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The Political Death of the Bogus Caesar

A President Was Impeached

In this activity you will examine issues leading to the impeachment trial of President Andrew Johnson and the trial's outcome.

CRITICAL THINKING ACTIVITY FOR POLITICAL CARTOON 31

Directions Read the following information about Reconstruction and study the cartoon on page 61. Then answer the questions.

When Lincoln was killed, Andrew Johnson became president. Johnson's vision of reconstructing the South ran in opposition to the wishes of Republicans who controlled Congress. His plan offered amnesty to ex-Confederates and restoration of rights to all who took an oath of allegiance to the United States or received a pardon. Southern states would be readmitted to the Union if they ratified the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, which prohibited slavery, repealed their ordinances of secession, and repudiated the Confederate debt. Congress rejected the plan as too lenient and demanded a greater voice in the Reconstruction and readmission of the seceded states. Johnson's opposition and veto of "Radical Republican" civil rights legislation and Reconstruction Acts passed by Congress polarized Congress against him. He also worked to defeat the 14th Amendment, which protected the rights of all citizens including African Americans, and he violated the Tenure of Office Act by dismissing Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton. The House of Representatives charged Johnson with usurping power and voted to impeach him early in 1868. The President was put on trial in the Senate. He was found not guilty by a margin of a single vote and remained in office for several months, with little political strength.

The cartoon by Thomas Nast was published about the time Johnson left office. It is drawn to resemble the well-known 1859 painting of the assassination of Julius Caesar by senators in ancient Rome, *Death of Caesar* by the French artist Jean-Léon Gérôme.

1. Who is the figure on the floor?

2. Who do the figures in the center of the cartoon represent?

3. What words appear on the wall at the top left?

CRITICAL THINKING

4. **Making Comparisons** Senators in Rome killed Caesar because they feared he was becoming an emperor. Why has the cartoonist portrayed Johnson's fate using this image of Caesar and the senators?

5. **Determining Relevant Information** The cartoon refers to and interprets events discussed in the historical information above. What details suggest that Nast depicts the "political death" as a necessary thing?

6. **Predicting Consequences** On the basis of what is depicted in the cartoon, do you think Reconstruction legislation eventually followed Johnson's plan or a plan imposed by Congress? Why?
