

## The Slavery Experience (17<sup>th</sup> Century-Civil War)

### NCSS Thematic Strand: Time, Continuity, Change

Grade Level: 7-12

Class Periods Required: Two 50 minutes periods

### Purpose, Background, and Context

The purpose of this lesson is to introduce students the experience of slaves in 19<sup>th</sup> century America. Students first interpret a map that shows the slave trade in the larger market trade taking place in the Atlantic. In this context students learn about slaves' capture in Africa and the long, forced march to the northwest coast. Next the students learn about the horrific Middle Passage. Finally, the teacher exposes students the slaves' experiences working on farms and plantations. Here student read firsthand accounts, which document the harshness of slave life. The documentary accounts offer contrasting accounts of plantation life: one from a slave owner and one from a slave. The first letter unveils the harshness of slave existence, whereas the latter unveils how white slaveholders sought to portray slavery in a glorified light.

### Objectives & Student Outcomes

Students will:

- ❖ Research and analyze past periods, events, and recurring issues using a variety of primary sources, as well as secondary sources. (NCSS Standards, p. 131.);
- ❖ Identify and use a variety of primary and secondary sources for reconstructing the past, such as documents, letters, diaries, maps, textbooks, photos, and other sources. (NCSS Standards, p. 98.);
- ❖ Understand the harshness of slave life in the 18<sup>th</sup> (as well as 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>) century.

- ❖ Understand that slaves were thought of as chattel property and not people; because they were dehumanized and thought of as an inferior race.

## Materials

Excerpts from *The Life of Olaudah Equiano*

Excerpt from Solomon Northrup

Excerpt from *Cannibals All or Slaves Without Masters* by George Fitzhugh

Map of the Atlantic Market Economy

Architectural drawing of a slave ship

Slave journey image

Sambo image

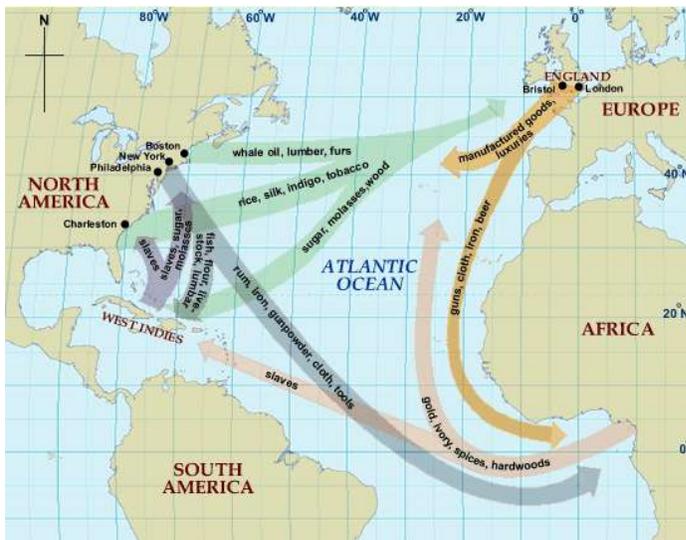
Mammy image

## Procedures:

### Day One

#### Procedure 1:

Give a brief explanation of the Atlantic Market Economy while this map is put up:



Encourage the students to interpret the map and try to explain its significance in a discussion of this colonial system. Check for understanding by having students explain the map and the trade routes between Africa, Europe, and the America. Monitor to see that they understand that this important market, yielding vast profits, depended on slave labor to produce raw materials which would be shipped to England to be

manufactured. Food crops were also sent to Europe while technology (guns, iron products) were sent to Africa's coast to be exchanged for slaves. By calling on students be sure they understand that European countries built their empires based on trade and economic gains built upon the enslavement of Africans.

To promote discussion about the Atlantic market economy, ask the following questions to the whole class:

- ❖ To start it off ask: What are some things you notice when looking at this map?
- ❖ Where were all the goods coming and going from in the colonies?
- ❖ Where were the slaves being shipped to? Why do you think they are only going to the West Indies and Charleston?
- ❖ What colonies other than America were receiving slaves and shipping goods?
- ❖ What types of goods are being shipped to England? Which do you think were being grown in the highest amounts? (Rice, tobacco, sugar in West Indies, and to a lesser extent indigo in the Southern colonies)
- ❖ What do you think is the overall significance of this map? Or in other words, what do you think were the outcomes of this trade system?

## Procedure 2

The major source of captives who would become slaves was wars between African tribes. They would sell captives to the Europeans. The Europeans did not usually go around capturing Africans, instead staying on the coast waiting for captives to be brought to them.

Transition to the next procedure by saying:

- ❖ "Ok let's move on and talk about how the slaves got from Africa to the Americas"

Keep the map up and zoom in on Africa specifically. Explain that around half of all slaves came from the interior, meaning they would have to march hundreds of miles to the coast. This journey was very difficult because they were given little food and were in chains for the march. Once they reached the coast they would be put on a slave ship to await their departure. Point out the slave coast and show the possible destinations for slaves.

