

# How Did Slaves React to Slavery?



By  
Michael R. Luzader and Stephanie Sumner

**Michael R. Luzader/Stephanie Sumner**

**EDU 6710 C07- The Enduring Legacy of the American Revolution - Freedom**

**Title**

How Did Slaves React to Slavery?

**Date**

April 8, 2009

**Grade Level**

Fifth and Sixth grade

**Proposal Number**

Four

**Proposal**

Students will do inquiry into slave life and livelihood in North America. Student inquiry will include slave narratives. This project will ask students to examine and interpret personal reactions from slaves to slave treatment.

As a final project/assessment students will write a slave narrative. Reenactments and role plays could include activities like: Slave and bounty hunter, debates, or History Snapshots. The activities will be interwoven with readings, and videos so that as many learning styles as possible will be addressed.

**Seminar Impact**

The summer seminar has had a tremendous impact on our content knowledge of nineteenth century American History, particularly in reference to the concepts of slavery, women's rights and the abolitionist movement. We each now have a deeper understanding of the struggles of men and women (black and white) during the early and mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. We have also gained insight into the many perspectives that dominated American culture in this era.

Our resources and teacher networks have widened as a direct result of the lectures and field trip experiences of the week. Finally, as a direct result of the research time and our ability to collaborate on this project, we have found some great resources for further research as well as for use in the classroom. We believe that this project will greatly enhance student learning in our district.

### **Central Questions**

- How did slaves react to their enslavement?
- How did slaves view their station in North America?
- How did slaves view the institution of slavery?
- How did slaves react to the institution of slavery?

### **Challenge Questions**

- What common themes are there among the thought and reactions of slaves and black abolitionists?
- What differences are there among the thought and reactions of slaves and black abolitionists?
- What accounts for these similarities and differences?

### **Lesson Length**

- This project will serve as an excursion from a larger unit on slavery in North America, and should take three to five days to complete.

### **Key Ideas**

- The treatment of slaves varied depending upon slave status and the character of their owners. This had a direct influence on their views of and reactions to slavery.
- In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, African Americans established credibility in the anti-slavery argument through sharing their personal experiences.
- Not all slaves had the same goals.

### **Intended Learning Outcomes**

- Slave narratives were a much more credible source of the atrocities of slavery than white politicians or other white abolitionists, because the slaves had lived the experience.

- Students will be able to access primary sources to draw conclusions and form opinions about slave life and black abolitionists in 19<sup>th</sup> century North America.
- Not all slaves were beaten and treated poorly; some actually found comfort in knowing that their needs would be supplied.

### **National History Standards**

- **Colonization and Settlement (1585-1763)**
- Standard 3: How the values and institutions of European economic life took root in the colonies, and how slavery reshaped European and African life in the Americas.
  - Student understands African life under slavery. Therefore the student is able to analyze overt and passive resistance to enslavement.
- **Expansion and Reform (1801-1861)**
- Standard 2: The student understands the rapid growth of “the peculiar institution” after 1800 and the varied experiences of African Americans under slavery.
  - Therefore the student is able to evaluate how enslaved African Americans used religion and family to create a viable culture and ameliorate the effects of slavery.
- Standard 4: The sources and character of cultural, religious, and social reform movements in the antebellum period.
  - Student understands the abolition movement. Therefore the student is able to analyze changing ideas about race and assess the reception of pro-slavery and anti-slavery ideologies in the North and the South.
  - Student is able to explain the fundamental beliefs of abolitionism and compare the anti-slavery position of the “immediatists” and “gradualists” within the movements.

### **Vermont Grade Expectations**

- **H&SS5-6:6 Students make connections to research by...**

- Explaining the relevance of their findings (So what?) to themselves, their community, and/or history (e.g., by asking follow-up questions, by proposing additional research).
- Explaining how their research has led to a clearer understanding of an issue or idea.
- **H&SS5-6:7 Students communicate their findings by...**
- Developing and giving oral, written, or visual presentations for various audiences.
- **H&SS5-6:8 Students connect the past with the present by...**
- Investigating how events, people, and ideas have shaped the United States and/or the world; and hypothesizing how different influences could have led to different consequences (e.g., How did the civil rights movement change the U.S., and how might the U.S. be different if it had never happened?).

