

# Teacher to Teacher

## Slavery in America

### A Thematic Unit Appropriate for Adult Literacy Classrooms

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The following thematic unit was designed for adult literacy students with at least a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading level. Objectives are tied closely to skills needed for the G.E.D. and include computer and workplace skills. Best Practice teaching strategies are utilized to engage learners in authentic learning as well as build motivation and interest. Although the lessons are based on African American history, the strategies learned can foster discussions involving present-day issues. Equipped for the Future (EFF) roles and skills were also integrated into the plans.

The OLRC Reading Group reviewed all trade books used in this unit. Summaries of the books are available on the OLRC website at <http://literacy.kent.edu/Oasis/Resc/Trade/index.html>



#### Lesson 1 - Introduction to Slavery Unit

##### Description:

After reading From Slave Ship to Freedom Road by J. Lester and R. Brown, learners will communicate in small groups regarding issues surrounding the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.

##### Learning Objectives:

- Learners will engage in a discussion web strategy using a graphic organizer.
- Learners will adopt two different points of view regarding the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 to enhance comprehension.

##### EFF Skills and Topics:

###### General Skills:

Read with understanding  
Cooperate with others  
Resolve conflict and negotiate  
Convey ideas in writing  
Speak so others can understand  
Listen actively  
Reflect and evaluate

###### Topics:

Community member role  
Reading  
Social studies  
Life skills

##### Learning Activity:

1. Intro. - Teacher or students will read From Slave Ship to Freedom Road.
2. Modeling—
  - Teacher will introduce and model the Discussion Web

activity (see Appendix A) with the whole class using pgs. 28-29 from the text and posing the question “Should the slave owner sell Delilah in order to keep the plantation running?”

- Students will offer answers and justifications to yes/no responses. (e.g. “No, because it’s important to keep a family together.” Or “Yes, because the plantation has to make money so that other slaves will have enough to eat.”)
  - The class will take a vote on the conclusion after several yes and no justifications are listed.
3. Collaborative Learning – Pairs of learners will work through a discussion web on the question, “Due to the passing of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, it is now illegal to assist slaves escaping to freedom. You are a white Christian working on the Underground Railroad network. Should you continue to help slaves escape to freedom now that you are risking your own freedom?”
  4. Each pair will orally share their conclusions with the rest of the class.
  5. Lesson extension – Journal writing – Using pages 36-37 of the text and what we’ve discussed about slavery, look at the faces of the slaves now that they have been given freedom. Why do some of them look apprehensive and afraid? Or use a Discussion Web to reason through both sides of a conflict in your life. This strategy can be excellent for weighing “pros” and “cons” in decision making.

## Lesson 2

### Description:

- After reading From Slave Ship to Freedom Road by J. Lester and R. Brown, learners will create a Series-of-Events-Chain on chart paper.

### Learning Objectives:

- Learners will create a Series-of-Events-Chain (including a time-line component), sequencing the events in the book from the beginning of slavery in America through Emancipation
- Learners will continue to fill in events (with dates) discovered in other books during the rest of this unit of study.

### EFF Skills and Topics:

#### General Skills:

Read with understanding  
Plan  
Cooperate with others  
Take responsibility for learning  
Convey ideas in writing  
Speak so others can understand  
Listen actively  
Observe critically  
Use math in problem solving and communication  
Solve problems and make decisions  
Reflect and evaluate

#### Topics:

Worker role  
Language arts  
Writing  
Reading  
Social studies  
Mathematics  
Life skills  
Employability skills

### Learning Activity:

1. Discuss the title of the book (from... to...). What does that imply? Discuss sequence of events – helps with comprehension, writing, and planning.
2. Invite students to talk with a partner to share examples of how sequencing impacts daily life and/or the GED. (ex. applying for a job – 1<sup>st</sup> find out about the job, send cover letter and resume, follow up with a phone call, go to interview, send thank-you note. Or practice sequence with following a recipe)
3. Collaborative Learning- have students work in pairs to create a series-of-events-chain on chart paper, referencing the book as needed.
4. Whole class – compare and contrast different groups' charts.
5. Lesson extension- Journal assignment: Encourage learners to create a series-of-events-chain in their journals about something that happened in their life (pregnancy), a plan of action or goal they'd like to organize (get GED, go to nurse's aid training, work at a hospital), or an example from another content area (science – life cycle of butterfly).

