

Abolition Movement

INTRODUCTION

The city of Syracuse, New York, was one of the major points of access to the “Underground Railroad,” which wasn’t a real railroad, but a vast secret network of abolitionists who helped escaped slaves from the South reach their freedom in Canada. In this lesson, students will learn about the abolition movement from the Jerry Rescue, which was an illegal rescue of a fugitive slave by the citizens of Syracuse in 1851.

GRADES: 7-8 MATERIALS

- » Primary Source Document: A Public Address Celebrating the Rescue of a Slave Named Jerry.
- » Analysis Worksheet.

STANDARDS

NY State Standard 1: History of the United States and New York

Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of major ideas, eras, themes, developments, and turning points in the history of the United States and New York.

Common Core: CC6-8RH/SS2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

Common Core: CC6-8WH/SS/S/TS2

Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/experiments, or technical processes.

AASL Standards for the 21st Century Learner: 2.1.1

Continue an inquiry-based research process by applying critical thinking skills (analysis, synthesis, evaluation, organization) to information and knowledge in order to construct new understandings, draw conclusions, and create new knowledge.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Using a primary source related to the abolition movement, students will:

- » Learn about primary sources, what they are and how they can be used to help understand the past.
- » Expand their thinking and knowledge about the abolition movement, when it was, how it came about, and what significance it has in history.
- » Apply critical thinking skills to analyze a public address and the arguments it makes.
- » Write a narrative that explains how the rescuers got Jerry to freedom and why they believed they were justified in breaking the law.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment should be based on the student's written narrative, which demonstrates their ability to:

- » Decipher the primary source document and understand the purpose it served in its original context.
- » Identify and explain the arguments made in the document.
- » Apply critical thinking skills in order to draw conclusions about the abolition movement through a specific example (the Jerry Rescue).

Students should take what they have learned in class about the abolition movement in order to interpret the primary source document on the Jerry Rescue. Then students should write a narrative that summarizes how the rescuers got Jerry to freedom and why they believed they were justified in breaking the law.

GETTING STARTED

- » Explain that primary sources are original documents that tell us about the historical moments in which they were created. Ask the following questions: How can you tell that you are looking, touching, or listening to a primary source? What is a secondary source? Explain that secondary sources are interpretations of primary sources.
- » Introduce the skill of the lesson. Students will apply critical thinking skills in order to draw conclusions about the abolition movement through a specific example (the Jerry Rescue). They will need to take what they have learned in class about the abolition movement and the "Underground Railroad" in order to interpret the primary source document and understand the purpose it served in its original context. Then the students will write a narrative that summarizes how the rescuers got Jerry to freedom and why they believed they were justified in breaking the law.

DIRECT INSTRUCTION

1. Have the students read the "Address of the Convention held in Syracuse, Oct. 1, 1853, for the Purpose of Celebrating the Rescue of the Man Jerry." Have the students work individually to fill out the Analysis Worksheet. After the students have completed the worksheet, ask the class: What is this document? Who do you think the intended audience was? Who is it addressed to? Why was it printed? How do you think it circulated? What are the main points being made? Demonstrate how to pull key points from the text.

2. Tell the students about the Jerry Rescue (See Teacher's Notes). Ask the students to recall important aspects of the abolition movement; for example, ask the students: What was the "Underground Railroad"? What was the Fugitive Slave Act? When did the Civil War begin? Then discuss the main points made in the primary source document in relationship to these aspects of the abolition movement.
3. For homework, ask the students to write a narrative that summarizes how the rescuers got Jerry to freedom and why they believed they were justified in breaking the law.

TEACHER'S NOTES

1. For more background information on the Jerry Rescue see, *Fugitive Slaves and the Unfinished American Revolution: Eight Cases* by Gordon S. Barker. (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2013)

REFLECTION AND SHARING

- » Ask the students how a public address from Jerry's point of view might differ from the one written by the abolitionists. Would he make the same arguments? Would he make different arguments? Why or why not?
- » Ask the class to brainstorm a current issue for which they could write a public address. The issue could be global, as in pollution or poverty; or the issue could be local and more personal, such as school rules or community issues. Have the class write a public address together on one of these issues.

ABOLITION MOVEMENT: PRIMARY SOURCE ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

After reading the “Address of the Convention held in Syracuse, Oct. 1 1853, for the Purpose of Celebrating the Rescue of the Man Jerry,” answer the following questions:

1. What is this primary source document? What do you think its original purpose was?
2. Was it written by one person or by multiple people? (Hint: Does it use the first person singular “I” or the plural “we”?)
3. Who do you think the intended audience was? (Hint: Who is it addressed to?)
4. Who were Jerry’s rescuers?
5. Who is guilty? (Hint: See the third paragraph.)
6. According to this document, would anyone consent to being enslaved?
7. Who should be punished for voting for the Fugitive Slave Act? (Hint: See the sixteenth paragraph.)
8. How and when did Jerry finally get his freedom?
9. What response do you think the authors of this document were looking for?

