

Final Project  
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Teaching American History II  
A More Perfect Union

The following information is provided in accordance with TAH directives. It represents the planning and implementation of a week-long unit involving three 85-minute classes. The target audience/level of instruction is a tenth grade Honors United States History class. This unit comprises part of the designated curriculum dealing with antebellum America and the institution of slavery.

### Objectives

By the unit end, students should be able to:

- 1) describe typical work experiences of rural slaves in the South.
- 2) describe typical work experiences of urban slaves in the South.
- 3) explain what was radical about the beliefs of William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips in antebellum America?
- 4) describe the provisions and results of the Fugitive Slave Act.
- 5) describe the efforts and arguments that were used to get around the Act.

### Day 1

Activator: Have students use provided paper to begin a three-column KWL chart on slavery. Discuss what students know about slavery and *how* they know it. Have them use the discussion to fill out the first column of the KWL chart (the K, or Known, information). In the second column, have them write questions they have about slavery in America (the W, or what they Want to know). Tell students that they will fill out the third column (the L, or what they Learned) after they finish reading the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. (25 minutes)

### Cooperative Learning, Jigsaw:

Within small groups, students read and report on Guided Reading selections from their text **The Americans** resource guide, **Religion Sparks Reform, Slavery and Abolition, Women and Reform, and The Changing Workplace**. Members of the group then share their main ideas with the class as a whole. (45 minutes)

### Interpreting Statistical Tables:

Students study Table 6 from *American Slavery 1619-1877* by Peter Kolchin, to wit, **SLAVES IN THE EIGHT LARGEST SOUTHERN CITIES, 1840 AND 1860**, and make observations about the same. (Take particular note of Baltimore, as it appears prominently in Douglass' experience.) (15 minutes)

Historical habit(s) of mind in spotlight:

-Understand the relationship between geography and history as a matrix of time and place, and as context for events.

Homework: Reading: Students read Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass through Chapter 5.

Day 2

Activator: Do a think-quick write-pair-share activity to have students discuss their experiences with *cliques*. As discussion begins on with the Narrative, this activity should allow students to think in terms of the (comparatively) small group of Southern slaveholders that wanted to safeguard their interests in keeping the institution of slavery intact while facing mounting pressure from outsiders to abolish the same. (20 minutes)

Lecture/Discussion: Students take notes using the name of Frederick Douglass as an acrostic organizer. (40 minutes) Ask students questions based on the prompts below:

### Chapter I

**F**or what purpose was separating slave infant from mother? (Hinder, blunt, destroy affection of mother for the child)

**R**elation of master and father sustained for pleasure and profit (Children of slave women shall follow condition of their mothers)

**E**xtraordinary barbarity on the part of overseers (Cowskins and cudgels in whippings)

**D**esires and denials by masters (Aunt Hester's case with Captain Anthony)

### Chapter II

**E**steemed privilege to be allowed to see Baltimore (Cargo vessel manned by slaves)

**R**egimented allowances (Yearly clothing, monthly food from main plantation)

**I**ncentive for working on the "Great House Farm" or main plantation? (Out of the field and the lash, seen as worthy and honorable)

**C**haracter of slavery in chorus of slaves (testimony against slavery, prayer for deliverance)

**K**illing of the soul (Aching heart relieved by tears, songs tell of sorrow—not joy)

### **Chapter III**

**D**eception in dealing with masters (Still tongue makes a wise head)

**O**wn master better than others (Master's greatness transferable to slave)

### **Chapter IV**

**U**seless to argue against accusations (To be accused was to be convicted)

**G**ory deeds in the name of order and discipline (Demby execution)

### **Chapter V**

**L**eisure time for younger slaves on plantation? (Too young for fields)

**A** better life ahead in Baltimore (No attachments to past place)

**S**trange sight: a kindly white face (New mistress in Baltimore)

**S**pecial divine interposition in his favor (Good hopeful spirit from God)

Writing Activity: Students write a letter from the perspective of a Southern slave (male/female), slaver overseer, and/or slaveowner/planter. Use Integrated Assessment, Rubric 5.3, from The Americans resource guide.

Homework: Reading: Students complete Narrative of Frederick Douglass.

#### Day 3

Activator: Conduct a Round Robin activity/discussion to have students discuss the experience of running away. Ask them if they have ever felt like running away---why did they feel that way? Where did they want to go? What would be the difficulties they might face? Ask students to compare their experiences or feelings with those of Frederick Douglass. Have one student volunteer to record all responses on the board/computer projection for class to review/reflect upon. Conduct the activity with the students sitting in a circle, including the teacher, having all answer in succession without interruptions, comments, or audible reactions. Students may pass once but should agree to be called upon later. (30 minutes)

Historical habit(s) of mind in spotlight:

-Understand the significance of the past to their own lives, both private and public, and to their society.