## Lesson 3

### Description:

After reading segments of Letters from a Slave Girl: The Story of Harriet Jacobs by M. Lyons, learners will "become" a character from the book and write a journal entry *as if* they are that character.

### Learning Objectives:

- Learners will increase comprehension and thinking skills via writing a historical character journal entry.
- Learners will develop a class rubric to determine the qualities of good writing so they can evaluate each others' articles with a "3 on a wall" activity.

### EFF Skills and Topics:

#### General Skills:

Use information and communication technology  
Read with understanding  
Advocate and influence  
Guide others  
Take responsibility for learning  
Convey ideas in writing  
Observe critically  
Reflect and evaluate

#### Topics:

Worker role  
Language arts  
Writing  
Reading  
Social studies  
Life skills

### Learning Activity:

1. Discuss if anyone keeps a personal journal (connect to importance of literacy skills).
2. Discuss "unsent letters" and compare that to the "letters" Harriet writes in her journal. Also discuss "writing to a specific audience" – Harriet writes to her mom, dad, etc.
3. Encourage learners to choose a character from the book and "collect" information from the text that will answer the following questions: How old is your character? Married? Have kids? Where / with whom does your character live? Work? Do for fun? Is your character religious? How does your character feel about slavery? How much education does your character have?
4. Using the "evidence" from the text, pretend you are your character and write a journal entry or unsent letter from the character's perspective.
5. To develop the writing evaluation rubric - Elicit ideas from the class about what makes good writing. Keep track of the ideas on an overhead. Also share GED essay evaluation criteria (write clearly, make a main point, support your ideas). As a class, agree on and develop a rubric to evaluate writing (for self-evaluation or peer evaluation).
6. When students are finished with their journal article, make 3 copies of each for "3 on a wall" peer writing evaluations. Hang all the copies up on the wall and ask learners to circulate and choose three pieces of writing to evaluate (they cannot choose their own). Have learners use the class-developed rubric to provide feedback on the articles. After the writing is evaluated, feedback is given to the original author. Give learners an opportunity to revise their work after receiving feedback.

## Lesson 4

### Description:

While reading segments of Letters from a Slave Girl: The Story of Harriet Jacobs by M. Lyons, learners will record (self-select) difficult vocabulary words. The words will be compiled into a class list and learners will individually fill out a knowledge rating form about the words. Learners will then work in small groups using context clues and an online

dictionary (if needed) to determine meanings of unknown words; sharing their results with the rest of the class.

### Learning Objectives:

- Students will individually analyze what they know (or don't know) about difficult words.
- Students will work in small groups to practice using context clues.
- Students will utilize an on-line dictionary when context clues don't provide enough information. [Http://www.wordcentral.com/cgi-bin/Kids](http://www.wordcentral.com/cgi-bin/Kids)

### EFF Skills and Topics:

#### General Skills:

Use information and  
Communication technology  
Read with understanding  
Cooperate with others  
Take responsibility for learning  
Reflect and evaluate

#### Topics:

Language arts  
Reading  
Internet use

### Learning Activity:

1. Teacher will compile list of self-selected difficult vocabulary words from the reading.
2. Teacher will model use of context clues with a few words by going back to the text.
3. Learners will individually fill out a Knowledge Rating chart (see Appendix B) for the remaining words with the following categories: "can define"/ "have seen or heard before"/ "no clue".
4. Learners will get into small groups and try to determine meanings of unknown words with context clues. They will record related words or phrases directly from the text that give clues to the meaning.
5. If a group cannot determine meaning via context clues, they can go to the on-line dictionary for further elaboration.
6. At the end of the lesson, learners will share their findings/compare answers with the rest of the class.

## Lesson 5

### Description:

Learners will compare and contrast Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth with a Venn Diagram graphic organizer using the books: A Picture Book of Frederick Douglass and A Picture Book of Sojourner Truth by D. Adler.