ADDRESS

Of the Convention held in Syracuse, Oct. 1, 1853, for the purpose of Celebrating the Rescue of the Man Jerry.

To our Countrymen:

We speak not to our neighbors only, but to all our countrymen also. We speak to them all, because it is the interest of them all, and the right of them all, to know what is our justification for our startling and reprehended conduct. When the acknowledged laws of a land are deliberately and concertedly trampled on, all its inhabitants are vitally affected, and justly alarmed by the momentous occurrence; and they are entitled to know, as well as concerned to know, why this assault has been made upon their Government. Government, to be a blessing to the people, must be sacred to the people. They must feel, that the wrong, which is done to it, is done to themselves. Every insult to a just Government must be as promptly resented by its subjects, as if offered to themselves. It is offered to themselves. Emphatically it is, when the Government, like our own, is one of the people's choice.

We admit, that we are the rescuers of Jerry. All of us are such. If we did not all use our hands in rescuing him: if we did not all participate in the counsels, which resulted in his rescue: if we did not all make ourselves legally liable for it: nevertheless, the fact, that we all approve it, makes us all his morally responsible rescuers:—and that is to be his rescuers, in the highest sense.

We admit, that we knew, that they were ministers of Government, out of whose hands we rescued Jerry; and that they had the great political parties, and Acts of Congress, and Opinions of Judges, and, above all, the received interpretations of the Federal Constitution, for their countenance and shelter. We admit, therefore, that we are guilty of great disrespect for "the powers that be"—guilty, indeed, of setting ourselves in array against the Government, and of taking the attitude of revolutionists and rebels.

We admit, that we knew, that the Doctors of Divinity, and the great majority of the Churches, and the current religion of the country were on the side of these ministers of Government; and that our rescue of Jerry was, therefore, an act of glaring, defiant infidelity, in the popular sense of infidelity.

We admit, that we knew, that the men, against whom we went, were armed, and that we, therefore, knew, that our being unarmed exposed us to the reproach of hazarding our lives recklessly.

We make all these admissions—and, yet, we justify our rescue of Jerry. On what ground? Solely on the ground of doing unto others, as we would have others do unto us.

We have said, that the character of slavery is, in no wise, material to our argument against the possible legalization of slavery. But we cannot forbear the incidental remark, that it is because every man knows the character of slavery, that every man shrinks from becoming a slave. Every man knows slavery to be a hell of horrors. Every man would infinitely rather have all his children in the grave than one of them in that Hell.

In the light of what has been said, we see what unparalleled hypocrites are the American people. The great mass of them are for slavery:—and, yet, not one of them would consent to be a slave. What hypocrites are their Divines, who preach or apologize for slavery! What hypocrites are their Churches, that do not cast these godless Divines out of the pulpit! What hypocrites are their legislators, who legislate for slavery! What hypocrites are the tribunals, that recognize the law of slavery! A few weeks ago, Judge McLean did, in the name of law, send his innocent brother into slavery. What, if the law-making power of Ohio should doom the Judge to slavery—would he not sooner shed an ocean of blood than acknowledge the legality of his doom! He would:—and that he would stamp him with the most guilty and frightful dishonesty. What a painful scene does Heaven witness this week, in the Court Room in Canandaigua! A Judge is there—polluting and murdering his soul by his recognition of slavery as law. A Marshal is there—doing likewise. So are the Government lawyers doing, who are there. But not so, we trust, are the Jurors.

There was no law against rescuing Jerry, because there was no law for enslaving him. Whatever the forms of law, under which he

was held, they were entirely wanting in the spirit and substance of law. The law to do unto others, as we would have others do unto us, is a law to respect all human rights. But all human rights are cloven down by slavery. Every law must be a law for the protection of rights. A law for the destruction of rights is a solecism and an absurdity.

We said, that there was no law for enslaving Jerry. That is not a law for the human race, which no human being can honestly enforce. To say, that it is, is to impeach the wisdom and purity of the Author of all law. But there lives not a human being, who would reverence, or know, slavery as law, were it to be turned against himself, and were it to demand a victim in himself. There lives not a human being, who, were he in slavery, would not be delivered—even though at the expense of trampling on all the Statute Books and Constitutions in the world. Hence, there lives not a human being, who can honestly recognize a law for enslaving any one:—and, hence, there can be no law for enslaving any one.

