

Seeking Refuge in Antebellum America

Museum Connection: Family and Community

Purpose: In this lesson students will examine the complex choices faced by African American slaves who sought freedom during the antebellum period. In doing so, students will gain an appreciation of how African Americans exercised the full range of human responses to oppression and enslavement.

Course: Advanced Placement United States History, African-American History

Time Frame: 1-2 Class Periods

National Standards for History, United States History

Era 4: Expansion and Reform (1801-1861)

Standard 2: How the industrial revolution, increasing immigration, the rapid expansion of slavery, and the westward movement changed the lives of Americans and led to regional tensions.

2D. Students will understand the rapid growth of "the peculiar institution" after 1800 and the varied experiences of African Americans under slavery. Students will identify the various ways in which African Americans resisted the conditions of their enslavement and analyze the consequences of violent uprisings.

Common Core State Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-12

- Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

Common Core State Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-12

- Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/experiments, or technical processes.
- Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Objective:

Students will analyze and evaluate choices slaves in antebellum America faced when deciding whether or not to seek freedom.

Vocabulary:

Abolitionist	a person who works to end slavery.
Abolitionist Movement	an organized effort of individuals (both African American and white) and organizations to end slavery in the United States of America.
emigrate	to leave one country or region to settle in another.
immigrate	to enter and settle in a country or region of which one is not a native.
Manumission	freeing of an enslaved person by “legal” means such as through a will, purchase, etc.
Runaway	enslaved person who seeks freedom by fleeing from his or her master.
Underground Railroad	a clandestine system of routes, safe houses, and people who assisted enslaved Africans who escaped to freedom.

Materials:***For the Teacher:***

Vocabulary
Publications
Websites
Historical Background

For the Students:

Student Resource Sheet 1, “Setting the Stage”
Student Resource Sheet 2, “Graphic Organizer”

Resources:***Publications:***

Franklin, John Hope and Evelyn B. Higginbotham. *From Slavery to Freedom: The History of African Americans*. New York: Alfred Knopf, 2011.

Whitman, Stephen T. *Challenging Slavery in the Chesapeake: Black and*

White Resistance to Human Bondage, 1775-1865. Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 2007.

Phillips, Christopher. *Freedom's Port: The African American Community of Baltimore, 1790-1860.* Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997.

Web Sites:

1. <http://teachingamericanhistorymd.net/000001/000000/000177/html/t177.html>
2. <http://teachingamericanhistorymd.net/000001/000000/000096/html/t96.html>
3. http://pathways.thinkport.org/flash_home.cfm
4. <http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/D/1826-1850/slavery/fugitxx.htm>

Historical Background:

Throughout the antebellum era, African Americans engaged in a full range of human responses to their enslavement. The manner and nature of their responses to slavery varied depending upon the conditions, time, place, relationships, local customs and a number of other factors. Typically one might think of running away and escaping to the North. However, the nuances of the local slavocracy may have impacted exactly what running away entailed. For instance, many people are aware of Frederick Douglass's escape from slavery by borrowing a sailor's uniform and pass (stipulating he was a "free seaman") which allowed him to travel by train from the slave state of Maryland. Once he arrived in Wilmington, Delaware, he took a boat to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where slavery did not exist. His desire for a greater sense of freedom from possible re-capture by slave catchers led to his desire to travel further north. On September 4, 1838, Frederick Douglass claimed his freedom when he arrived in New York City.

However, many do not acknowledge Douglass's earlier escape from the "slave breaker" Covey's plantation on the Eastern Shore of Maryland as "running away." In that instance Douglass was "hired out" to Covey by his master. Covey was such a harsh and cruel master that Douglass "ran away" and went back to his original master to complain about his treatment. Although Douglass ran away, he did not try to escape to his ultimate freedom; he was escaping the brutality of his daily life on the Covey plantation. This type of "temporary" escape was not unusual. Douglass's mother would "run away" from the plantation where she worked at night to see the young Douglass and return in the morning to work before her absence was noticed. There are countless narratives of husbands and wives being denied permission to see their spouses who would just run off without their masters' knowledge and permission. The point here is that there were many ways in which African Americans attempted to mollify the rigors of daily life as enslaved people. They often engaged in work slowdowns, broke their tools, feigned illness, feigned ignorance, committed suicide, rebelled, committed infanticide, and aborted pregnancies to prevent their children from being enslaved. Enslaved African Americans availed themselves of these options depending upon their viability. This lesson focuses on the nuanced choices and options African Americans created for themselves.

