

Abolishing Slavery in America: Teacher's Guide

Grade Level: 9-12

Curriculum Focus: U.S. History

Lesson Duration: Two to three class periods

Program Description

See how a cotton boom produced a dependence on slavery in the South. Travel alongside runaway slaves and meet the people who helped them escape. Uncover how Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel foreshadowed the coming Civil War conflict. And experience life aboard the *Amistad* during the slave revolt.

- Life on Southern Plantations (3 min.)
 - Riding the Underground Railroad (4 min.)
 - *Uncle Tom's Cabin: Politics and the Pen* (3 min.)
 - Revolt Aboard the *Amistad* (35 min.)
-

Onscreen Questions

- How was life difficult for enslaved African Americans?
 - How did workers on the Underground Railroad help slaves reach freedom?
 - Why was the book *Uncle Tom's Cabin* so shocking when it was first published?
 - What did Africans experience during voyages across the Middle Passage?
-

Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

- Learn what happened aboard the slave vessels *Zong* and *Amistad*.
- Consider what each incident reveals about views of slavery in Great Britain and the United States.
- Write an essay exploring each country's attitude toward slavery.

Materials

- *Abolishing Slavery in America* program
- Computer with Internet access
- Newsprint and markers

Procedures

1. Ask students what they know about slavery. Possible answers include:
 - Slavery was the practice of bringing people from Africa to the New World to work against their will and without payment for plantation owners.
 - Slavery is inhumane.
 - Slavery was the cause of the Civil War.
 - People in the northern part of the United States opposed slavery.
2. Explain that people began using slaves for cheap labor beginning in the 1600s, and that in the early days of the United States parts of the country relied on slavery. Because of this economic dependence, many were ambivalent about the use of slaves and didn't recognize the moral dilemma that slavery represented.
3. Show students the "Revolt Aboard the *Amistad*" segment in the *Abolishing Slavery in America* program to introduce them to two incidents aboard slave vessels that illuminate the worldwide ambivalence toward slavery in the late 1700s and early 1800s.
4. Divide the class into groups of two or three students, and have them discuss what these two incidents reveal about people's attitudes toward slavery at the time. Have the groups consider the following questions.
 - Did most people think slavery was wrong? Why or why not?
 - How did people in the United States view the African slaves?
 - What events helped changed people's views of slavery?
 - How did the events that took place on the *Zong* and the *Amistad* affect the status of slavery in Great Britain and the United States?
5. For additional information on the events described in the program, send students to these Web sites:
 - <http://www.hullwebs.co.uk/content/j-georgians/people/william-wilberforce/slaveship-zong.htm>
 - <http://www.mersey-gateway.org/server.php?show=ConNarrative.51&chapterId=262>
 - <http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/amistad/AMISTD.HTM>

6. Give students time in class for research and group discussions. Then have each student write an essay that includes the following information; students can begin their essays during class and then complete them as homework.
 - The events that took place on the *Zong*
 - Reactions to the *Zong* incident in Great Britain
 - The events that took place on the *Amistad*
 - Reactions to the *Amistad* incident in the United States
 - What the events and reactions to them reveal about attitudes toward slavery at the time in Great Britain and the United States
7. During the next class period, give students an opportunity to share their essays. Then discuss what students learned about human nature by looking at the ambivalence people felt about slavery. Ask: Can you think of recent events that reveal a similar ambivalence? In our country, what checks are in place to ensure that people do “the right thing” in situations involving moral dilemmas?

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- 3 points: Students were highly engaged in class and small-group discussions; researched their topic thoroughly; produced a thoughtful, in-depth essay.
- 2 points: Students participated in class and small-group discussions; conducted an adequate amount of research, produced a satisfactory essay.
- 1 point: Students participated minimally in class and small-group discussions; did not research their topic thoroughly; produced an incomplete essay.

Vocabulary

John Quincy Adams

Definition: President of the United States from 1825-1829; he also argued the case of the *Amistad* rebels before the Supreme Court, basing his defense on the principle that all men have the right to be free.

Context: John Quincy Adams was successful in his bid to free the *Amistad* rebels; they returned to Africa in January 1842.

Amistad

Definition: A Cuban slave schooner; during a mutiny in 1839, slaves took over the ship and tried to return to Africa.

Context: For two months, the *Amistad* wandered on the waters just off the eastern coast of the United States.



Cinque

Definition: Slave on the *Amistad* who took charge and spearheaded the mutiny

Context: Cinque used a nail to unlock his shackles and then found knives to fight the ship's crew.

Luke Collingwood

Definition: Captain of the British slaver *Zong* at the time of the 1781 incident

Context: Fearing most of his cargo would die before reaching Kingston, Collingwood decided to collect the insurance money on his captives. He gave the order to jettison 132 sick or weak Africans.

slavery

Definition: An institution that allows people to own other humans and use them for forced labor

Context: In the 19th century, the economy of the southern part of the United States became dependent on slavery, which was abolished after the Civil War.

Academic Standards**Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)**

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit <http://www.mcrel.org/>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- U.S. History: Era 2 – Understands how the values and institutions of European life took root in the colonies and how slavery reshaped European and African life in the Americas
- Language Arts: Viewing – Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)

NCSS has developed national guidelines for teaching social studies. To become a member of NCSS, or to view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org>

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Culture
 - Time, Continuity, and Change
-

Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the Discoveryschool.com Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>
-

DVD Content

This program is available in an interactive DVD format. The following information and activities are specific to the DVD version.

How to Use the DVD

The DVD starting screen has the following options:

Play Video – This plays the video from start to finish. There are no programmed stops, except by using a remote control. With a computer, depending on the particular software player, a pause button is included with the other video controls.

