



# THE HISTORY OF MITCHELVILLE, SC

## TARGET LEVEL:

This lesson is designed for upper elementary level social studies.

## STANDARD INDICATORS:

**Standard 3.1: Use maps and globes to categorize places and regions by their human and physical conditions.**

### 3.1.2.AG

Locate the world's four hemispheres (i.e., northern, southern, eastern, and western) by using the major components of latitude and longitude (i.e., the Equator, the Prime Meridian, lines of latitude (i.e., parallels), lines of longitude (i.e., meridians), and the International Date Line).

**Standard 5: Demonstrate an understanding of the contributions different groups made to impact the economic, political, and social developments during Reconstruction of the United States and South Carolina in the period of 1860-1880.**

### 4.5.CC

Identify and evaluate the impact of economic, political, and social events on the African American experience throughout Reconstruction.

### 4.5.CX

Contextualize the economic, labor, political, and social conditions in South Carolina during the period of Reconstruction.

## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

1. Describe the location of Mitchelville using geographical references; latitude, longitude, hemisphere and ocean.
2. How did the enslaved people of Mitchelville become free (emancipated) before slavery was abolished?
3. What is the historical significance of Mitchelville's churches and schools?

## SOURCES NEEDED:

- **Lesson Text-The History of Mitchelville- Grades 3, 4, 5 (National Archives)**
- **Mitchelville History Vocabulary Words**
- **Mitchelville Geography Vocabulary Words**

## VIDEOS:

- **Historic Mitchelville Freedom Park now part of Reconstruction Historic Network**
- **Anything but Bland- Mitchelville Freedom Park**
- **Historic Mitchelville - Hilton Head Island, SC**
- **The Untold Story of the Lowcountry Gullah**



HISTORIC  
**MITCHELVILLE**  
FREEDOM PARK | EST. 1862

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## HISTORICAL CONTENT:

Before the Emancipation Proclamation was signed in 1863 and at the height of the Civil War, a group of escaped slaves, considered “contraband of war”, set about creating their own town on the grounds of the former Drayton Plantation on Hilton Head Island. Here Union General Ormsby Mitchel, created an actual town – instead of one of the more prevalent camps – with orderly streets, simple but accommodating wooden homes, a church, and most importantly, gave its inhabitants the freedom to govern themselves.

The newly minted citizens went about their business with elections, enacting various laws, collecting taxes, making a living, and naming their town “Mitchelville”, in honor of the forward-thinking General Mitchel. A compulsory education law for children was enacted— most likely the first such law in the South.

On November 7, 1861, Union forces attacked two Confederate forts and the Sea Islands of South Carolina near Port Royal. “The Battle of Port Royal” later drove the Confederate forces to retreat to the mainland. One island, Hilton Head Island, immediately became the headquarters for the Union Army. It also would become the setting for the first self-governed town of freed Africans in the country. After the Battle of Port Royal, men, women, and children fled the plantations and sought freedom with the Union army. However, the Emancipation Proclamation was yet to be signed so these former slaves—though seeking new lives as freedmen—would be labeled “contrabands of war” and housed in ill-constructed shacks on the grounds of the Union outpost. In need of labor, the Union Army hired these “contrabands”, as carpenters, blacksmiths, launderers, coopers, clerks and cooks.

Due to overcrowding in the barracks in the Union camp, General Ormsby Mitchel dedicated a large parcel of the land, near the old Drayton Plantation, to the newly freed Blacks that they would be able to cultivate and govern. Individuals and families were given a quarter acre lot and material to build a home. The freedmen elected their own officials, created their own system of law, built three churches, four stores and established the first compulsory school system in the state of South Carolina. Education was required for every child from age 6 to 15 and when the school district was created in 1866, there were 238 students in the town. Commercial organizations and churches were established and weddings were conducted. Men were recruited for the on-going Civil War and Black soldiers built nearby Fort Howell to protect Mitchelville. On weekends, the marsh tacky work horses were raced along the beaches for enjoyment. They designed sweet grass baskets and fishing nets and sang songs interpreting their burdens.

After the slaves were freed by the Emancipation Proclamation, Mitchelville (named after General Mitchel following his death from yellow fever in 1862) became a template for the creation of future freedmen towns and served as the “rehearsal for Reconstruction”. This experiment of independence was a radical idea. It addressed the former slaves’ longings for their own land, the right to choose who would represent them, the responsibility of keeping families intact, the right to negotiate wages for their labor, and to initiate their own religious and commercial enterprises.

At its height, Mitchelville boasted over 3,000 residents, but after the Union army left the area in 1868, the population began to decrease. Many residents began farming and engaging in local commerce to sustain themselves and the town would maintain until the end of the century. Eventually, the residents took apart their homes and moved inland towards the area of Squire Pope, Bayard and Chaplain. Even though the citizens of this important community moved on from the physical property, their connection to the town endures through their descendants and the impact of the first taste of African American independence. Mitchelville truly is: “Where Freedom Began”



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## LESSON PROCEDURES

### *Day 1 Lesson:* The Geography of Mitchelville

#### **Standard 3.1.2.AG**

- Locate the world's four hemispheres (i.e., northern, southern, eastern, and western) by using the major components of latitude and longitude (i.e., the Equator, the Prime Meridian, lines of latitude (i.e., parallels), lines of longitude (i.e., meridians), and the International Date Line).

#### **Essential Questions:**

- Describe the location of Mitchelville using geographical references; latitude, longitude, hemisphere and ocean.

#### **Materials Needed**

- Pictures (see below)
- Maps
- Globes
- Blank map of Mitchelville
- Mitchelville Geography Vocabulary Words

#### **Lesson Procedure**

- Provide students with the blank map of Mitchelville
- Have students use the globe to identify latitude, longitude, hemisphere, and ocean.
- Introduce Mitchelville **The History of Mitchelville**
- Have students complete **Teacher's Guide: Analyzing Motion Pictures | Teacher Resources** while viewing the video.
- Have students answer the essential question and label the maps accordingly.
  - Describe the location of Mitchelville using geographical references; latitude, longitude, hemisphere and ocean.



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## LESSON PROCEDURES

### *Day 2 Lesson:* **The Geography of Mitchelville**

**Review the location of Mitchelville and have students share some key points they recall from the previous day's lesson**

#### **Standard 4.5.CC**

Identify and evaluate the impact of economic, political, and social events on the African American experience throughout Reconstruction.

#### **Essential Questions:**

How did the enslaved people of Mitchelville become free (emancipated) before slavery was abolished?

#### **Lesson Procedure**

- Have students create a bubble map categorizing the vocabulary terms below
  - **Mitchelville History Vocabulary Words**
  - **Mitchelville Geography Vocabulary Words**
- Have students view the video: **The Untold Story of the Lowcountry Gullah.**
- Have students generate questions regarding the establishment of Mitchelville using **The History of Mitchelville-Grades 3, 4, 5**
- Place students in groups to discuss and answer the essential question, using words and images.

### *Closure:* **Writing Assignment**

What was the economic, political, and social impact of the Civil War on the enslaved and freed African Americans in Mitchelville?



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## PHOTOS