Slavery was not as “black and white” as it often seems with a strict master/slave relationship in which the master was in complete charge. These relationships were often negotiated as enslaved African Americans sought to have their human agency acknowledged. Manumissions were often a negotiated process whereby a master would grant freedom at a certain age with certain conditions attached. The freedmen might have to leave the state. This was often the law in many southern states, especially after the 1820s when slavery ended in the North. Virginia enacted such a law to ensure that there would not be a large population of free African Americans that might challenge the slavocracy. Other stipulations would require a child to remain enslaved until a certain age. Similar conditions could be imposed on self-purchase as well. When enslaved persons were allowed to “purchase themselves” they would do so with the understanding that they had to leave the state. The American Colonization Society as well as the Maryland Colonization Society were established to provide places to send freedmen.

In this lesson a husband and wife have to come to terms with both the nuances of the slavocracy and the struggle to maintain their human agency. Do they remain in Virginia violating the law and risk losing freedom? Do they escape and, if so, where do they go? If they remain in the United States, they run the risk of being captured and re-enslaved as fugitives. They can attempt to create a completely new life in Canada facing the possibility of losing their family and national ties. Students must explore the complexity of slavery by examining the historical reality enslaved African Americans faced on a daily basis and their nuanced responses in antebellum America.

Lesson Development:

Motivation:

1. Ask: If you were enslaved in Virginia (the upper South) during the 1830s how would you respond? What would you do? Accept all responses, list them and have students copy them. (Enslaved people responded to slavery in a multitude of ways from acquiescence to rebellion. It is important to point out in this stage of the lesson that African Americans chose the full range of human responses to oppression. Thus, it is important to accept all serious responses from the students.) A full list might include: went crazy, broke their tools, committed suicide, committed infanticide, engaged in “shuckin’ and jivin’”, turned to God for salvation, stole an education, and ran away. After completing the list, have students rank the choices in order from most to least desirable.
2. Distribute Student Resource Sheet 1, “Setting the Stage.” Call on several students to read the introductory background and the four options facing the Jacksons.
3. Divide the class into groups of four and assign each student an option from Student Resource Sheet 1. Have students use Student Resource Sheet 2 (graphic organizer) for their option. Direct students to come to a consensus on which option they think is the best. Each group should choose a spokesperson to represent its point of view.

4. Once ample time has been given for all groups to develop a consensus, have students present their positions. During the presentations promote discussion by encouraging students to challenge each other's decisions. Conclude the discussion by asking students if they have changed their minds about their group's decision based on the discussions and what factors influenced them.

Assessment:

Direct students to create a dialogue between Amelia Jackson and her husband about what their plans will be for the future. The dialogue should include consideration of at least two options. It should also include the advantages and disadvantages of each as well as a plan to execute the option they choose. This can be done individually or in pairs.

Closure:

Revisit the list of responses to slavery generated during the motivation and have students re-order their list. Engage students in a discussion about why they did or did not change their order.

Thoughtful Application:

- Ask students to describe push/pull factors they believe are affecting migration in the world today.
- Select one of the options presented in Student Resource Sheet 1 and implement the AVID 4-Corners strategy. Have students move to a corner of the classroom based on whether or not they agree, disagree, somewhat agree, or somewhat disagree with the option. Engage students in a discussion of why they chose their position.

Lesson Extensions:

- The Museum offers several school programs that connect to the curriculum lessons.
 - *Journey in History Theater* provides living history and theatrical performances which highlight African Americans in the museum's gallery.
 - Take the theme tour, *Paths to Freedom* and explore the story of slavery through the eyes of enslaved and free blacks from Maryland's colonial past to the end of the Civil War.
 - Contact group reservations for schedule updates.

1. Research the role of slave narratives as oral histories.

<http://teachingamericanhistorymd.net/000001/000000/000177/html/t177.html>

2. Research Runaway Slaves Advertisements in Ante-bellum America

<http://teachingamericanhistorymd.net/000001/000000/000096/html/t96.html>

3. Research the beginnings of the Underground Railroad.

http://pathways.thinkport.org/flash_home.cfm

5. Research former slaves who established colonies in Canada.

http://pathways.thinkport.org/flash_home.cfm

<http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/D/1826-1850/slavery/fugitxx.htm>

6. Visit the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture. Examine displays on James W.C. Pennington, Charles Ball, Josiah Henson or William Still. Read the autobiography of one of these African Americans.
7. Create a contemporary book jacket for William Still's *The Underground Railroad*.
8. Have students research how enslaved people who ran away seeking freedom were viewed by both supporters and opponents of slavery during the antebellum era. Have students engage in a debate in order to explore the prevailing views of slavery in the United States in the antebellum era.