Video Index – Here the video is divided into four segments (see below), indicated by video thumbnail icons. Watching all parts in sequence is similar to watching the video from start to finish. Brief descriptions and total running times are noted for each part. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the remote for TV playback; on a computer, click once to highlight a thumbnail and read the accompanying text description and click again to start the video.

Curriculum Units – These are specially edited video segments pulled from different sections of the video (see below). These nonlinear segments align with key ideas in the unit of instruction. They include onscreen pre- and post-viewing questions, reproduced below in this Teacher's Guide. Total running times for these segments are noted. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the TV remote or click once on the Curriculum Unit title on a computer.

Standards Link – Selecting this option displays a single screen that lists the national academic standards the video addresses.

Teacher Resources – This screen gives the technical support number and Web site address.

Video Index

I. Life on Southern Plantations (3 min.)

Slavery was an important part of the South's economic infrastructure until the U.S. Civil War. Explore the harsh conditions under which African-American slaves lived until their emancipation.

II. Riding the Underground Railroad (4 min.)

Working for the Underground Railroad was dangerous and illegal, but many people risked their lives for others' freedom. Learn how this system helped people escape slavery.

III. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: Politics and the Pen (3 min.)

Examine *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a book written by Harriet Beecher Stowe that shocked the nation with its brutal depiction of slave life.

IV. Revolt Aboard the *Amistad* (35 min.)

Learn about the African slave trade and the historic victory over slavery aboard the *Amistad*. The enslaved Africans aboard this ship were the only such group to mutiny successfully against their captors.

Curriculum Units

1. Slavery in the South

Pre-viewing question

Q: What differences existed between the U.S. North and South in the 1800s?

A: Answers should include the economy – that the North was industrial and the South's agricultural economy depended on slavery.

Post-viewing question

Q: What aspect of slave life did you find the most difficult?

A: Answers will vary.

2. The Underground Railroad

Pre-viewing question

Q: Would you have risked your life to help people escape slavery?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Why was the Underground Railroad called a railroad?

A: This secret system by which whites and freed slaves helped slaves escape from the South was called a railroad because those involved used railroad terms as a code to hide their actions. Specific routes were called lines, stopping places were stations, those who helped along the way were called conductors, and those trying to escape were known as packages or freight.

3. The Immorality of Slavery

Pre-viewing question

Q: What books or movies have influenced your life or personal beliefs?

A: Answers will vary.



Post-viewing question

Q: How did *Uncle Tom's Cabin* affect Northerners and Southerners?

A: Answers will vary.

4. The Transatlantic Slave Trade

Pre-viewing question

Q: Who benefited from the transatlantic slave trade?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Describe the transatlantic slave trade.

A: The transatlantic slave trade was the largest forced migration in human history and a very lucrative business. Running from the 15th century through most of the 19th century, slave ships made roughly 39,000 voyages from Africa to the Americas. The millions of men, women, and children aboard these ships were instrumental in building commerce and wealth in the New World.

5. Mutiny!

Pre-viewing question

Q: How would you describe a mutiny?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: In what ways did the *Amistad* differ from most slave ships?

A: The *Amistad* was a small schooner working the north coast of Cuba and was not as well equipped, well armed, or as heavily armed as a slave ship would have been in the deep-sea trade. These factors helped the slave rebellion aboard the *Amistad* succeed.

6. Traveling the Middle Passage

Pre-viewing question

Q: What was the Middle Passage?

A: It was the route followed by the slave ships across the Atlantic Ocean. Most slave ships traveled from West Africa to Brazil or the West Indies.

Post-viewing question

Q: What did the names and conditions of the slave ships say about the slave merchants' views of slavery?

A: Answers will vary.

7. Trading People for Goods

Pre-viewing question

Q: How did slave traders view the material value of human life?

A: Answers will vary.



Post-viewing question

Q: What did merchants trade the Africans in exchange for slaves?

A: Traders exchanged many different kinds of goods for humans. African kings and slave owners wanted gunpowder, brandy, and other goods. Cowry shells, small seashells indigenous to the Indian Ocean near the Maldive Islands, were the currency of choice. A trader could pay as much as 40,000 shells for one slave.

8. Triangle of Profit*Pre-viewing question*

Q: Describe businesses and industries that depend on one another.

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Describe the triangular trade associated with the practice of slavery.

A: The lucrative slave trade created a great triangle of profit between Africa, the tropical Americas, and Europe. Goods and commodities were shipped from Europe to Africa to buy slaves. Slaves were shipped to the Americas to grow sugar and other crops. Those crops were then shipped to Europe, where they were manufactured for re-export to Africa and were then used to buy more slaves.

9. Captaining a Slave Ship*Pre-viewing question*

Q: Have you ever been in a position of great responsibility?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Why would somebody want to captain a slave ship?

A: Answers will vary.

10. Commandeering the *Amistad**Pre-viewing question*

Q: Have you ever taken control of something from someone else?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: How do you think the Africans felt when they realized they had traveled to the United State?

A: Answers will vary.

11. The *Amistad* in Court*Pre-viewing question*

Q: What would have happened to Don Pedro Montez if the *Amistad* had returned to Africa?

A: Answers will vary.



Post-viewing question

Q: Do you agree with Judge Judson's verdict in the *Amistad* case?

A: Answers will vary.

12. Appealing the *Amistad* Verdict

Pre-viewing question

Q: Have you ever fought for a cause you believed in?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: How do you think the Africans felt upon returning to Africa?

A: Answers will vary.