-Distinguish between the important and inconsequential, to develop the “discriminating memory” needed for a discerning judgment in public and personal life.

-Perceive past events and issues as they were experienced by people at the time, to develop historical empathy as opposed to present-mindedness.

Cooperative Learning: Working in pairs, students analyze photo depicting Hiram Powers' sculpture, **The Greek Slave**. (25 minutes)



Hiram Powers' *The Greek Slave*, 1846

Sample questions for consideration: Subject of photograph? Expression? Style of dress? Social class? Occupation? How could one use the photograph in telling the story of slavery? Use more words such as what, color, where, movement, perspective, when, sound, as needed.

Formal assessment: Students complete the section quiz from *The Americans* resource guide. (30 minutes)

Homework: Reading: Read Chapter 5 of Kolchin's *American Slavery: Antebellum Slavery: Slave Life*

Extension/alternate activities using Frederick Douglass' *Narrative*:

Pre-reading survey

Have students construct a chart as presented below. Introduce the statements in the right column as topics for discussion. Students may write their responses in the left column. Re-visit this chart during or after the *Narrative* has been read and complete the center column as a class, citing page numbers as applicable.

You	Narrative	Topic: Slavery
		-All Southern plantations required many laborers.
		-Cities offered more opportunity to slaves than plantations and farms.
		-Religion was not a central theme in Southern society.
		-Slaves accepted their treatment without protest.
		-There were conflicting attitudes between regions over slavery.
		-Escape to freedom in the North solved all problems of a slave.

Ensure the students know that they will be assessed on their ability to support their positions with evidence or logic. Finally, all should expect to respond appropriately to each other's statements.

Alternative/extension lesson for Antebellum unit

Objective

\*To understand the role of early reformers in removing evils (slavery) in American society.

Using the Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass as well as information from the text, each student will respond to a series of questions on the efforts and impact of Frederick Douglass, Wendell Phillips, and William Lloyd Garrison.

Students should expect to discuss the following questions in class:

1. What criticism of American society did the individual have?
2. What methods did the person use to improve American life?
3. What success did the individual have in promoting reform?
4. What detail(s) of the person's work made him an interesting historical figure?
5. To what extent was the reformer obsessed with achieving an impractical goal through fanatical or impractical means?
6. What lasting impact did the person's reforms have on American society?

Questions/answers from:

“Purifying the Nation” (The Center for Learning: Advanced Placement U.S. History 1; Roberta Leach, Augustine Caliguire; 1997; Lesson 19)

Frederick Douglass

1. As a runaway slave, Douglass abhorred the evil of slavery.
2. He wrote an abolitionist newspaper and lectured with Garrison until they parted company.
3. Many, including Abraham Lincoln, listened to his arguments and found them persuasive.
4. Details from Narrative could be used as evidence.
5. He recounted his own experience under slavery to persuade others of the evil of the institution.
6. He helped create a climate for eventual abolition.

Wendell Phillips

1. Slavery was evil.
2. He lectured in lyceums across the country with Emerson and Greeley.
3. His lectures and writings swayed logical thinkers.
4. Details from letter in Narrative could be used as evidence.
5. He surrendered his legal practice because the Constitution condoned slavery; he was a man of reason.
6. He also helped create a climate for eventual abolition.

### William Lloyd Garrison

1. Slavery was an evil requiring immediate abolition.
2. He published the abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator*, founded the American Anti-Slavery Society, and lectured against the crime of slavery.
3. 3. His efforts helped bring about the adoption of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1865.
4. Details from Preface in Narrative could be used as evidence.
5. Although a fanatic, Garrison helped to create a climate for the eventual abolition of slavery.

### Assessment

Have students complete standard assessment test from *The Americans*, Chapter 8, Version C (Honors).

The following summary of Frederick Douglass' Narrative is provided as a discussion prompt for students following the completion of the unit. The instructor may ask for students to complete a similar written response and thereafter share in a peer review/round table presentation of all papers.

Frederick Douglass' stirring narrative of his life as a slave makes an undeniable case for antebellum America as a land of critical hypocrisy, worthy of condemnation in social, political, economic, and, most convincingly, religious terms. Mr. Douglass' articulate weaving of his tale of pain, suffering, humiliation, and helplessness is as powerful a read in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as it must have been in the 19<sup>th</sup>. The early depths to which his spirit sank as a slave serve to heighten his feelings of utter joy at his latter escape to freedom. It is a compelling story of one man's hope and faith overcoming impossible odds.

