Pre-Visit Lesson: Slavery and Abolition in New England
An Introduction to Primary Sources

Time: 60 minutes

Background

This lesson is to be completed with students before their visit to Old Sturbridge Village for the Abolition and Social Change program. During this program, students will learn more about the far-reaching impact of the institution of slavery. They will explore the ways in which Northern states supported plantations in the American South through commerce and industrial production. They will become acquainted with abolitionists of the time and study why some people made their voices and opinions heard, while others did not. They will also explore the Colonization Movement, which was very popular in New England, but also controversial among more radical abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, and Gerrit Smith.

In the 19th century, slavery touched everything. Massachusetts abolished slavery in 1783, but it persisted in neighboring states well into the 1800s through gradual emancipation laws. Slavery did not officially end in Connecticut until 1848 and Rhode Island until 1842. For such a small state, Rhode Island was very much entwined in the institution:

> Rum, which was distilled from West Indian molasses, was the most important and number one export in Rhode Island. Over 60% of all the slave ships that disembarked from ports in British North America left from Rhode Island. By 1850, 79% of all Rhode Island textile mills manufactured negro cloth.¹

According to historian Christy Clark-Pujara, New England benefitted from and participated in slavery in both well-known and lesser-known ways. "Negro cloth" or "slave cloth," which the author mentions above, were rough textiles like linsey-woolsey, made in Northern factories in the early 1800s specifically to clothe the enslaved.²

Massachusetts shoe shops of the 1830s produced 15 million pairs of shoes and 1.5 million pairs of boots annually. With the exception of farming, the shoe industry employed more women and men across the state than any other at the time. Most of the shoes these shops produced were not meant

¹ “Slavery, emancipation and Black freedom in Rhode Island, 1652-1842,” Christy Clark-Pujara
² http://library.providence.edu/encompass/rhode-island-and-the-industrial-revolution/primary-sources/slave-cloth/
for the local population. Instead, they were packed in barrels and shipped to the South, West Indies, Cuba, Haiti, and other places via Northern ports. These shoes were traded for goods like sugar and coffee, and some of them went to plantations to be worn by enslaved people.

The 1830s was also the peak of the Colonization Movement, which aimed to return free Black people to Africa. Formed in 1816 by a partnership of slave-owning southerners and concerned northerners, the American Colonization Society (ACS) was an alternative to emancipation. It was seen as an alternative to emancipation in the United States. Members of the ACS, some Black and some white, had varied reasons for supporting the cause of colonization. Some members believed that Black people would never achieve justice in the United States, or that colonization would free the country of slavery. Other supporters thought that colonization was a way to remove free Black people from the country. In 1822, the Society established the West African colony now known as Liberia.

The ACS was a very popular organization, with chapters and supporters throughout the country. It was especially popular in New England. By the 1830s, though, radical abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison condemned it as an impractical and unjust scheme, designed to strengthen slavery by removing free Black people from American society.

In this lesson, students will look at primary sources relating to the story of New England and slavery. During the in-person program, students will be asked to examine primary sources from the collections of Old Sturbridge Village, as well as other New England museums. In this first lesson, we will learn more about what primary sources are, what they can tell us, and why they are important to the study of our past. Using learning stations, students will have the opportunity to observe, think, and discuss in small groups.

Lesson Objectives

1. Students will be able to define the differences between primary and secondary sources, and note the pros and cons of each.
2. Using a variety of primary sources, students will make educated guesses about the purposes of different objects and their relation to the topic of slavery and abolition.
3. Students will discuss their interpretations in small groups or pairs, expressing their own opinions clearly and showing empathy for the opinions of others.
4. Students will begin to understand the ways in which Northern states participated in the institution of slavery.

Essential Questions

1. Why are primary sources important?

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2. What can primary sources teach us about the people who lived during the time of American slavery?
3. Why do we preserve and study some artifacts but not others?

List of Materials and Resources

- Pencil
- Timer
- Sticky notes
- Large piece of paper or whiteboard to stick sticky notes to
- Scissors
- Glue sticks or tape
- 4-6 objects of the educator’s choosing
- Device to video short YouTube video (https://youtu.be/RvWKfJHV0ts)
- Primary Source slides—this resource contains images of all the sources with descriptive text for the instructor in the notes at the bottom of the slide. This can be used for classroom discussion at the end of the lesson.
- Images of primary sources—Non-monetary token and transfer plate
- Worksheets for Stations and Timeline of Slavery and Abolition (in separate PDF)

This is a list of sources for the lesson. Choose 4-8 sources for your students to use during their analysis and discussion. Some have links to OSV’s website or the websites of other institutions.