Student Resource Sheet 1

Setting the Stage

Upon the death of her owner, Amelia Jackson, age 24, will be manumitted on her 25th birthday in accordance with her master's Last Will and Testament. Her husband, Marcus, is enslaved on a neighboring plantation. They have one child, Betty, age 7 who lives on the same plantation as Amelia. The year is 1833. They live about ten miles outside of Richmond, Virginia. Marcus has managed to save a little money from extra work as a carpenter. The Jacksons are descended from Africans who were brought to Virginia in 1690. They have many relatives in the Richmond area enslaved on nearby plantations. According to Virginia law, all freed persons must leave the state within six months of their emancipation to avoid setting an example which would make other enslaved persons want freedom and perhaps rebel. The Jackson family must decide what to do now that Amelia's status is about to change. Although Betty is still a slave, Amelia could try to take her daughter with her. Marcus Jackson is willing to try to escape with them, and he feels he has a good chance of getting away.

What should the Jackson family do?

Option A - Richmond, Virginia

The Jacksons could stay in Richmond, an area which is familiar to them. Only one of them would be breaking the law. Amelia would have to hide in Richmond, sneaking visits to her daughter on one plantation and her husband on another. They would be close to their relatives, who mean a lot to them. Although it is illegal to remain Amelia could probably find work and may not be turned in for breaking the law.

Option B - Liberia, Maryland Colonization Society

The Jacksons could escape to Maryland and join the colonization movement. In antebellum Maryland, a large number of African-Americans were still held in slavery. By the 1830s, however, many African-Americans were "free" because they had purchased their own freedom, had been freed by their owners, or had migrated from other states to Maryland. Many of these "free blacks" lived and worked in the towns and countryside of the state, but they had no political rights and usually had to work for very low wages. Many white Marylanders during the 1830s did not own slaves. Some of these were abolitionists who worked to have slavery abolished.

The tension between the pro-slavery and anti-slavery groups led to the formation of the Maryland Colonization Society as an outgrowth of the American Colonization Society. The Maryland Colonization Society, like its national organization, the American Colonization Society, favored the idea of sending "free blacks" to Africa. Marylanders helped to found the Colony of Maryland within the colony of Liberia. Many white Marylanders were in favor of colonization because of the large number of free African Americans in the state. Throughout

most of the antebellum era Baltimore had the largest number of free African Americans in the nation.

The debate over colonization was fierce within the African American community. There were those who believed that it was a scheme by whites to rid the nation of free African Americans so there would not be any voice to speak on behalf of those still in bondage. African American opponents viewed themselves as citizens of the United States with no ties to Africa. Many free African American families could trace their heritage to the British colonial era and felt they were entitled to the same rights as any other Americans. African American supporters of the colonization movement felt that they could make a better life for themselves in Africa. They were supported by well-meaning whites who had been allies in their struggles for freedom. Many also went as a condition of emancipation. Their masters promised them freedom only if they joined the colonization movement. So, many took advantage. Finally, many went to Liberia for religious reasons. They felt that it was their Christian duty to evangelize and bring Christianity to Africa.

Option C – New York City

The Jacksons could escape to New York. New York did not outlaw slavery until 1799 when a gradual abolition law was passed. The law provided that male children born to enslaved mothers after July 4, 1799, would be free when they reached the age of twenty-eight, and female children after the age of twenty-five. If the Jacksons went to New York, they would have found more than several thousand black people there, but some of them were still enslaved. Jobs were available to African Americans in the shipyards, stores, shops, warehouses, and as servants in wealthy households. There was much racism and segregation. However, there was a vibrant free African American community with a very active religious and anti-slavery position. There was a strong belief that one day the abolitionist movement would be victorious and slavery would come to an end, and as a result the many families that had been broken up would once again be reunited. In New York the Jacksons could help the abolitionist cause and one day become full citizens of the United States and reunite with their family in Virginia. The Jacksons could find work, but both Marcus and Betty would remain fugitives.

Option D - Canada

The Jacksons could escape to Nova Scotia in Canada. Canada, including what is now Ontario, was settled heavily by Loyalists who had fled the American Revolution and brought enslaved Africans with them. Enslaved Africans who joined the British forces during the American Revolution under Lord Dunmore's Proclamation were promised freedom at the end of the war. Many Africans who fought with the British were settled in Nova Scotia at the end of the American Revolution. In 1793, the Canadian Parliament passed a gradual abolition law which freed all children born to enslaved persons when they reached their twenty-fifth birthday. The law also provided that "No Negro or other person who shall come or be brought into this province...shall be subject to the condition of a slave or to...involuntary service for life." Thus, there was a vibrant African American community in Nova Scotia. The Jacksons would be able to find work and would be legally free.

Student Resource Sheet 2 – Graphic Organizer

Directions: Read your selection from Student Resource Sheet 1 and complete the corresponding section of the graphic organizer. Discuss your option with your group members. Decide as a group which is the best option for the Jackson family and explain why. Choose a spokesperson to report your group's decision to the class.

Option

Advantages

Disadvantages

Remain in Virginia

Join Colonization Movement

Escape to New York

Escape to Canada

Group Consensus (explain):

Consequences:

Name: _____