

# Slavery in the North

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## DOCUMENTS:

1. *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, A Native of Africa, But Resident Above Sixty Years in the United States of America.* Middletown, CT. I. S. Stewart, Printer and Bookbinder, 1897. (The account is also in *From African to Yankee, Narratives of Slavery and Freedom in Antebellum New England* edited by Robert J. Cottrol, published by M.E.Sharpe Inc.1998. Excerpts can be found on numerous websites.)
2. "Slavery in 18th-Century New England"  
(from: [www.stanleywhitman.org/slaverynewengland.html](http://www.stanleywhitman.org/slaverynewengland.html))

## FOCUS OF SUBJECT AREA:

- Existence of slavery in New England in the Colonial time period
- Conditions of slavery in New England

## INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

- Identify elements of slavery
- Apply definition of slavery to *A Narrative of ... Venture*
- Extract information from a primary source document
- Learn elements of the African-American experience in 18th-century Connecticut
- Learn general information regarding slavery in New England

## STRATEGIES:

Students will accomplish the instructional objectives by:

- Reading a primary source document
- Completing a chart to apply the definition of slavery to Venture Smith's account
- Participating in small group and class discussions

## OVERVIEW OF LESSON ACTIVITIES:

This lesson requires two 45-minute periods. It is intended as an introduction to a unit on the extent of slavery in New England, but it can also be

used as a stand-alone lesson. Before beginning the lesson, teachers may want to preselect sections of *A Narrative of ... Venture*.

## **ASSESSMENT:**

Students will complete one or two daily homework assignments in addition to selecting one of the following assessments:

### 1. Short Essay

In 1-2 pages, explain your understanding of slavery in New England. Be specific about what you learned from the lesson and give at least two specific examples of knowledge gained from the Venture Smith text.

### 2. Illustration

On an 8 1/2 x 11 sheet of paper, illustrate your knowledge of slavery in New England. You may draw specific objects and/or use abstract images to show your understanding of the subject. Clip art is not allowed. Feel free to use color to express mood and feelings. On the back of your illustration, include 2-3 specific paragraphs explaining your images and how they relate to the topic.

### 3. Soundtrack

Choose a song (it must be school appropriate!) that demonstrates the nature of slavery in New England. Print the lyrics and on the back, write 2-3 specific paragraphs explaining why you chose this song. Be sure to explain how the song helps demonstrate the presence and nature of slavery in New England and/or the feelings of slaves or owners. You may want to discuss the mood and atmosphere of the music, as well as the lyrics.

## **DAY ONE**

### **QUESTIONS ADDRESSED:**

- How do we define slavery?  
(It is important to create a student-generated definition of the term. Students will need to agree on elements that comprise slavery. The class should agree on a list of 5-8 components of slavery. Common answers may include loss of power, complete control by the master, violence, mistreatment. Students will need this list to complete the day's activity.)
- Did slavery exist in New England in the Colonial period?  
(Slavery, contrary to popular belief, was prevalent throughout New England society up until the 1840s. This topic is often under- or

misrepresented. By reading an account written by a Connecticut-based slave, students will examine a primary source for the answer to this question.)

### **MATERIALS:**

- Copies of *A Narrative of ... Venture*

### **PROCEDURE:**

- Begin with a few general questions, i.e., What do the students know about slavery in the US? When did it occur? Where did it occur? Write a few of the answers to these questions on the board.
- In small groups, have students come up with a definition for slavery.
- Have all groups report on their definition. As a class, make a consensus list of the elements or components of slavery and put this list on the board.
- Have students create a T-chart, titled Slavery in New England. On the left-hand side, list the elements the class agreed on, leaving plenty of space between each element.
- Explain that the class will read *A Narrative of ... Venture*, the autobiography of a Connecticut slave, published in 1798. The students are to read the work, looking for evidence of the existence of slavery as they have defined it. When they find an event that corresponds to one of the listed elements of slavery, they should quote the *Narrative*, writing the page number and the corresponding line(s) on the right hand side of their T-chart.
- Model the assignment by reading a short passage together, deciding which element the account refers to, and writing it down on the chart. (NOTE: Teachers who pre-select passages may need to give background on Venure Smith's early life in Africa and his transport to the US.)
- Have students begin reading and compiling evidence on their own. They should finish the chart for homework.
- Explain the assessment required at the end of the lesson.

### **DAY TWO**

### **QUESTIONS ADDRESSED:**

- Did slavery exist in New England in the colonial period? (Students will use the *Narrative* as evidence of the existence of slavery in this time period.)

- What was the African-American experience in colonial New England? (While it is important to explain that no one account can explain the experience of a people, Venture Smith's story is indicative of the pervasiveness of slavery and the problems faced by African-Americans in New England. You may want to ask students if there is evidence in the account that slavery was common in the time period. You may also want to explore the question of why slavery in the North was generally overlooked or looked upon as benign. The discussion of Venture Smith's treatment may take your class on a new path for student exploration.)
- How can primary source documents help us better understand history? (Primary source documents record the feelings and emotions of those involved and help students to better understand the people of a time period. Students often find primary sources more interesting and involving than secondary sources.)

### **MATERIALS:**

- Copies of pages 1-3 of the article, "Slavery in 18th-Century New England" (You may or may not use this article today for additional background material on the subject.)
- Questions for the article

### **PROCEDURE:**

- Have students name elements of slavery they found present in the *Narrative*. List the elements on the board.
- Review each element by asking students to contribute specific examples. You may want to use one or more recorders to write the examples on the board.
- Conduct a class discussion on the existence and nature of slavery in New England.
- Return to the original questions asked to the class: Where and when did slavery occur in the US? Discuss how the current answers differ from those given before the students read Venture Smith's story.
- Have students finish their assessment of slavery in New England for homework.
- NOTE: As it is difficult to predict how productive a class discussion will be, you may want an extension activity. If you have time, you can hand out the article on slavery in New England and ask students to answer the following questions.

### Understanding Slavery in Colonial New England

Use the article "Slavery in 18th-Century New England" to answer the following questions:

1. In what three ways did the Puritans justify slavery? Explain each way.
2. When did the slave trade in New England begin?
3. Describe the slave trade--how did it work, where did the ships go, and what cargo was carried?
4. Why did Connecticut, in particular, have so many slaves?
5. What types of labor did slaves do?
6. How were slaves treated?
7. Why do you think so little information is generally written about slavery in New England?

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