



Learning with Lincoln Institute

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Born Into Slavery: Slave Narratives and the American Experience

by Jon Parkin



Students will explore and analyze slave narratives in audio and text format compiled by the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938. They will then write a poem or song lyrics reflecting what they have learned regarding the African American experience in the antebellum South.



Overview

- Subject:** U.S. History (Slavery-Making Connections) / Social Studies
- Time Required:** Three 50 minute class periods
- Grade Range:** 9 - 12
- Understanding Goal:** Oral history primary sources provide a glimpse into everyday life in the past.
- Investigative or Essential Question:** What can primary sources teach us about how slavery affected African-Americans as a group – and American society as a whole, both during the antebellum period of United States history, as well as after the War Between the States? How reliable is memory when recounting events that occurred decades earlier? What Additional sources can be employed to corroborate/confirm recollections? 4. How does perspective influence narrative?



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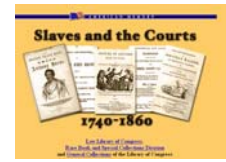
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Materials

Purpose of Library of Congress Items: The primary sources help students build background knowledge regarding the conditions of slaves in the Antebellum South.

Library of Congress Items: This learning experience did not refer to specific primary sources, but to collections.



Additional Materials:

-  Cracking the Code (attached)
-  KWLH Graphic Organizer (attached)
-  Written Document Analysis (attached)

Required Vocabulary: abolition/abolitionist, antebellum, contraband, cotton 'gin, Underground Railway, "King Cotton", "peculiar institution", spirituals, and work songs

Prior Content Knowledge: In addition to knowledge of how to analyze primary sources used, students will need to know that slavery was: originally introduced into the British colonies of North America shortly after the Settlement of Jamestown, found at one time or another in all of the original Thirteen Colonies prior to the American War for Independence, race-based, a permanent condition, and eventually confined to the Southern States.

Technology Skills: Students must be able to access the Library of Congress' collections pertaining to slavery, open and read a transcribed interview, or download and listen to a recorded-interview of a former-slave.



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Standards

Illinois Learning Standards: 14b, 1C4c
16A5a, 16d4A, 16d4B, 16d5,
18c5

For information on specific Illinois Learning Standards go to www.isbe.state.il.us/ils/

Actions

Description of Teacher Actions:

Build Prior Knowledge (Anticipatory Set)

- KWLH Graphic Organizer/Pre-reading Activity.
 1. Break class up into small groups of four to six students each.
 2. Have each group complete the “what we know” column of a KWLH graphic organizer on slavery. (Be sure everyone maintains their own personal KWLH chart for future use.)
 3. Conduct a class-wide debriefing a) compiling a complete list of everything known about slavery, and b) construct a list of “what we want to find out” for the “W”.
- Review Primary Sources.
 1. Define Primary Source.
 2. Differentiate types of primary sources (e.g. artifacts, documents, oral histories, sounds, visuals, etc.).
 3. Review methods/techniques for interpreting primary sources.
 4. Distribute a copy of a Written Document Analysis Worksheet.
 - Time-permitting, distribute and analyze as a class a short sample of a slave narrative. (Use Cracking the Code guidelines.)

Student Investigative Activity

Homework. Assign a specific slave narrative to each student. (Strive for gender, age, occupational, and geographic representative diversity in the narratives selected.)



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Students will write a short essay (two to three pages) summarizing the experiences related in the narrative they were assigned. (Encourage them to look for details that would enhance/add-to our understanding of slavery.)

- Debrief students as a class.
 1. Ask students to share what they have learned about slavery from their particular narrative. Students can share excerpts from their assigned-narrative or read their essay.
 2. Have students continue working on their personal KWLH charts, adding information for “what we learned” in the “L” column.
 3. Compile a list of unique idioms (i.e. archaic and/or obscure words and phrases) employed by the interviewees.
 - Challenge the students to figure-out the Meaning(s) /definition(s) by analyzing the context of each word and/or phrase.
 - Encourage students to consult various resources (e.g. dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses, word-origin books, the Internet, grandparents, etc.) for any words/phrases they are unable to define.
 4. Have students speculate about “how we can learn more” in the “H” column of a KWLH chart.
 5. Compile a list of sources to be consulted.
 6. Share examples of other types of sources that can inform students about African-American experiences as slaves (e.g. spirituals, work songs, etc.).
- Introduce students to selected samples of spirituals and work songs with roots in the antebellum South. (African-American Sheet Music, 1850-1920)

Student Investigative Activity

Homework.