Freedom Seeker Advertisements from Northern states in the late 1700s (choose 1 or multiple options for your class):
- Richard, Providence, RI, 1783: https://fotm.link/bWsCBufc9ka8WXoXtNuBRE
- Hannah Watson, Salisbury, CT, 1784: https://fotm.link/jxx3VdpVteRF514GkVFKYo
- Stephen, Cranston, RI, 1785: https://fotm.link/4D9jeB6nGz16N6QGbMYVn
- James Smith, New York, 1788: https://fotm.link/Zk1i1WZkyFXiBG2vn2aqo
- Joseph Smith, Stonington, CT, 1763: https://fotm.link/czyzmqyu1xnkkCSfHXkpzb
- Pomp, Woodbury, CT, 1779: https://fotm.link/enAHtGxqDMF3YVLNS7YiSL
- Multiple people, listed in the New England Chronicle, 1775: https://fotm.link/23n3hPwsJyvxM9Hj9zdDXT
- Robert Smith, Hartford, CT, n.d.: https://fotm.link/xDPwkgQiTEm4K47t2bLD2

Objects from OSV’s collections:
- Transfer printed plate, c. 1835: https://collections.osv.org/object-51-16-755
Key Terms and Vocabulary

- **Primary Source**: A first-hand account of a topic, from someone who experienced it.
- **Secondary source**: One step removed from a primary source, it covers the same topic but includes a layer of analysis or interpretation.
- **Archive**: A collection of historical documents or records providing information about a place, institution, or group of people.
- **Artifact**: An object made by a human being, typically an item of cultural or historical interest.
- **Historian**: A student of history, particularly someone who compiles and analyzes information about the past.
- **Slavery**: The state of a person held in forced servitude.
- **Abolition**: The act of ending a system, practice, or institution, in this unit, slavery.
- **Emancipation**: The fact or process of being set free from legal, social, or political restrictions; in this unit, slavery.

Consider using these terms during this unit:

- **Enslaved**: Rather than using the word “slave,” enslaved implies that slavery is a condition, i.e. a person is enslaved, not a slave.
- **Enslaver**: The terms “slave master” or “slave owner” empower the enslaver and dehumanize/commodify the enslaved. “Enslaver” shows that slavery was forced on someone.
- **Language in some primary source documents may include the terms “Colored,” “Mulatto,” and “Negro.” Today, we know that these terms carry weight historically and are considered hurtful and racist. When discussing these primary source documents, we can use alternative language that celebrates and remembers the lives of those mentioned in the documents in a respectful way. In addition, when making connections to the 21st century, remember to use terms that are appropriate today. Consider using “enslaved people” instead of “slaves” as a way to acknowledge the humanity of those who were enslaved. In addition, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and African American are inclusive terms that respectfully acknowledge the importance of race in American history.
- **For more information, view this video on the use of the word “enslaved” versus “slave”: https://youtu.be/-XMcyIce-MQ**

Procedure

1. Break students into six small groups.
2. Print out images of primary sources.
3. Cut out events for timeline activity.
4. Print out worksheets and instructions for learning stations.
5. Open YouTube video on device for class viewing (https://youtu.be/RvWKfJHV0ts)
Opening to Lesson (7 minutes)

During our visit to Old Sturbridge Village, we are going to be talking about slavery and abolition in the North. During our visit, we will examine many primary sources. These sources will help us learn more about the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

In preparation for our visit, we’re going to do a primary source activity here in the classroom. We are going to break up into small groups and rotate through six different learning stations. Some of these stations will ask you to look closely at objects. Others will have you discuss different ideas with your groupmates.

- Define expectations with the students. How long will they have at each station? How will they know to move on to the next one? How will they rotate through the stations?

OPTIONAL REVIEW: What is a Primary Source?

*If you have recently covered this topic with your class, feel free to skip it or do a quick reminder of what a primary source is.*

Define primary source and secondary source with the class.

- **Primary Source:** A first-hand account of a topic, from someone who experienced it.
- **Secondary source:** One step removed from a primary source, they cover the same topic but include a layer of analysis or interpretation.

Examples of primary sources include:

- Oral histories
- Artifacts
- Clothing
- Photographs
- Art works
- Newspapers
- Census
- Records
- Diaries and journals
- Advertisements
- Speeches
- Audio and video recordings
- Government publications
- Works of literature from that time period

Examples of secondary sources include:

- Textbooks
- Biographies
- Encyclopedias
- Journal articles that contain analysis
- Op-eds
- Articles written to critique art, music, books
Ask the class:

- Why do you think it is important to look at primary sources?
  - Primary sources provide a personal connection with history and help us understand the feel and spirit of a different time. They can also be a good way to learn more about people or groups of people not typically addressed in traditional textbooks.
- What could be some of the problems with primary sources?
  - We only have access to primary sources created by specific people. Some primary sources were deemed more useful or valuable than others. Also, as 21st-century people, we may not have all the context to truly understand a primary source and we have to rely on our own interpretation of the material.
- Before breaking into groups, watch this brief YouTube video on the importance of material culture to the study of history: https://youtu.be/RvWkJHV0ts

**Learning Stations (about 5-7 minutes per station)**

*Note: See Learning Stations PDF for printable copies of the Worksheets, as well as any primary sources students will need for this activity.*

**Station 1: Thinking about Objects in Your Life**

This station will ask students to think about a personal object that might tell outsiders something about their lives. Students will draw the object and answer a few questions about it.

