

Maureen Stevens

NEH Courting Liberty: Slavery and the Constitution Lesson Plan

Compelling Question: Did the slaves resist slavery? If so, how?

Standard: **USHC-2.4** Compare the social and cultural characteristics of the North, the South, and the West during the **antebellum** period, including the lives of African Americans and social reform movements such as **abolition** and women's rights

Bell ringer- Do you think the slaves tried to resist being enslaved? If so, by what means did they try to resist?

The teacher will have already pre-assigned groups of 3-4 students. After students have written a response to the bell ringer in their journals, the students will share their responses in their groups.

The students will examine Eastman Johnson's 1862 painting "A Ride for Liberty-The Fugitive Slaves"

<http://www.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/biogam.soc.ush.slcult/examining-slave-culture-and-resistance/>. Using the accompanying support materials, discuss with the class who Eastman Johnson was and why his paintings are important.

The teacher will discuss different types of rebellion that did exist. Using information gained from the summer institute, the teacher will introduce the Stono Rebellion, Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner and the various forms of informal resistance.

The teacher will then distribute excerpts from the WPA Slave Narratives focusing on Slaves Resistance on Southern Plantations –

<http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai/enslavement/text7/resistancewpa.pdf>

Students will read the excerpts. In their groups, they will create a list of the different ways slaves did in fact resist their enslavement. The class will reconvene and compile a list as a whole.

Next, the students will consider the case of Gabriel's Rebellion, 1800. Using the materials found at the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History site:

<http://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/slavery-and-anti-slavery/essays/material-culture-slave-resistance>

Students will consider the facts of the case. Solomon is the brother of a slave rebel, Gabriel. He has been arrested and several other slaves from his plantation have testified against him.

<http://www.lva.virginia.gov/exhibits/DeathLiberty/gabriel/evidence.htm>

Students will be able to glean a great deal about slave rebelliousness and strategies of survival from this case. As the students read and discuss the case in their groups, they should consider the following:

- Several slaves testified against Solomon, but in whose handwriting are the depositions?
- Under what condition are men like Daniel and Toby providing testimony?
- Would we today call them hostile witnesses?
- Even if they are telling the truth, can modern readers regard as legitimate the testimony provided by terrified enslaved men before a court of powerful, vengeful whites?
- How long does the trial last?
- What does such a short account indicate about the sort of justice meted out by southern courts to rebellious bondmen?
- What might enslaved people do on their day off?
- To what extent did Sunday morning religious services slip comfortably into recreational activities?
- How did potential rebels like Gabriel use these leisure moments to recruit followers?

Once students have successfully considered the questions, they will create a video or narrative explaining how slaves may have rebelled in many different way to resist slavery.

The students will then make a short presentation to the class.

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