Teacher's Worksheet Answer Key For Video: Ida B. Wells, A Passion for Justice

1. When and where was Ida Wells born?
   1862; Holly Springs, Mississippi

2. What was the background of the Wells family? Her father? Her mother? What were their childhoods like?
   Father was son of white master and slave mother; mother sold into slavery in Mississippi-beaten by slave owners. Ida's parents got married again after war, family commitment. Ida went to school with her mother.

3. Why do you think it was illegal to teach slaves? What was interesting about the schooling of Ida? How did the freed African-Americans feel about education? Why? It would help them get ahead and make them politically powerful. She had very little. They saw education as a way to learn all they could. She read newspapers to her father.

4. What were the conditions for African-Americans after the Civil War? Why was it known as a period of great optimism?
   African-Americans believed that it was a time for them to become full-fledged citizens of the country with opportunities to work hard and get ahead.

5. What were three conditions of the post-war South? Why were African-Americans scapegoats?
   Economic unrest, destruction of most property, crop failure, deprived of slave labor. Blacks blamed for it. The Press said African Americans were genetically inferior.

6. What was the first crisis Ida faced? What happened to her parents? Her siblings? Why did her childhood end as it did?
   Family hit by yellow fever; Ida's mother and father both died. She was oldest and her family was going to be split up. Ida took over. Got a teaching job.

7. Why did Ida go to the big city? What were the conditions like in Memphis?
   Get a better paying job teaching. Many blacks moved for same reason.

8. What was the Lyceum?
   A cultural group of citizens who met to discuss philosophy, literature, and other democratic ideas.

   Freed men were rounded up and sent back to farms to pick cotton.

10. Describe the African-American middle class of Memphis.
    Black shopkeepers, doctors, lawyers, landowners.
11. What effect did the withdrawal of federal troops and Supreme Court decisions have on African-American rights?

State gained control over civil rights, Supreme Court overturned laws giving blacks rights.

12. What laws did the southern states pass that created a new order? What was the effect on the progress of African-Americans?

Jim Crow laws; Stripped them of their rights through segregation.

13. Why did Wells refuse to go into the other car? What did she do? What happened to her? What did the whites do? How did she respond? What was the end result? What effect did the Supreme Court’s decision have on her attitude about her race?

The other car was a smoker. She refused and was thrown off the train. The whites laughed. She sued, was awarded $500 in damages. The railroad took the cases to the state supreme court and it reversed the decision. She had hoped for great things and had believed the law was on her side. She was very discouraged. She wished she could go elsewhere. She wrote articles on her story.

14. What political action did Wells take to get her story out? What organizations helped her? What meaning did she find for her life?

She wrote a series of articles. The black churches and newspapers picked up on it. Her work in writing the column gave her life meaning.

15. Why did Ida lose her teaching job? Why was she called “the Princess of the Press?”

She exposed corruption and poor teaching practices in her school system.

16. What personal qualities made Wells popular? What issues did she focus on in her writing?

She was effective and very bright. She wrote about issues she experienced as a child.

17. What was the incident in Arkansas that concerned African-American officials? Why did the governor of Arkansas do nothing? What was the “lynch law?” How did pamphlets affect the outcome?

They put a bunch of elected black officials on trains to Memphis. He said if that’s what the people wanted, he couldn’t do anything. Blacks were lynched by mobs. Pamphlets added fuel to the fire, incited more to violence.


The blacks had a grocery store and the whites didn’t like it. A white deputy in plain clothes came after them and blacks fired on them. The blacks were arrested and anyone else around was too. Later the three grocers were murdered by a mob. The killers were never brought to justice.
19. Describe Ida's friend that was killed. Who was one of the lynchers?
   They were good, strong and kind people who didn't deserve to die. One of the lynchers was a judge.

20. How did Wells retaliate? What issues did she speak out about? What questions was she forced to ask herself? Why were her words so inflammatory?
   She wrote a series of articles about racial justice. She was forced to ask herself if she was ready to stand up for her own beliefs. She urged many to leave Memphis and go west. She helped to create a Midwest migration of blacks.

21. After the incident, where did many of the African-Americans of Memphis go? What effect did it have on the economy of the Memphis?
   It caused an economic crisis because all the black patronage was going. She was the force behind thousands of black people leaving.

22. What did Ida do after staying in Memphis? What did she urge people to do? What strategy did she use?
   She continued her writing and organized a boycott aimed at the trolley system. She used her political clout and ability to articulate injustice to help create support for her cause.

23. What reasons were given for lynching of African-American men? What did Wells find out about these charges? What injustice did she speak out about the most?
   Nonpayment of a debt, insulting whites, even testifying in court and the killing white men and white women. Wells investigated and found out they were false charges. She said that white men could fall in love with Negro women but white women were not supposed to do the same.

