FOURTEENTH AMENDMENT DISCUSSION STATER: THE 39TH CONGRESS DEBATES

SUMMARY
In this clip from FOURTEEN: A Theatrical Performance, performers use the words of the 39th Congress as they debate the proposed 14th Amendment to the Constitution. Once you have watched the video, use the discussion questions to explore the roles of federal and state government and the rights of citizens.

BACKGROUND
In 1866, the Joint Committee on Reconstruction proposed amendments to secure freedom and equality for all. Some proposals pressured Southern states to give freed African Americans the right to vote. Others granted Congress the power to enforce equal rights in the states.

In April 1866, Congress decided to package several proposals together as a single amendment. Representative John Bingham drafted the first section, promising equal protection of the law and attacking state abuses of fundamental rights. In the debates that followed, Congress added a definition of U.S. citizenship, which overturned Dred Scott (1857). The amendment ultimately passed in Congress in June 1866.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
1) How many rights listed in the beginning of the clip do you recognize?
2) List at least two reasons supporting the 14th Amendment and two reasons opposing the amendment.
3) What were the goals of the 14th Amendment? What rights did it seek to provide?
4) What role should the federal government play in protecting the civil rights of all?

PRIMARY SOURCES
39th Congressional debates

Interactive Constitution: 14th Amendment – Citizenship Rights, Equal Protection, Apportionment, Civil War Debt
https://constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/amendment/amendment-xiv

VIDEO CLIP
Run Time: 5:55