



# JUNETEENTH TIMELINE

## The Amazing Story of Opal Lee and Freedom

*Lesson Plan and Activities for Grades 5-6 (Ages 10-11)*

### UNDERSTANDING JUNETEENTH

Juneteenth commemorates June 19, 1865, when Union troops arrived in Galveston, Texas, to announce that enslaved people were free. To understand this momentous day, we must examine the Civil War's origins, progression, and aftermath. The journey from slavery to freedom was complex, involving economic, political, and moral conflicts that divided the nation. Opal Lee, an educator and civil rights activist, dedicated decades to securing federal recognition for this pivotal moment in American history.

### COMPREHENSIVE HISTORICAL TIMELINE

**1619-1860** ⚔️ **Slavery in America** For over 240 years, millions of Africans and their descendants were enslaved in America. The economy of Southern states depended heavily on enslaved labor for cotton, tobacco, and other crops, creating deep divisions between North and South.

**NOVEMBER 1860** 📦 **Lincoln Elected President** Abraham Lincoln's election on an anti-slavery platform prompted Southern states to consider secession. Many feared Lincoln would end slavery, threatening their economic system and way of life.

**DECEMBER 1860 - FEBRUARY 1861** 💔 **Union Breaks Apart** Eleven Southern states seceded from the Union, forming the Confederate States of America. They declared independence to preserve slavery and states' rights, setting the stage for war.

**APRIL 12, 1861** ✕ **Civil War Begins** Confederate forces attacked Fort Sumter in South Carolina, marking the start of the Civil War. Initially, Lincoln's goal was to preserve the Union and reunify the nation.

**SEPTEMBER 1862** 📜 **Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation** After the Battle of Antietam, Lincoln announced his intention to free enslaved people in rebellious states. This transformed the war's purpose from preserving the Union to also ending slavery.

**JANUARY 1, 1863** 📜 **Emancipation Proclamation** President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, declaring enslaved people in rebellious states "forever free."



However, enforcement required Union military presence, which hadn't reached remote areas like Texas.

**APRIL 9, 1865** 🏠 **Civil War Ends** General Robert E. Lee surrendered to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House, effectively ending the Civil War. The Union victory ensured slavery's abolition throughout the former Confederacy.

**JUNE 19, 1865** 🦋 **Juneteenth - Freedom Day** Major General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston with federal troops to enforce emancipation. He read General Order No. 3, officially freeing the last enslaved people in Texas.

**OCTOBER 7, 1926** 🧑🏿🏠 **Opal Lee's Birth** Born in Marshall, Texas, Opal Lee would grow up during the Jim Crow era, experiencing first-hand the ongoing struggle for civil rights and equality.

**1940s-1980s** 🧑🏿🏠📖 **Educator and Advocate** Opal served as a teacher and counselor for decades, earning her degree from the University of North Texas and dedicating her career to education and community service.

**1979** 🏠 **Texas State Holiday** State Representative Albert Ely Edwards authored and sponsored House Bill 1016, making Juneteenth an official state-paid holiday in Texas. This was the first state-level recognition of Juneteenth, paving the way for national recognition decades later.

**1990s-2015** 🌀 **Grassroots Activism** Opal began organizing annual Juneteenth celebrations and lobbying efforts. She started walking 2.5 miles annually to symbolize the 2.5 years between emancipation and its enforcement in Texas.

**SEPTEMBER 2016 - JANUARY 2017** 🚶🏿🏠♀️ **Historic March to Washington** At 89 years old, Opal embarked on a symbolic walk from Fort Worth to Washington D.C., covering over 1,400 miles to raise awareness and pressure Congress to recognize Juneteenth.

**JUNE 17, 2021** 🏠 **Federal Recognition Achieved** President Joe Biden signed Senate Bill S.475, officially establishing Juneteenth as the 11th federal holiday. Opal Lee was present at the White House signing ceremony, witnessing the culmination of her lifelong advocacy.

## 🧐 ADVANCED CHALLENGE QUIZ

**Question 1: What was the primary cause of the Civil War?** a) Disagreement about taxes b) Conflict over slavery and states' rights ← (Correct!) c) Arguments about trade with Europe

**Question 2: Why didn't the Emancipation Proclamation immediately free all enslaved people?** a) Lincoln changed his mind b) It required Union military enforcement to be effective ← (Correct!) c) Only Congress could free enslaved people



**Question 3: Why did it take 2.5 years for emancipation news to reach Texas?** a) Texas was too far away b) Limited communication and local resistance to enforcement ← (Correct!) c) The war was still happening in Texas

**Question 4: Who made Juneteenth an official Texas state holiday in 1979?** a) Opal Lee b) State Representative Albert Ely Edwards ← (Correct!) c) President Biden