Put on the projector an illustration of this journey to the coast. Have students interpret it by asking them about details in the image such as the lack of shoes, the fact

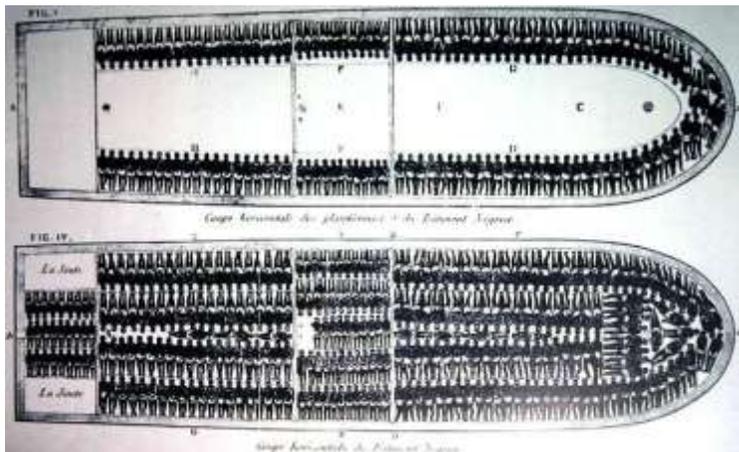
that they were all chained together and a man was punished.



Transition by saying that they marched hundreds of miles it was not even the worst part of the journey to the colonies.

### Procedure 3

Hand out excerpts from *The Life of Olaudah Equiano* and put the architectural drawing of a slave ship on the projector:



Explain that Equiano was a slave who wrote an autobiography. Give the students 5-10 minutes to read the excerpts.

After the students are finished reading, ask them a series of questions for large group discussion:

- ❖ How long do you think this voyage was?
  - After students guess, tell them it was on average 2-3 months.
- ❖ Why do you think they whipped Equiano he didn't want to eat?
  - They wanted the slaves to live to sell them for money.

- ❖ How did Equiano's writings compare to this drawing of a slave ship?
- ❖ There were often nets on the outside of these ships. Why do you think the Europeans put up nets?
- ❖ Any other thoughts on Equiano?

Mention that one-fifth of Africans who departed died on the Middle Passage.

Set up the next day's lesson by reading the following quote:

"Once the slave ships docked the slaves were brought to a market, displayed in the nude, and sold. They would then march (potentially) hundreds of miles, usually to a plantation where they would be laborers."

## *Day 2*

### **Procedure 1**

Yesterday we discussed the slave system and how slaves arrived in the colonies. Do a recap of the lesson to check for student understanding.

### **Procedure 2**

Hand out excerpts from Solomon Northrup and George Fitzhugh.

Give students 5- 10 minutes to carefully read both accounts of plantation life.

### **Procedure 3**

Have a large class discussion to compare the two accounts of plantation life.

Ask the following questions to get discussion going:

- ❖ What is plantation life like according to Solomon Northrup? George Fitzhugh?
- ❖ What differences do you notice between the two accounts?
- ❖ How does George Fitzhugh's account compare to the images of Mammy and Sambo we looked at earlier?
- ❖ Who do you think Solomon Northrup was? What do you think he was trying to accomplish by writing this? (Former slave)
- ❖ Who do you think George Fitzhugh was? Why might he want to portray slave life this way? (Plantation owner)

The students should have interpreted the accounts and determined that Northrup's was much more accurate in describing plantation life.

### **Procedure 4**

Give out a short writing assignment for homework.

Short Essay Question: *What was the experience of slavery like for an African taken to the colonies?* Use evidence from materials we looked at the last two days such as Equiano and Northrup's narratives as well as the images we saw to argue your point. Use specific examples.

### Assessment

The essay should demonstrate if the students analyzed and understood the primary sources.

### Extensions and Adaptations

This lesson can lead into a lesson comparing the different slave systems of the West Indies sugar plantations, southern plantations, eastern tobacco plantations, and northern housekeeping slaves. (slave societies vs. societies with slaves).

### Resources

Equiano, Olaudah "The Life of Olaudah Equiano," *The Classic Slave Narratives*. New York: Signet Classics, 2002.

Solomon Northrup Account: <http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/historyonline/us16.cfm>

George Fitzhugh Account: <http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/historyonline/us16.cfm>

Map of the Atlantic Market Economy:

<http://www.petervronsky.org/HST501/HST501/pixcivilwar/2-bai.gif>

Architectural drawing of a slave ship:

<http://0.tqn.com/d/africanhistory/1/0/p/l/SlaveShipBrookes.jpg>

Slave journey image: <http://3.bp.blogspot.com/->

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