### **Preparation for Teaching**

In order for students and teachers to be successful, they will need to understand:

- Societal perspectives of slavery;
- The history and practice of slavery in North America;
- The Triangular Trade;
- The variety of slave environments and slavery conditions in North America;
- The economic characteristics of the South that led to and shaped slavery.

### **Activities**

- Slave and bounty hunter simulation  
In this activity students assume the role of a slave, a bounty hunter, or a station master.
  1. Assign 3/8 of the class to be escaped slaves, 3/8 of the class to be station masters, and 1/4 of the class to be bounty hunters.
  2. Class Period One: The slaves and the station masters need to come together to design a map that shows where the safe houses and “free territory” are in the school. Simultaneously the bounty hunters devise a plan of action to capture the escaped slaves.

3. Class Period Two: The station masters go to their assigned locations, a few minutes later the slaves need to navigate through all of the safe houses in order to make it to the "free territory" as slaves reach a save house they need to get a stamp or some type of a mark to prove that they have made it to all the safe houses. A few minutes after the slaves escape the bounty hunters need to try to capture the slaves. A bounty hunter only needs to see a slave in order to capture him or her.
  4. After the simulation students come together and discuss what it was like to be a slave, a bounty hunter, or a station master. Questions like; How did you make it to "free territory"?, How did you capture your slave?, What did you do in order to avoid being captured?, How did you know where to look for the slaves? Other questions and topics could be discussed as well.
  5. If time allows have students switch roles and do it again.
- Debates (possible topics: Fugitive Slave Laws, Was the institution of slavery good for America? ...)
 

This is a good activity to do only if students have had time to do ample inquiry on the topic. Also, students need to be clear on the rules of debate. Concepts to consider are:

    1. Counter arguments need to stay focused on the topic.
    2. Don't make it, or let it get personal.
    3. Only historically based opinion or fact can be discussed or debated
    4. The moderator always has the final say.
  - Writing fictitious slave narratives
 

This activity really allows students to step into the role of a slave. However, some groundwork should be laid first.

    1. Students need to read many (4-6) real slave narratives first.
    2. Students need to have clear guidelines on the narrative expectations. ie. setting, character development, character motivation, problem, solution/resolution (see appendix for examples).
    3. Students should also be aware that unlike other narrative writing, this writing should be historically accurate, and that they need to check facts.

- Snapshot from history  
This activity allows a group of students to “pose” as a picture from a reading. In this case a slave narrative would be an appropriate reading. Next, the students who are not posing (the audience) identify what section of the reading the pose is from. After the audience has an opportunity to discuss what the snapshot represents, the teacher interviews the posers and asks probing questions that will give insight into the mind of the character who was being posed.
- Primary Source Document Analysis  
This can primarily be done through the lessons of the Slavery in the Nineteenth Century. Students examine primary source documents such as letters from slave owners, the Alabama Slave Code of 1852, lists of slave inventories, slave role descriptions, pictures of African-American artifacts, slave-owner dialogues and dramatic readings, slave narratives and a short play about abolitionists. These readings are interspersed with cooperative group activities and discussions to allow students time to analyze and interpret various informational sources, always leading back to questions such as:
  - What was the impact on individual slaves?
  - How did such events shape African-American culture?
  - How did slaves respond to specific events?
  - What does this source of information show or tell us?
  - If you were a slave (slave-owner, abolitionist), how would you respond?