One can indeed glean many examples of slavery's dehumanizing stamp on America from Douglass' work. To begin with, all motherly attachment was broken by the masters of the lash. His agonizing account of separation from his mother at an early age sets the stage for the social turmoil to come. Even his date of birth was obscured by the peculiar institution. (p. 1-2) One gathers the dehumanization inherent in slavery from other descriptions of his early life on the plantation. There was no privacy afforded most slaves; they slept together naked on primitive floors in shacks. Douglass was particularly affected when he recollected the woe, anguish, and prayers for deliverance from plantation slaves in the songs they sang. The brutality of the plantation also engendered a code of silence, for in telling the truth about life in bondage, a slave could expect to be beaten for insolence. Writes Douglass, "A still tongue makes for a wise head." (p.11)

The nature of the institution demoralized all that took part, the willing and unwilling alike. The willing slaveholder became base (p. 22) ---the unwilling slave could wax suicidal. (p. 24) Another degrading aspect of slavery was exposed in the process following a master's death. The valuation of property often preceded the breaking up of slave families and friends, taken away by different purchasing factions like furniture in an estate sale.

Still, the better nature of mankind is served in Douglass' description of the youth of society, where human bondage was not yet a corruptible force in life. The Baltimore boys especially earned the author's respect and love for their acceptance and caring efforts on his behalf when he was laboring in that city. (p. 30) As for the adult white slaveholders, however, even holidays and recreational events were not beyond the dehumanizing efforts of the same. Days off exposed the "fraud, wrong, and inhumanity" of slavery as masters would often gamble on slave capacities for liquor (p. 44) or wrestling prowess (p. 48). City life did apparently offer better conditions than the plantation (shelter, food, clothing, even a wage), but not without price. A black laborer in Baltimore could still expect no sympathy from onlookers if in an altercation with a white man or men of any station. (p. 58) Ironically, the better conditions of city life only heightened the feelings of desperation to be free.

The politics of slavery produced much of the emotional fall-out for those trapped by the institution and those fighting for its eradication. The Constitution was called into service by both pro and anti-slavery forces in the justification of respective thoughts and actions. The frustration of battling a system seemingly immune from attack is apparent in much of Douglass' writing. The economic gain that slavery offered to society was undeniable to all and irresistible to many. The plantation system was a self-sustaining operation (p. 7), with the slave as its sine quo non. "King Cotton" made the wealthy planter class wealthier and required slave hands for the job. It was this exigency which gave others impetus to profit by the marketing of slaves, even resorting to the business of breeding. (p. 37) Virginia stood as example for a region that gained notoriety as well as profit from slave-trading when tobacco market futures dimmed. Others were lured to pro-slavery action by the lucrative rewards offered in the return of fugitive slaves. (p. 25)

Douglass reserves his most searing attacks on the proponents of slavery in religious terms. From the base ingratitude paid to his grandmother, who, kept as a slave after her master's death, was left to die abandoned and alone (p. 28-29) to the holiday spectacle that Christmas had become on some plantations, the sacrilegious aspect of the institution was denounced thoroughly. And that slaveholders could seek protection under the cloak of Christianity was cause for the ultimate revulsion in the author's mind. Indeed, he wrote long and well in expressing this view. He lashes out in a torrent of contempt in the final pages of his narrative against, the "corrupt, slaveholding, women-whipping, cradle-plundering, partial and hypocritical Christianity" (p. 71/Appendix) in the America of his day.

Douglass' narrative is served well by William Lloyd Garrison's stirring call to awareness and Wendell Phillip's letter of approval and encouragement, which highlight the zeal and passion of contemporary abolitionists. It is Douglass, however, who best delivers in a final salvo of condemnation of the nature of slavery and the self-righteous slaveholder, who "scatters whole families", is a "thief preaching against theft", an "adulterer preaching against adultery", all "devils dressed in angel's robes." (p. 72/Appendix)

It is now noted in the course of abolition history in America that Frederick Douglass originally viewed the Constitution as a pro-slavery document. The evidence supporting this endorsement is clear enough, most notably the three-fifths and Fugitive Slave clauses. Mr. Douglass' initial interpretation of the Constitution included indictments of the founders as cunning and, in effect, men who tried to have the best of two worlds, free and slave. The Supreme Law of the Land was hypocritical, even enabling the United States armed forces to protect slavery against slave rebellions (Article I, Section 8). It should be added that Douglass was much aligned in sentiment with the fiery Garrison during his original thinking on the Constitution.

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