**Question 5: What was the significance of Opal Lee's 2.5-mile walks?** a) Symbolized the 2.5-year delay in freedom news ← (Correct!) b) It was her daily exercise routine c) She lived 2.5 miles from work

**Question 6: How does Opal Lee's activism connect to broader civil rights movements?** a) It doesn't connect to other movements b) It continues the fight for recognition and equality ← (Correct!) c) It only focused on Texas history



## ADVANCED VOCABULARY CHALLENGE

Match these important terms with their definitions:

### TERMS:

- Legislature
- Bill
- Recognition
- Enforcement
- Secession
- Emancipation
- Proclamation
- Federal

### DEFINITIONS:

- A proposed law presented to government (*Bill*)
- The government body that makes laws (*Legislature*)
- Making sure laws are followed (*Enforcement*)
- Official acknowledgment of importance (*Recognition*)
- The act of leaving or withdrawing from a union (*Secession*)
- The act of setting people free (*Emancipation*)
- An official public announcement (*Proclamation*)
- Related to the national government (*Federal*)



# HISTORICAL ANALYSIS ACTIVITIES

## CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

**Legislative Progress:** How did Albert Ely Edwards' 1979 state legislation pave the way for Opal Lee's federal advocacy? What does this teach us about how change happens in government?

**Cause and Effect:** What factors contributed to Texas being the last state to receive emancipation news? What were the long-term effects of this delay?

**Historical Significance:** Why was it important for Juneteenth to become first a state holiday, then a federal holiday? What does this progression show about American democracy?

**Multiple Perspectives:** How might different groups (formerly enslaved people, legislators, activists) have viewed the 42-year gap between state and federal recognition?

## REFLECTION AND WRITING PROMPTS

Choose one prompt to write a detailed response (2-3 paragraphs):

**Personal Reflection:** Write about a time when you or someone you know worked hard to achieve something important. How does this connect to Opal Lee's perseverance?

**Historical Essay:** Explain the progression from Albert Ely Edwards' state legislation to Opal Lee's federal advocacy. Why did it take 42 years between these milestones?

**Government Process:** Compare how laws are made at the state level versus federal level. Use the example of Juneteenth recognition to explain the differences.

**Current Events Connection:** How do modern activists use different methods than both Albert Ely Edwards and Opal Lee to create change? Compare historical and contemporary activism.

## TAKE HOME ACTIVITIES!

### ADVANCED FAMILY DISCUSSION

Ask your family these questions:

- How do economic systems influence political decisions? (Consider slavery's role in the Southern economy)
- What role does persistence play in creating social change?
- How do different levels of government (state vs. federal) address civil rights issues?
- What lessons from Juneteenth apply to current social justice movements?



## RESEARCH PROJECT OPTIONS

### Historical Research:

- Compare the economic systems of Northern and Southern states before the Civil War
- Research other delayed implementations of federal laws or policies
- Study the role of communication technology in historical events

### Contemporary Connections:

- Research current civil rights legislation and how it's implemented
- Study modern activists and their methods compared to historical figures
- Investigate how other countries handle recognition of historical injustices

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

### Service Learning:

- Volunteer with local organizations that promote equality and justice
- Create a presentation about Juneteenth for younger students
- Research local civil rights history and share with your community

## ☆ ADVANCED LEARNING OBJECTIVES

**📖 Historical Analysis:** You analyze primary and secondary sources, evaluate historical significance, and draw evidence-based conclusions about the progression from slavery to freedom.

**🏛️ Civic Process Understanding:** You understand how change happens through government at different levels, from Albert Ely Edwards' state legislation to federal recognition.

**🔗 Making Connections:** You connect historical events to contemporary issues and understand continuity and change over time periods spanning centuries.

**✍️ Academic Writing:** You construct well-organized arguments using evidence and demonstrate understanding through written expression and analysis.

**🧠 Critical Thinking:** You evaluate multiple perspectives, analyze cause-and-effect relationships, and develop reasoned judgments about complex historical issues.

**📚 Advanced Vocabulary:** You master sophisticated academic vocabulary related to government, legislation, and civil rights movements.

**🌍 Cultural Competency:** You develop understanding of diverse experiences and the ongoing relevance of historical events in contemporary society.



🏛️ **Democratic Principles:** You understand how democratic processes work, from individual advocacy to legislative action and federal recognition.

## 🎉 **EXCELLENT WORK ON ADVANCED JUNETEENTH STUDIES!** 🎉

You now have a sophisticated understanding of the complex historical, political, and social factors that led from slavery through Civil War to emancipation and modern civil rights advocacy. You understand how individuals like Albert Ely Edwards and Opal Lee worked through democratic processes to achieve lasting change!

*This Month™ Educational Activities • Grade 5-6 • Juneteenth 2025*