### **Possible Assessments**

- Constructed response
- Student written slave narratives
- Speech
- Wanted Poster
- Mini-Page
- Venn Diagram of slaves and free blacks

## Annotated Resources

A collaborative effort by Michael Luzader and Stephanie Sumner

## Primary Sources

- History Alive! America's Past:  
Written by Bower, Bert and Jim Lodbell. Teachers' Curriculum Institute, Palo Alto, California, 2001

This is the fifth grade textbook for the History Alive! curriculum series, published by the Teachers' Curriculum Institute. Chapter 8, "Facing Slavery" addresses content specific to slavery in America, beginning with the triangle slave trade prior to the colonial period, through the abolition movement of the mid-nineteenth century. The reading level of this text is age-appropriate for fifth graders. Each page has one graphic or illustration, making the text structure less distracting than other traditional texts. In addition, this program has an accompanying Student Notebook with Guided Reading Notes, which often use a variety of graphic organizers to help students organize and analyze content.

This is our primary textbook for our district Social Studies curriculum.

- Great Speeches by African Americans  
Edited by James Daley, Dover Publications, 2006

This short volume is packed with primary sources by some of the most heavy hitting African Americans. That being said, there are no slave narratives included. If the reader is looking for a wide variety of abolitionist writings, civil rights leader writings, or a piece by Barack Obama the reader will not be disappointed. There is truly a wide range of writings here and they span American history. However, the reading level is a bit difficult for the average fifth grader.

I stumbled upon this collection thumbing through Amazon.com.

- Far More Terrible For Women

Edited by Patrick Mingos, John F. Blair Publisher, 2006

This book takes a serious look at woman slaves, their specific challenges, problems, and dilemmas. This is a nice collection of woman specific narratives, it is broken into thematic chapters: Jezebel and Mammy, Friends and Family, Witches/Doctors, Mother/Child, and Herstory. I found this collection easy to navigate, and a valuable for woman's issues.

I picked up this volume at the Women's Rights Shop in Seneca Falls.

- Powerful Words

Edited by Wade Hudson, Scholastic Nonfiction, 2004

Hudson puts together a fine collection of African American writings, and categorizes them into themes. This work spans all of American history, so the reader will get more than just abolitionist writings; again there are no slave narratives. While the writings are primary sources and may not be easily accessible to the average fifth grade student, Hudson does a fine job of giving a short synopsis/background of each writing.

I bought this book from Scholastic.

- African America Folktales: Stories from Black Traditions in the New World

Edited by Abrahams, Roger D., Pantheon Books, 1985

Abrahams develops a vast and diverse collection of folktales from many different parts of the New World, from the American South (including some Creole tales from Louisiana) to coastal regions in South and Central America, as well as the Caribbean. This diverse collection includes traditional tales used to explain how the world was created, moral fables, trickster tales and much more. Collectively, the tales illustrate how people torn from their homes and traditions formed a new life and vital culture in the New World.

I bought this book from Amazon.com.

- When I Was a Slave: Memoirs from the Slave Narrative Collection

Edited by Yetman, Norman R., Dover Publications, 2002

Yetman puts together thirty-four intriguing personal narratives representing all slave occupations and a wide variety of slave living conditions. This collection was amassed in the 1930s, when the Works Progress Administration funded the Federal Writer's Project in order to employ writers with work during the Great Depression. These memoirs are rich in detail, which at times can be quite difficult to read, as they accurately represent the horrors of American slavery. The memoirs are also interspersed with songs that emerged within African American culture during this period of American history.

I purchased this book from Amazon.com.

### **Secondary Sources**

#### **For teacher background**

- Witness for Freedom  
Edited by Finkenbine, Roy E., Hembree, Michael F., Ripley, C. Peter, Yacovone, Donald, University of North Carolina Press, 1993

This volume examines the issues and opinions of black abolitionists and slaves from the onset of slavery in America through the Civil War time period. Packed with numerous slave narratives this collection examines issues of morality, canonization, independence, and the struggle of African Americans to end slavery and claim their rights as citizens. This is a fine work for teacher background, but some of the narratives could be brought into the classroom for use with students.

I received this book through the Teaching American History grant.