We go farther, and declare, that no person has the right to use as law, or know as law, even that, which is law—provided, that, when it is applied to himself, he rejects it as law. For instance, he who resists the collection of a debt, which he owes, has no right to collect a debt, or to claim, that there is a law for collecting it. The resistance, in the one case, makes him dishonest in asserting the claim in the other: and, whether the thing, which a man does, is, in itself, right or wrong, he never ertheless, must not do it, if it can be done by him, only dishonestly. "Happy is he, who condemneth not himself in that thing, which he alloweth." So too, the man, who lets his horse jump into his neighbor's field, is not to inquire into the law of the case, when, in turn, his neighbor's horse jumps into his field. His own lawlessness estops him from claiming, that there is any law in the case. Such reasoning, applied to slavery, justifies us in saying, that, if there is a person in all the world so peculiar, as to welcome the yoke of slavery, his peculiarity can furnish no plea for slavery to those, who do not welcome that yoke. It also, justifies us in saying, that the question, whether slavery is good or bad, right or wrong, is entirely immaterial to our argument. Though it were possible, that its elements could be all from Heaven, instead of being, as they are, all from Hell, nevertheless, no sane man could be allowed to claim, that slavery is the subject of law—of sanctioning and sanctifying law—for the simple reason, that no sane man would consent to be a slave.

We have said, that the character of slavery is, in no wise, material to our argument against the possible legalization of slavery. But we cannot forbear the incidental remark, that it is because every man knows the character of slavery, that every man shrinks from becoming a slave. Every man knows slavery to be a hell of horrors. Every man would infinitely rather have all his children in the grave than one of them in that Hell.

In the light of what has been said, we see what unparalleled hypocrites are the American people. The great mass of them are for slavery:—and, yet, not one of them would consent to be a slave. What hypocrites are their Divines, who preach or apologize for slavery! What hypocrites are their Churches, that do not cast these godless Divines out of the pulpit! What hypocrites are their legislators, who legislate for slavery! What hypocrites are the tribunals, that recognize the law of slavery! A few weeks ago, Judge McLean did, in the name of law, send his innocent brother into slavery. What, if the law-making power of Ohio should doom the Judge to slavery—would he not sooner shed an ocean of blood than acknowledge the legality of his doom! He would:—and that he would stamp him with the most guilty and frightful dishonesty. What a painful scene does Heaven witness this week, in the Court Room in Canandaigua! A Judge is there—polluting and murdering his soul by his recognition of slavery as law. A Marshal is there—doing likewise. So are the Government lawyers doing, who are there. But not so, we trust, are the Jurors.

Judge Hall affects respect for pro-slavery enactments; and is willing to send men into slavery. But, though ten thousand Legislatures had pronounced his son a slave, he would sooner see a whole Court murdered than see it succeed in sending that son into slavery.

We spoke of the Jurors. Happily, they need not concern themselves with the law of the case. They can acquit all the defendants, on the facts in the case. The Government must fail to prove, that Jerry was a slave. Slavery, it must be remembered, does not consist in the involuntary service and whippings, or in the other hardships and sufferings of its victims. These are but the incidents of slavery. Its essence consists solely in the assumed conversion of its victims into chattels. But the legal fiction, that turns a man into a thing, is at war with every possibility of fact. This fiction is, that "Slaves shall be deemed, held, taken, reputed, and adjudged in law to be chattels personal." Was Jerry a chattel personal—a mere thing! Could he be! Can a man be turned into a horse, or a stone! Can immortality be merchandized! All this is impossible. No legislation can create impossible facts. No legislation can convert a man into a slave. As well talk of making a slave of God Himself, as of the being made in His own image. A million witnesses might testify, that Jerry was a slave—or, in other words, a brute, a thing, a subject of traffic. But triumphant above all this false testimony would tower the proud fact, that Jerry was a man, and can be nothing else than a man, either in time or eternity.

We have said enough to justify our rescue of Jerry. We rescued him, because, as we have said, there was no law, and could be no law, for enslaving him—because there was no law—and could be no law, for reducing a man from the glorious heights, where his Maker placed him, to the level of brutes and things. We rescued him, as we would have rescued any other innocent brother from the hands of any other pirates, without passing one moment to make the absurd inquiry, whether there was a law for the piracy. We should have been monsters, instead of men, had we not rescued him. To have stopped our ears, when this poor brother cried; and to have forbore to deliver him, when we saw him drawn unto death; would have been to incur the frown of Heaven and the contempt of earth. In a word, we rescued him, because we could not help it. All in vain, would it have been for us to try to dam up our nature, at that high flood time of its feelings. Those feelings would have their way. That nature would be true to itself.

