



The Blacksmith in Society

Lesson Plan # 4 - The Price of Freedom

Teacher's Background

Slaves were property, and as such had value. However, slaves who were also skilled craftsmen were difficult to replace and commanded the highest prices. Slave owners often maximized their investment by apprenticing young slaves to craftsmen, including blacksmiths, to learn a trade. The slave apprentices often spent years learning a skill and living in relative freedom. Once returned to the master, these slaves were more likely than most to: negotiate with the master so that he could work freely for an annual fee, work overtime to purchase his freedom and/or the freedom of his family, or escape. This lesson shows that it was extremely difficult for slaves to purchase freedom, making escape an attractive alternative.

Goal

After reading and analyzing the suggested materials, students will understand that the technical training given certain slaves increased their value both as a worker and a commodity, and decreased the likelihood of manumission by their owners.

Objectives

- To show students how slaves were utilized and marketed to meet the economic needs of the slave owner.
- To acquaint students with strategies slaves utilized to gain freedom, i.e., purchase of their time, purchase of family members or self, escape or manumission.
- To demonstrate the earning potential of a typical 19th century blacksmith.
- To introduce documentation, written by slaves, describing the working conditions and life- styles of slaves.

This activity addresses the following Maryland Learning Outcomes

For Grades 4-5

#1 Social Studies Skills

Students will demonstrate an understanding of historical and current events using chronological and spatial thinking, develop historical interpretations, and frame questions that include collecting and evaluating information from primary and secondary sources.

- Apply and organize information specific to social studies disciplines by reading, asking questions, and observing. (MLO 1.2)
- Interpret and organize primary and secondary sources of information including pictures, graphics, maps, atlases, artifacts, timelines, political cartoons, videotapes, journals, and government documents. (MLO 1.3)
- Identify and analyze the causes and effects of historic events. (MLO 1.4)
- Make decisions and analyze decisions of individuals, groups, and institutions. (MLO 1.5)
- Analyze the impact of social institutions and the media on the behavior of individuals and groups. (MLO 1.8)

#4 Economics

Students will develop economic reasoning to understand the historical development and current status of economic principles, institutions, and processes needed to be effective citizens, consumers, and workers participating in local communities, the nation, and the world.

- Explain how limited resources and unlimited economic wants cause people to choose certain goods and services and give up others. (MLO 4.1)

#5 Political Systems

Students will understand the historical development and current status of the fundamental concepts and processes of authority, power, and influence, with particular emphasis on the founding documents of the United States and the democratic skills and attitudes necessary to become responsible citizens.

- Give examples of how the rule of law has impacted the rights and responsibilities of people. (MLO 5.1)

For Grades 6-8

#1 Social Studies Skills

Students will demonstrate an understanding of historical and current events using chronological and spatial thinking, develop historical interpretations, and frame questions that include collecting and evaluating information from primary and secondary sources.

- Evaluate and organize information specific to social studies disciplines by reading, asking questions, investigating, or observing. (MLO 1.2)
- Interpret, evaluate, and organize primary and secondary sources of information including pictures, graphics, maps, atlases, artifacts, timelines, political cartoons, videotapes, journals, and government documents. (MLO 1.3)
- Make decisions and analyze decisions of individuals, groups, and institutions in other times and places and evaluate the consequences. (MLO 1.5)
- Analyze issues by stating and summarizing the issue, evaluating different viewpoints, and drawing conclusions based on data. (MLO 1.7)
- Evaluate the impact of social institutions and the print media on the behavior of individuals and groups. (MLO 1.9)

#2 History

Students will examine significant ideas, beliefs, and themes; organize patterns and events; and analyze how individuals and societies have changed over time in Maryland, the United States, and the world.

- Describe pro-slavery and anti-slavery positions and explain how debates over slavery influenced politics and sectionalism. (MLO 2.1)

Suggested Background Reading

"From Slave to Abolitionist: James W.C. Pennington of Washington County, Maryland" by Dean Herrin (provided)

[Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. Written by Herself : Electronic Edition](http://docsouth.unc.edu/jacobs/jacobs.html), found at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/jacobs/jacobs.html>

Suggested Activity

1. After dividing the background readings into appropriate sections, assign a portion of each reading to individual students or groups. Have each individual or group list the training, rights or freedoms mentioned or implied in their reading and state whether the training was given or denied to the slave.
2. By using information from the readings or from other research sources, have students determine an appropriate purchase price for a slave blacksmith in the 20- 30 year old age range. (Slave records including sale prices can be found at <http://ftp.rootsweb.com/pub/usgenweb/la/afriamer/court/ebr1.txt>)
3. Using the Blacksmith Ledger provided, have students calculate the average daily income of a typical 19th century blacksmith. Then determine how many days a slave blacksmith would have to work to earn his purchase price. Since the slave would have to earn this money working beyond the time required by his master, have students multiply the number of days by 12, the average number of hours worked in a day, to determine how many hours a slave would work to earn his purchase price. Lead students in a discussion speculating a realistic time frame for working the extra hours, considering time available for this work, i.e., days off and time beyond the regular work day.
4. After students speculate on the length of time required to earn the money for a blacksmith slave to purchase his freedom, lead them into a deeper discussion by interjecting the following questions:
 - Is it likely that the slave owner would grant a slave his freedom for the same price that he would be sold to another buyer?
 - Would the slave find it beneficial to "buy" the rights to act as a freeman on an annual basis, while remaining the property of his owner?
 - What is the likelihood that a blacksmith slave would have used his earnings to purchase his family's freedom rather than his own?
 - Would the slave owner been more or less likely to permit slaves to purchase their freedom before or after the Nat Turner Rebellion?
 - Would a slave owner have been likely to allow slaves to purchase their freedom after the start of the Civil War or after the Emancipation and Proclamation? (The Emancipation and Proclamation gave freedom to slaves in seceding states only, slavery was not abolished in Maryland until 1864.)
5. Select a group of students who will role- play the family of a slave blacksmith discussing their options for freedom and the possible consequences or outcomes of working for the purchase of individual family members versus escaping.
6. Have students write a letter from the slave owner to the slave explaining the slave's value to the owner and why he /she would or would not allow the slave to purchase his freedom.

Follow-up Activity

1. Encourage students to visit, or lead a field trip to a National Park Service site, i.e. Gettysburg NMP, Harpers Ferry NHP or Antietam NB to learn more about the slave experience and slave/master relationships. Log on to the National Park Service website at www.nps.gov as a starting point for virtual visits to additional National Park Service units that interpret the issues of slavery.

2. Have students read the complete versions of the suggested readings. Upon completion have them write an argumentative essay discussing the benefits or burdens that technical training reaped upon 18th century slaves.
3. J.C. Pennington's escape to freedom could have failed when he traveled east toward Baltimore instead of north to Pennsylvania. A map of Washington, County, Maryland taken from the 1895 U.S. Atlas is provided. (This map was found at www.livgenmi.com/washingtonMD.htm). Using this map, along with information from current maps that give names to land features, have students plot a more direct escape route for J. C. Pennington. Students will defend their route in a short paragraph accompanying the map. A successful route would stay away from population centers, and follow well- defined land forms. Students who apply what they already know will realize that J.C. Pennington should have known at least one route to Hagerstown and that slaves were allowed to travel away from the plantation on Sundays .