- Untidy Origins  
Ginzberg, Lori, The University of North Carolina Press, 2005

This book spends scant time documenting the history or treatment of slaves in the United States during the antebellum period. However, Ginzberg's work does a nice job chronicling the events that led up to the anti-slavery movement. There is some mention of abolitionist activities, but only in the context of the New York Constitutional Convention and how those activities would impact the early woman's right movement.

I received this book through the Teaching American History grant.

- The Black Hearts of Men

Stauffer, John, Harvard University Press, 2001

Stauffer examines the lives of Frederic Douglass, John Brown, James McCune Smith, and Gerrit Smith. He makes ties to the four men through the abolitionist call to arms, religion, imagery, philosophical ideologies, and most importantly their agreement that in order to truly stop slavery it was necessary to spill blood. This is a good book for the teacher who will include this type of radical abolitionist in their lesson, and is a great read.

I received this book through the Teaching American History grant.

- Many Thousand Gone: African Americans from Slavery to Freedom  
Hamilton, Virginia, Alfred Knopf Publications, New York, 1993

This book is a companion to *The People Could Fly* and contains short biographical chapters about indentured servants and slaves, as well as short chapters about underlying concepts and events related to slavery such as the Emancipation Proclamation, and the exodus to freedom post-Civil War. The introduction to the book gives an excellent summary of the beginnings of slavery in America, at a grade-appropriate reading level for fifth and sixth graders. Each chapter is short enough to be an appropriate selection of non-fiction reading, yet detailed enough to provide students with a wealth of information. Additionally, the black-and-white, full-page illustrations are amazing!

- The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales  
Hamilton, Virginia, Alfred Knopf Publications, New York, 1988

This book offers a wide range of American black folktales for elementary and middle-school children. Selections used in my classroom included He Lion, Bruh Bear, and Bruh Rabbit; Doc Rabbit, Bruh Fox, and Tar Baby and The Talking Cooter. The first two tales focused on tales in which animals learn through experience to fear man and to use trickery to save themselves. The last tale is about the wish of slaves in the South for freedom. Overall, the

collection offers a tales of freedom, slave narratives, and a body of literature that accurately tells the stories of slaves in America.

- Slavery in the Nineteenth Century: A Unit of Study for Grades 5-8:  
Pearson, Jim and John Robertson, The Regents, University of California, 1991

This book is a teaching unit that was published by the National Center for History in the Schools from the University of California. It is geared for teaching history in the middle grades. Each lesson focuses on representing specific dramatic moments during the time period being studied, in order to give students the opportunity to delve deeper into the significance of each event represented. This unit focuses on slavery and abolitionism, and addresses concepts such as arguments used to justify slavery, the nature of enslaved labor, African-American culture within slavery, slave resistance and abolition, and the connection between abolition and women's rights. Each lesson provides background content and information for teachers, lesson activities, processing questions and the inclusion of documents and other primary sources. It is very usable by teachers, beginning at fifth grade. The inclusion of content-specific vocabulary, higher-order questions and extensions, allow teachers to differentiate for students of differing abilities.

This book was included in our text resources provided by the Teaching American History program.

#### **For student use**

- Freedom Crossing

Clark, Margaret Goff, Scholastic Press, 1980

This book is a must-read for fifth-graders! Clark tells the story of a young girl raised on a plantation in antebellum America. After a move to live with family in Virginia in which she becomes aware of her family's involvement with the Underground Railroad. Her friendship with a runaway slave boy has a tremendous impact on Laura. This story, in true young adult literature fashion, incorporates key concepts such as abolition, the use of music and codes along the Underground Railroad, and living within a culture of fear and hope at the same time.

I purchased this book from Amazon.com.

- Henry's Freedom Box

Levine, Ellen., Nelson, Kadir, Scholastic Press, 2007

Not only is this one of the greatest slavery stories ever told, but this picture book version is accessible to any fifth grader; I even saw a copy of it in my first grade son's classroom. The artwork makes the story come to life for the reader. When I read this book to my fifth grade class, we had deep discussions about the content and the art jumped started conversations that we would not have had with text only.