### Learning Objectives:

- Learners will be able to compare and contrast qualities of characters to enhance reading comprehension.
- Learners will learn to use a Venn Diagram (see Appendix C) to organize information.

### EFF Skills and Topics:

#### General Skills:

Use information and  
Communication technology  
Read with understanding  
Plan  
Cooperate with others

#### Topics:

Community member role  
Language arts  
Writing  
Reading

Convey ideas in writing

Listen actively

Reflect and evaluate

Social studies

Life skills

### Learning Activity:

1. Teacher will read one of the books to the whole class to increase interest and motivation. Encourage learners to take notes on important details/events relating to the main character.
2. Learners will read the second book in pairs (taking notes).
3. Teacher will model how to use a Venn Diagram with some of the details on chart paper or an overhead projector.
4. In pairs– learners will add their information to their own copies of a Venn Diagram.
5. As a whole class– teacher will lead a discussion summarizing information found in the groups– filling in a "class summary" version of the Venn Diagram on the chart paper or overhead.
6. Individually– learners will use the information gathered on the Venn Diagram to create compare/ contrast paragraphs on a word processor.

## Lesson 6

### Description:

This lesson will be used as the culminating project for the slavery unit of study. It will include reading selections from Virginia Hamilton's Many Thousand Gone: African Americans from Slavery to Freedom; using a K-W-L chart to organize research questions and prior knowledge; researching with books, CD-ROMs and the Internet; creating a Microsoft Word document with clipart, wordart, and a written summary; and making an oral presentation.

### Learning Objectives:

- Students will use K-W-L (see Appendix D) to organize content information.
- Students will use the Internet, books, and CD-ROMs to gather information relating to their chosen topic.
- Students will create a Microsoft Word document using:
  - at least one picture (clip art or a picture cut and pasted from Internet)
  - written summary of information found
  - at least one example of WordArt from Microsoft Word
- Students will create a list of at least 5 references used.
- Students will orally present their project to the class.

### EFF Skills and Topics:

#### General Skills:

Use information and  
communication technology  
Read with understanding  
Plan  
Take responsibility for learning  
Convey ideas in writing  
Speak so others can understand  
Learn through research  
Reflect and evaluate

#### Topics:

Worker role  
Language arts  
Writing  
Reading  
Social studies  
Life skills  
Employability skills

**Learning Activity:**

1. Learners will use a project planning sheet (K-W-L, see Appendix D) after they have selected the character or event they want to research (from Many Thousand Gone or other previously read texts). This will help to identify questions they need to answer via their research.
2. Learners can utilize books previously used in the unit (or others), a CD ROM encyclopedia, and various Internet sites:
  - <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/tguide/4tgfocus.html> (Africans in America)
  - <http://www.itsnet.com/home/getlost/explore.html> (slave narratives)
  - <http://www.nps.gov/undergroundrr/contents.htm> (underground railroad)
  - <http://www.afroam.org/history/slavery/main.html> (black resistance)
  - <http://160.79.207.23/blackhistory/fnsotru.html> (profiles of famous 18<sup>th</sup> century African Americans)
  - <http://www.historychannel.com> (search history channel info.)
3. Learners can use meta-search engines to locate other sources:
  - <http://www.metacrawler.com>
  - <http://www.askjeeves.com>
4. Learners will compile information and write a summary on the word processor. They will use at least one picture graphic and one piece of WordArt in their document.
5. Learners will present their project to the whole class. Teacher can provide a guideline for the oral presentation: Who/what was your topic, why did you pick that topic, where did you find info., talk about 3 of your most interesting findings.

The lessons in this unit can work well individually or as a complete thematic unit. The level of difficulty can easily be adapted based on the abilities of the learners in your classroom. This unit utilized only a handful of the quality tradebooks available on slavery or the Civil War. The OLRC Reading Group has reviewed many other tradebooks that would be excellent additions to this unit. See Appendix E for a matrix listing recommended books on these topics.

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Appendix A

**Discussion Web**  
**The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850**

**Yes**

**No**

Due to the passing of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, it is now illegal to assist slaves escaping to freedom. You are a white Christian working in the Underground Railroad network. Should you continue to help slaves escape to freedom now that you are risking your own freedom?



**Conclusion:**

