurate facts about sharecropping or tenant farming.	The letter contains 3-4 accurate facts about sharecropping or tenant farming.	The letter contains 1-2 accurate facts about sharecropping or tenant farming.	The letter contains no accurate facts about sharecropping or tenant farming.	
<b>Grammar &amp; spelling</b>	Writer makes no errors in grammar or spelling.	Writer makes 1-2 errors in grammar and/or spelling.	Writer makes 3-4 errors in grammar and/or spelling.	Writer makes more than 4 errors in grammar and/or spelling.	
<b>Ideas</b>	Ideas were expressed in a clear and organized fashion. It was easy to figure out what the letter was about.	Ideas were expressed in a pretty clear manner, but the organization could have been better.	Ideas were somewhat organized, but were not very clear. It took more than one reading to figure out what the letter was about.	The letter seemed to be a collection of unrelated sentences. It was very difficult to figure out what the letter was about.	
<b>Format</b>	Complies with all the requirements for a friendly letter.	Complies with almost all the requirements for a friendly letter.	Complies with several of the requirements for a friendly letter.	Complies with less than 75% of the requirements for a friendly letter.	
<b>Sentences &amp; Paragraphs</b>	Sentences and paragraphs are complete, well constructed and of varied structure.	All sentences are complete and well constructed (no fragments, no run-ons). Paragraphing is generally done well.	Most sentences are complete and well constructed. Paragraphing needs some work.	Many sentence fragments or run-on sentences OR paragraphing needs lots of work.	

**Total** \_\_\_\_\_