

The hidden truth of slavery in Connecticut

DOCUMENTS: A variety of primary source documents (census records, court records, church records, bills of sale, petitions, personal narratives and illustrations) and secondary sources regarding slavery in Connecticut

FOCUS OF SUBJECT AREA

- The statistics, legislation, and conditions of slavery in CT
- The impact of slavery in CT on the daily lives of its people
- The opposing viewpoints regarding slavery in CT
- The complicity and concealment of slavery in CT

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

- Identify the conditions of slavery in CT based on statistical and legislative data
- Compare, contrast, and analyze differing viewpoints regarding slavery in CT based on both primary and secondary source documents
- Interpret broader meanings from statistical data and personal narratives by placing various sources in their proper context
- Formulate a personal response to the complicity and concealment of slavery in CT

STRATEGIES

Students will accomplish the instructional objectives by:

- Analyzing primary and secondary source documents while completing assigned worksheets
- Participating in a group activity and class discussions
- Creating a role-play situation
- Composing a creative response

OVERVIEW OF LESSON ACTIVITIES

The lesson on the hidden truth of slavery in CT requires three 47-minute class periods. Prior to Day One, students will be instructed to brainstorm their background knowledge on slavery in CT by completing a worksheet. On Day One, we will start class with a very brief discussion of their preconceived ideas regarding slavery in CT, and then as a class we will read the introduction to *Complicity* entitled “The State That Slavery Built: An Introduction.” This will be followed by group work in which students will work with a variety of primary and secondary source documents. Each of the groups will complete an analysis worksheet to accompany their documents. For homework students should finish analyzing their documents and complete their worksheets. On Day Two students will finish discussing their documents with their group and create role-play situations to present their findings to their classmates. For homework students should prepare for their presentations by creating a costume and practicing their lines. On Day

Three students will act out their role-plays for their classmates and present their findings. As the students view each other's presentations, they will need to complete a separate worksheet. Finish with a discussion of how their view of slavery in CT has changed.

ASSESSMENT

Students will demonstrate their comprehension of the lesson concepts by completing the document analysis worksheets and completing one of the following assignments:

- 1) **Write a letter to the editor** of *The Connecticut Courant* expressing an opinion on the condition of slavery in pre-1865 CT from the perspective of your choice (slave owner, slave, free Black, abolitionist...)
- 2) **Create a diary or journal** account of a role-played scenario from the point of view of a slave
- 3) **Draw a political cartoon/illustration** expressing a clear opinion on a specific aspect of slavery in CT
- 4) **Draft a speech** that an abolitionist might give to gain support for emancipating slaves or that a slave owner might give to protect and spread the institution of slavery
- 5) **Compose a poem** that a slave might pen to express emotion (fear, frustration, anger, exhaustion, hope, resistance...)

*** students should look at *Complicity's* "In Their Own Words" as a reference**

DAY ONE: Dispelling the Myth

QUESTIONS ADDRESSED

- What preconceived notions do we have regarding slavery in CT?
(Slavery in CT was a benign institution. There were very few, if any, slaves in CT. CT was mostly united in its fight to abolish slavery. CT hosted part of the Freedom Trail. The Amistad case took place in CT.)
- What is the definition of “complicity?”
(The fact or state of being an accomplice; partnership in wrongdoing)
- Why has CT failed to confront its complicity in the past, and what has triggered this new retrospective look into our slave history?
(Much of the slavery that CT benefited from occurred elsewhere, making our dependence on slavery easier to conceal. CT, and New England, possessed a unique duality in its past relationship with slavery. Our schools fail to educate our students on our true history as a slave state. Recent talk of reparations has finally opened the door to a new openness and scholarship of slavery in CT.)
- What do primary source documents reveal that secondary source documents do not? What factors must we still keep in mind as we analyze primary source documents?
(Primary source documents provide a more true, reliable source of first-hand information. They also reveal the emotions and context of the time period. However, we must remember that they still contain a bias, and therefore, archaeological evidence should be used to corroborate, and sometimes even contradict, findings.)

MATERIALS

- CT Slavery Background Knowledge Worksheet
- *Complicity* introduction entitled “The State That Slavery Built: An Introduction”
- Document Analysis Worksheet (SOAPSTone)
- Documents for each group (7 groups of 3-4 students)
 - 1) CT Census documents and West Hartford Church Records (including *Complicity*)
 - 2) Colonial CT Records
 - 3) Venture Smith and James Mars narrative excerpts
 - 4) *Complicity*’s “The Plantation Next Door” excerpts (Samuel Browne) and map
 - 5) CT Emancipation Legislation and Emancipation Petitions
 - 6) Slave Bills of Sale and Fugitive Slave Ads (including *Complicity*) and *Complicity*’s “Slavery and The Courant” article
 - 7) Illustrations of enslaved free black and mob violence against black school, accompanying Colonial CT Record, Prudence Crandall excerpt, and Black Governors excerpt

OPENING THE LESSON

Begin the lesson by explaining to the students that they will be examining slavery in CT to:

- Develop an understanding of the time period and the institution of slavery
- Experience the passion of the time period through first hand accounts of slave life
- Uncover the hidden truth of slavery in CT
- Question the process by which CT's slave history has been concealed
- Discover the new scholarship shedding light on CT's slave legacy

PROCEDURE

- Discuss with the class their preconceived thoughts on slavery in CT and ask them if they think that there is more to the story; if so, what is the rest of the story and why haven't they been taught it?
- As a class, read the *Complicity* introduction entitled "The State That Slavery Built: An Introduction;" ask for their reactions
- Explain that we will be taking a closer look at slavery in CT by analyzing a variety of primary and secondary source documents; check for understanding of these terms, asking for examples
- Divide the class into seven groups and assign a set of documents to each group; pass out Document Analysis Worksheet
- For homework, instruct them to complete their Document Analysis Worksheet and start to think of a role-play scenario to present their findings to their classmates

CONNECTICUT SLAVERY: BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE WORKSHEET

Answer the following questions based on your prior knowledge.

1. How large was CT's slave population?
2. What types of tasks did slaves in CT perform?
3. Describe the conditions of slavery in CT.
4. How did slavery impact the economic, political, and social structure of CT?
5. What was CT's connection to the Underground Railroad?
6. What was CT's connection to the Amistad case?
7. Who was Harriet Beecher Stowe?
8. Define abolitionist.
9. Define emancipation.
10. Relate any other information you may be aware of regarding slavery in CT.

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS WORKSHEET (SOAPStone)

S: What is the **subject** of the piece? What are the general topics/ideas contained in the text?

O: What is the **occasion**? What are the time, place and setting of the piece?

A: Who is the **audience**? To whom is this piece directed?

P: What is the **purpose** or reason that this piece was created?

S: Who is the **speaker**? Who is the voice that tells the story?

T: What is the **tone** of the piece? What emotions or attitudes are present in the piece?

Questions to Consider:

1. What does this source reveal about slavery in CT?
2. What are the economic, political, and social realities of slavery in CT revealed in this source?
3. What does this source reveal about the relationship between CT slaves and their owners?
4. What does this source reveal about the treatment of CT slaves?
5. What does this source reveal about the daily life of CT slaves?
6. What does this source reveal about the abilities of CT slaves?
7. What does this source reveal about the duality of slavery in CT?