A distinction has been set up between rescuing a fugitive slave from the hands of private citizens, and rescuing him from the hands of official persons. Some there are, who justify the former, but condemn the latter. The distinction is absurd, and should never be made—or, if made, it should be made against the official persons. The "mischief framed by law," and executed by the officers of law, is the worst of all mischief, because apparently clothed with the authority of law. No mischief should be so promptly resisted, as such mischief: and no persons should be so promptly punished, as they, who attempt to legalize it, and they, who officially undertake to enforce it. The abuse of law-making and of other official powers is the most fearful wrong, that can befall the people: and the most effectual way for the people to invite the perpetration of such wrong, is to give in to the false and impudent doctrine, that office shelters the abuse of office; and that crime, when committed by Government, is to be unresisted and unpunished, because committed by Government. Every member of Congress, who voted for the Fugitive Slave Act, and the President, who signed it, and the Judge, who administers it, should be punished for this treachery to their trust, and this conspiracy against human rights. Were the public mind sound, they would be punished. Or, rather, were the public mind sound, office would be conferred on a very different class of men. We close, under this head, with the remark, that crime on the part of Government is as much more to be dreaded and punished than crime on the part of the individual, as

Government is more authoritative and influential than the individual.

There was a mob in Syracuse, October 1st, 1851, said the newspapers. It is true, that there was. But it was not what the newspapers represented. It was not the rescuers of Jerry, who composed the mob; but it was those, who fell upon that poor and helpless, and innocent man. The President and the Members of Congress, referred to, were virtually and prominently among those, who fell upon him—were virtually and prominently of the mob. No other leader of that mob, unless it were Daniel Webster, or some very distinguished clerical advocate of the Fugitive Slave Act, was so conspicuous and influential, as the President of the United States. Yes, it was the kidnapers of Jerry, who constituted the mob. They were the trampers on law. The law-abiding men were his rescuers. Jerry was rescued not by a mob, but from a mob.

Fellow-citizens! we are not ignorant, that we are reproached and hated. We are called infidels:—and we confess, that if our deep belief, that the current religion of this country is infidel, makes us infidels, then are we infidels. We confess, that we have not the most distant idea, that that is the religion of Jesus Christ, which does not heartily espouse the cause of the slave. We are called the enemies of law:—and we confess, that, if to be the enemies of enactments, which contain not truth, nor justice, nor any other element of law, makes us the enemies of law, then are we the enemies of law. We are called anarchists and despisers of Government:—and we confess, that, if obedience to human Government requires us to disobey the Divine Government; and if "Honor the King" is a commandment to dishonor the King of Kings, then are we anarchists and despisers of Government.

We repeat, fellow citizens, that we are conscious of the odium, that rests upon us. We feel, that we are wronged; but we are not impatient for the righting of our wrongs. We bide our time. The men, that shall come after us, will do us justice. The present generation of America cannot "judge righteous judgment," in the case of the uncompromising friends of freedom, religion and law. They are so debauched and blinded by slavery, and by the perverse and low ideas of freedom, religion and law, which it engenders, that they "call evil good and good evil; put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter." They have been living out the lie of slavery so long, and have been, thereby, deadening their consciences so long as to be, now, well nigh incapable of perceiving the wide and everlasting distinctions between truth and falsehood.

We are aware, too, fellow citizens, of the peril, in which we are involved by our position and purpose. We have rescued one fugitive slave. We must rescue every other, that we can. We have exhorted our fellow men to trample on the Fugitive Slave Act. We must continue to exhort them to do so. We cannot recede. We owe it to ourselves, our children, our country, our God, to go forward. We cannot, for the sake of securing our property or liberty, or any of the interests of time, forget, that there is an eternity. Nor may we count even our lives dear to ourselves in the high and holy cause to which we have consecrated our all. We do not claim to have risen above the fear of death. But we remember, and strive to obey the commandment: "Fear not them, which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him, who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell."

We have, now, said all we wish to say, at this second celebration of the rescue of Jerry. What we shall say on the like occasion hereafter, or how often the occasion will be repeated, we cannot now tell. This much, however, we can now tell—that, at every future celebration of this precious event, we shall continue to speak out our convictions honestly and fearlessly; and that we shall continue to repeat the celebration from year to year, until the impudent and lying claim, that slavery can be legalized, shall be abandoned in every part of our guilty land.