1. Have students write the lyrics for their own spiritual and/or work song, drawing upon what they have learned from the classroom discussion and their own analysis of a particular slave narrative.
2. Allow students to read their lyrics/poems to the class.
3. Lead a class-discussion evaluating each selection read.



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4. Have students continue adding pertinent information to their KWLH charts.
 - o Remind students to limit their remarks to constructive comments/criticism.
5. Inform students that slavery still exists in the world today, and at a later-date will revisit the issue, comparing contemporary practices and experiences with those of the antebellum era they have just analyzed.

Best Instructional Practices:

Teaching for Understanding

By composing lyrics to a song or writing a poem relating the unique experience(s) of the former-slave studied, students demonstrate knowledge of the “peculiar institution” of the antebellum South. A subsequent/follow-up activity exploring present-day slavery, comparing and contrasting it to pre-Civil war slavery in the United States, will help students better-understand institutional servitude.

Literacy Instruction/Reading Comprehension

When students summarize pertinent information culled from a transcript of an oral history in their own words reading-comprehension and composition-writing skills are practiced.

Differentiated Instruction

Students collaborate in small-groups developing a list of what they already know about slavery in the United States prior to compiling a more complete list as a class. Students individually read/listen to a former slave interview before writing a summary of salient details regarding America’s brand of involuntary servitude. As a class individuals will share the stories of their respective interviewee, students demonstrate understanding by composing lyrics to a spiritual or work song from the slave perspective.

Technology Integration

Accessing the Library of Congress American Memory Collections on-line in order to read transcribed oral histories and/or download and listen-to audio files of oral history interviews allows students to practice their skills at manipulating technology for the purpose of research. Also, using a computer to produce a short paper further hones students’ skills at word-processing.



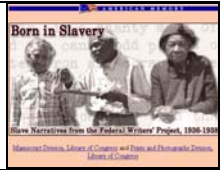

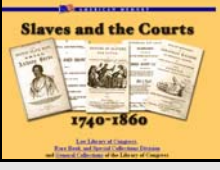

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Attachments

Library of Congress Resources

Title:		Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938	
	Collection or Exhibit		
	Media Type:	published text	
	URL	http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html	
Title:		Voices from the Days of Slavery: Former Slaves Tell Their Stories	
	Collection or Exhibit		
	Media Type:	sound recording	
	URL	http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/voices/	
Title:		Slaves and the Courts, 1740-1860	
	Collection or Exhibit		
	Media Type:	published text	
	URL	http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/sthtml/sthome.html	
Title:		African-American Sheet Music, 1850-1920	
	Collection or Exhibit		
	Media Type:	sound recording	
	URL	http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/sheetmusic/brown/	



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KWHL

K What we KNOW about...	W What we WANT to find out about...	L What we LEARNED about...	H HOW we can learn more about...



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Cracking the Code

Reading Diaries, Journals, Letters, and other “unofficial manuscripts” as pieces of Primary Source communication

Analysis / Interpretation / Evaluation Tips:

- Make a personal connection between the type of document and the student’s own lives.
- Show a handwritten copy of the document if available. Allow students to practice reading the document using a magnifying glass or by transcribing 1-2 sentences on their own. Compare student transcriptions to official transcriptions.
- Ask students to identify as much factual information about the document writer or creator, from bibliographic record, if possible.
- Ask students to pose an historical inquiry question about the document, writer, or time period.
- If the document is long, divide it into sections and charge individuals or small groups with analysis of their own section. Print the document out, cut it apart, and use highlighters if needed.
- Ask students to list:
 - interesting / peculiar language. (They should use dictionaries to find origins and meanings of these words)
 - places and people mentioned. (They should consult maps and secondary sources to find identity of notable people.)
 - topics written about or discussed.
 - personal thoughts of writer.
 - other observations.
- Ask students to share information with one and create a hypothesis that addresses their inquiry question. Students should be able to support hypothesis with data from their findings.
- Ask students to find additional information from other sources to check their hypothesis.



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Cracking the Code	
<u>Identify Factual Information</u> Time frame, place, age of author. Some life interests and year diary was written.	
<u>Pose Historical Inquiry Question</u> How does the author feel about traveling? Are many other people traveling at the same time?	
<u>List:</u> Interesting/peculiar language	
<u>List:</u> Places and people	
<u>List:</u> Topics written about or discussed	
<u>List:</u> Personal thoughts of writer	
<u>List:</u> Other observations	
<u>Create hypothesis that addresses the inquiry question you created.</u>	
<u>List facts to support your hypothesis.</u>	

Handout inspired by primarysourcelearning.org