I bought this book from Scholastic.

- Slavery

Bell, Naomi, Interact, 2001

This Interact simulation is designed to be used as a slave simulation, and it is a fine simulation. I did not use it as it was intended. There is a collection of historical fiction slave narratives that are fifth grade appropriate and at a reading level that most fifth grade students can navigate. I found these narratives to really help my students get grounding in what life was like for the typical slave. I would highly recommend this simulation either in part or whole.

I bought this unit from Interact.com.

### **Accommodations**

- Use of visual arts materials, such as genre paintings;
- Audio recordings of slave narratives and/or abolitionist speeches, as available;
- Video clips;
- Leveled reading materials;
- Untimed writing time;
- Individual, partner and group activities;
- Scaffolds for writing.

# Appendix I

## Slave narrative requirements - designed for students in Michael's class

- **A clear setting**, where were you raised, where do you live now?, did you travel?...
- **A well developed main character (you the slave)**, how old are you?, what kind of a slave are you (house or field slave)?, have you been a slave all your life, do you have a family?...
- **Motivation**, what does your character care about and why, do you have a cruel master?, has all or part of your family been sold?, do you have plans to escape?...
- **A clear problem or conflict**, what bothers you about your situation?, why?, is something in your situation not fair?, why?...
- **A solution or resolution** how did you solve your problem?, what is your plan to solve your problem?, do you need anything to solve your problem?, what is it?...

## Slave Narrative Rubric

Setting	Character	Motivation	Problem/Conflict	Solution/Resolution
The setting is clear and has rich details telling about the place or places	The main and any support characters are fully developed and believable	It is very clear why the main character (the slave) is behaving the way that he or she is behaving	The problem is obvious and believable, and the main character is responding to it in a believable way	The solution is appropriate and believable for the situation
The setting is clear and has some details that describe place	The main and support characters may be thinly developed or unbelievable	There is motivation but it may not support the reasons that the character is behaving in a certain way	The problem is obvious, but it may not be clear why the character is responding that way	The solution is either not appropriate or believable for the situation
The setting is not clear or there is little description of place	The characters are not believable and are thinly developed	There is some motivation, but not enough to support the reasons that the character behaves a certain way	The problem is somewhat clear, but does not support the character motivation	The solution is neither appropriate or believable for the situation
There is little or no evidence of setting	The characters are vague and not developed	There is little no evidence of character motivation	The problem may not be clear or believable	The solution is absent

## Appendix II

### **Slave narrative requirements – designed for students in Stephanie’s class** Personal Narrative – Slavery Unit

As a final assessment of this unit, you will create a *personal narrative* from the perspective of a person living in the early 1800’s, when the institution of slavery was practiced in different parts of America. You may write from the following perspectives:

- Field slave
- Domestic Slave
- Freed Slave
- Conductor on the Underground Railroad
- Child
- Adult
- Male
- Female
- Abolitionist
- A combination of various perspectives.....such as a freed slave who becomes an abolitionist

In your narrative, you will tell the story of your experience, including details that show what you have learned about the experience of Americans in the time of slavery.

## History Content – Slave Narrative

How well does the slave narrative address the key understandings of this unit?

- Student understands African life under slavery. Therefore the student is able to analyze overt and passive resistance to enslavement.

- § Understands origin of slavery in U.S. (West Africa, triangular slave trade, born into slavery, born free)

student \_\_\_\_/20

\_\_\_\_/20

- § Nature of slavery – domestic vs. field; treatment of owners

student \_\_\_\_/20

\_\_\_\_/20

- § Personal response to slavery – desire to be free, feeling of contentment vs. oppression

student \_\_\_\_/20

\_\_\_\_/20

- § Integration of abolitionism and slave resistance student

student \_\_\_\_/20

\_\_\_\_/20

- § Inclusion of post-slavery experiences and/or Underground Railroad where appropriate

student \_\_\_\_/20

\_\_\_\_/20