24. Why was Ida forced into exile? Where did Ida go? Why?
   She wrote an editorial about the difference in treatment between relations between black and white men and women. She suggested voluntary relationships between the races. The white press got angry. Her office was destroyed. She went to New York because it had a black newspaper.

25. What was the African-American Woman's Club movement? Why was it so powerful?
   It was a powerful group of black women who spoke out against injustice. It took the first stand against lynching and raised money for Ida to investigate.

26. Why did Ida feel at first the lynching was somehow justified? What changed her mind?
   Why did she feel that lynching was being used? What core democratic values are missing when lynching occurs?
   At first she felt it was somehow justified. When her friends were killed she realized that it was used as a way to keep Negroes down. Due process.
27. Who was Frederick Douglass? What did he think of Ida’s work? Why was Wells’ work so highly regarded?
   The most prominent black leader of the time. He admired her work and felt she was very effective for speaking out.

28. Why did Wells seek help from other countries? What was her strategy? How did it force the Memphis media to take lynching seriously?
   She used meticulous detail to obtain the information she needed, often using the white press articles for her information. She felt she could mobilize moral and economic pressures against the Southern economy. She helped launch the London Anti-lynching Committee—the first in the world. The American press had to defend it by saying it didn’t happen. There were no more lynching’s for two decades.

29. What was ironic about the Colombian Exhibition? How did Wells deal with the issue? What did she accomplish?
   She pointed out that blacks were not represented at the Exposition. She showed the white community for what it was, discriminating, racist and not representative. She got people aware of the problem.

30. How did the white community react?
   In having to answer the charges they were forced to admit it happened.

31. Why was Wells concerned about the attitude toward African-American women? What did she do about it? How did whites view Frederick Douglass compared with Wells? Why?
   She felt that she had two problems: being black and being a woman. She was opposed to the specific treatment of black women. Frederick Douglass was much more highly thought of because he was male.

32. What efforts does Wells make for promoting the rights of women?
   She spoke out against all segregation including women’s suffrage.

33. Why did Wells criticize the actions of Susan B Anthony?
   Wells criticized her for not inviting Frederick Douglass to a suffrage meeting because she didn’t want to alienate the southern women.

34. Who did Wells marry? What was his background? What was the result? Why did it take so long for her to get married?
   F. L. Barnett, activist and founder of the first black newspaper in Chicago. She moved to Chicago. She was too involved in her activities.

35. What did Wells do after her marriage? Why did that create a tension between her and Susan B. Anthony?
   She continued her work but had children as well. Anthony felt she had divided loyalty and felt that she wasn’t as effective as she could have been.
36. What were the differences between the various groups in the African-American organizations? Who were the radicals and who were the accommodationists? Wells, WEB DuBois, and William Trotter were radicals. Booker T. Washington and others were accommodationists.

37. What made Ida so powerful and so feared? She wasn't afraid to tell people what she thought, even the President of the United States.

38. What organization did she follow? What was its purpose? Why was she maneuvered out of power? The NAACP. Probably because of her refusal to compromise and her outspokenness in confronting injustice. It's hard to imagine her compromising.

39. In what other causes was she involved and what other organizations did she start? She helped causes at home in Chicago and helped to form societies to provide food and clothing for the homeless.

40. What was the attitude about African-Americans at home during the war? Even though many were serving their country in the war, there was an increase of hatred at home and blacks were still forced to fight for justice.

41. What happened in Houston? Why did Wells protest? The 24th infantry took up arms and marched on the city. 16 whites and 4 blacks were killed. 50 soldiers were sentenced to life, 19 were hanged. Wells protested because of the way they were treated. The Secret Service told her to stop handing out buttons. She said it was a dastardly thing to do. The Secret Service didn't come back and she continued to dispose of the buttons.

42. What was the incident that compelled Wells to go back to the South after thirty years? The Arkansas race riot. When black farmers tried to unionize, there was violence and whites fired on them at an organizing meeting. The farmers fought back. 12 were charged with murder and conspiracy and sentence to die. She went back and went straight to the jail.

43. What were conditions like for African-American farmers? They couldn't get a fair price for their crops and tried to unionize.

44. Where did Wells go directly? What did she do? To the jail to talk with them about their experiences and got stories from each. They were beaten and given electric shock.

45. Why were the whites so opposed to the African-Americans unionizing? They saw it as a conspiracy to take the white man's land.
46. What did Ida do when she got back from Chicago? What happened to the men in Arkansas?
   She wrote about them in a pamphlet. She appealed to public opinion. The condemned men were released.

47. Why do you think historians call Wells, "Everything we value in American heroes?" Why was so little ever known about her?
   She saw injustice and spoke out against it. She praised hard work and courage and worked to instill black pride. History was still written by whites.