Some of the artifacts we will look at today are about 200 years old, or older.

Museums and archives have been collecting objects and documents from the past for a long time. During this lesson, we will think about why museums collect some things but not others.

Primary sources can be very helpful to historians when learning about the past, but they can also miss out on some very important moments and perspectives. Today, we are going to be historians. We will look at artifacts from about 200 years ago to learn more about the lives of the people who lived during the time of American slavery.

Choose a personal item that has meaning to you. Draw a picture of it here:

- What is it? Where is it from? Was it a gift?
- What could students in 200 years learn about your life from the object that you have chosen?
- What would they NOT learn about you by examining this object?
Station 2: Defining Slavery and Freedom

Students will discuss the meaning of the words “slavery” and “freedom” as a group, writing ideas on post-its and placing on a large piece of paper.

In your group, discuss how to complete the following statements. Write your ideas on sticky notes and place on the large piece of paper under the heading “slavery” or “freedom.”

- What freedom means…
- What I know about slavery…

Conclusion questions: Why are some people enslaved? Why do some people have freedom?

Note: In addition to Black people from Africa enslaved via the Triangle Trade, consider also Indigenous People and Native Americans who were enslaved in colonial America. Reiterate that slavery was a social system that created a hierarchy based on skin color and the belief that Black people were not equal to white people.

Station 3: Looking at Primary Sources: Freedom Seeker Advertisements

Two of the learning stations will have students look closely at a primary source relating to the topic of slavery and abolition, and then answer questions on the primary source worksheet. For this station, students will look at a Freedom Seeker Advertisement. Choose one from the list of sources above for their analysis.

Take a look at your primary source. Answer the questions below based on what you see. It’s ok if you don’t know the answer to some of the questions. Sometimes historians don’t know the answers, but they try their best to observe and use what they know about history to figure things out.

1. What is your object?
2. What is it made out of?
3. Is there a date on your object? If so, what is it? If not, what are some clues about when it is from?
4. What do you notice first?
5. Where did it come from?
6. Who do you think created this item?
7. Why did they create this item?
8. Write 3 observations about your object. (For example, there are four people in this photograph.)

1.
2.

3.

9. How does this object make you feel? (for example, curious to learn more)
10. Do you have any questions about this object?

**Station 4: Looking at Primary Sources**

Two of the learning stations will have students look closely at a primary source relating to the topic of slavery and abolition, and then answer questions on the primary source worksheet. For this station, students will look at an object from Old Sturbridge Village’s collections, either the Non-monetary token or the transferware plate.

- Transfer printed plate, c. 1835: [https://collections.osv.org/object-51-16-755](https://collections.osv.org/object-51-16-755)

  - What do you KNOW about this object?
  - What would you LIKE TO KNOW about this object?

**Station 5: Timeline of Slavery and Abolition**

Working together as a group, place these events related to slavery and abolition in the U.S. on the timeline. As you place each date on the timeline, read the date and the text aloud.

*(Note: Timeline dates are located at the end of the worksheet PDF)*

*The last group at this station can glue the events to the timeline for future use in the classroom during this unit.*

**Station 6: Telling Stories about Objects**

For this station, students will tell a story about an object. Educators should choose 4-6 physical objects (toys, books, supplies, etc.) for students to talk about. The teacher may need to demonstrate this activity beforehand.

Historians and museum curators use objects to tell stories about history and help us know more about our past. Different people may have different interpretations of what an object was used for, where it came from, or its importance.

Each member of your group should choose one object off the table. Taking turns with your groupmates, tell a story about the object you’ve chosen. Include things you know about the object
(like its size, color, weight, material), and create a backstory about the object. For example, was this tape dispenser a gift to your teacher from a famous celebrity?

Make sure each person in the group gets the chance to tell their story.

**Conclusion (10 minutes)**

- Discuss the learning stations. Which one did they like the best, and why?
- What is one thing they learned?
- As we continue through this unit and look at more primary sources, remind the students that they should consider where the artifacts come from.
  - What types of artifacts were preserved?
  - Who did they belong to?
  - What types of artifacts are we missing?

- Before closing the class, review the Timeline of Slavery and Abolition with students. It shows some important dates relating to these topics. Throughout this unit, students will be asked to add various events to the timeline. Post it somewhere visible in the classroom.

- Explain that you will be visiting Old Sturbridge Village as a class soon, where you will be asked to examine more primary sources and express your opinions about the issue of slavery in the North.

- During the visit, we will be talking about the word “complicity” and the ways in which people in Northern states were complicit, or involved with others in wrongdoing. You will be asked to think about how people today are complicit in wrongs. Brainstorm potential ideas as a class.

**Background Readings for Educators (optional)**

- “Slavery, emancipation and Black freedom in Rhode Island, 1652-1842,” Christy Clark-Pujara (https://ir.uiowa.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4956&context=etd)
- “Slave Cloth” (http://library.providence.edu/encompass/rhode-island-and-the-industrial-revolution/primary-sources/slave-cloth/)