

Slavery in Philadelphia

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Overview

This curriculum unit will be an exploration of the life of Africans in Philadelphia and the various conditions of servitude that they encountered from the time of the inception of the city in 1681 to the passage of the Gradual Abolition Act of 1780 and the Fugitive Slave Laws of 1850. This unit will also explore the conditions for free Africans and escaped slaves during the antebellum period. Students will learn about the laws that governed society and their impact on the lives of African Americans, the daily life activities of African Americans and their impact on society, the resistance movements in Philadelphia, and historic sites within Philadelphia that relate to slavery.

The desired impact of this unit will be to take a broad topic such as slavery and make it local. This unit will allow teachers to show students the impact that slavery had in this region and how Philadelphia impacted the rest of the world.

Rationale

As of September 2005, all ninth grade students in Philadelphia high schools are required to take African American History before they graduate. This historic move on the part of the School District of Philadelphia has been steeped in the rich traditions of African Americans in this city from its inception. Philadelphia is known for its rich history in political and cultural arenas, yet the knowledge and acceptance of the story of slavery in this region has little been told.

Dana King, Lead Academic Coach in African and African American Studies, provided a history of the events that led up to the creation of African American Studies curricula in Philadelphia. On November 17, 1967, one of the largest student demonstrations in the city of Philadelphia, led by David P. Richardson, took place in front of the Board of Education Building. The students were protesting the inadequate education they were receiving in Philadelphia's public schools. Leaflets that were distributed denounced the lack of Black History in the curriculum. In 1969, an official district policy mandated the inclusion of racial and ethnic history in all curricula materials.

As a result, an Ad Hoc Committee consisting of community activists and university scholars was formed to create curricula materials in African and African American History. The formation of this committee also resulted in the formation of the African American Studies Department later known as the African and African American Studies Department. Although the work of creating curriculum materials and guides on African American History began, the teaching of “Black Studies” was marginalized in textbooks and minimized in classroom teaching.

For the past thirty-seven years, community members, educators, and local politicians have consistently fought to have the 1969 policy come to fruition. It has been a long arduous journey, but through the continued efforts of several community organizations, parents, school district officials, and the school reform commission, the teaching of African American History will be a reality for the students in the School District of Philadelphia.¹

The goal of this curriculum unit is for students to gain specific and full appreciation of the history of Africans in colonial and antebellum Philadelphia. Students will be able to connect the study of the creation of this country and its institutions to the development of Philadelphia and apply that information to meaningful classroom activities and research projects.

Historical Context

In November 1684, 150 Africans arrived in chains in Philadelphia carried on the *Isabella*, out of Bristol, England. Merchant William Frampton was the Philadelphia agent of a Bristol firm who negotiated the sale of the Africans to the Quaker settlers of the city. The Quakers used their purchases to clear trees and brush and erect crude houses in the village. This introduction of slaves into the small population of white settlers began the intermingling of white and black Philadelphians that has continued. The friction that accompanies this interaction has also been present from the start.²

Since a plantation economy did not develop in Pennsylvania, most slaves worked alongside their masters as sail makers, bakers, carpenters, charcoal-iron workers, farmhands, or domestic servants. Global events affected the tide of slavery in the United States, and Philadelphia was included in that effect. The Seven Years’ War impacted the number of white immigrants and indentured servants coming to city. Many slaves ran away to serve in the British army, thus creating a renewed market for slave labor. At its apogee the number of slaves in the city reached about 1,400 in a population of about 18,000.³

City life afforded an assimilation of slaves to a European way of life due to the close contact with white families who owned slaves. However, “ from the earliest years, the slaves brought together in Philadelphia were a polyglot population. Almost all came from the kingdoms of the west coast of Africa, although until the Seven Years’ War most

had been ‘seasoned’ first by the wretchedness of sugar cultivation in the West Indies.”⁴ Others migrated with their masters from Delaware and Maryland.

From the very beginning, Africans resisted slavery. This resistance took many forms, from the violent rebellions on slaves ships, burning the homes of their masters or more subtle forms of protest like refusing to work or slowing work down. These forms of resistance were no less prevalent in Philadelphia. Resistance, such as that of Sampson, the slave of James Logan of Philadelphia, is accounted. In 1737 Sampson was charged with burning a house owned by Logan. Fearful, the white court sentenced Sampson to death. Punishments for the enslaved blacks were more severe than for whites that committed the same crimes.⁵

Throughout the history of the commonwealth, various “Black Laws” were enacted to restrict the movement of Africans in Pennsylvania. However, earlier laws would ban the purchase of slaves, and heavily tax those who purchased slaves within the state. In 1780, Pennsylvania became the first in the nation to pass a Gradual Abolition Law. This law stated that any slave born after the enactment of the law would be granted their freedom at the age of twenty-eight. Although slavery was not as popular in Pennsylvania as it was in its neighboring states, the numbers declined throughout the late 1700’s and early 1800’s. “Between 1790 and 1800, the number of slaves dropped from 3,737 to 1,706 and by 1810 to 795. In 1840 there were 64 slaves in the state, but by 1850 there were none.”⁶

Objectives

The objectives for this unit are for students to be able to take a broad topic such as slavery and localize it. Overall, students should learn that there were national implications to the local laws enacted in Philadelphia and Pennsylvania. They will also learn about the ways in which Africans were involved in their own cause as well as the efforts of members of various abolition societies.

Students will identify prominent figures in the Philadelphia anti-slavery movement, identify prominent figures in Philadelphia’s free black community, understand the effects of the Jane Johnson case, identify related streets, landmarks and locations on a map, create maps, comparing and contrasting antebellum Philadelphia to the present day landscape, compare and contrast the laws in Pennsylvania to the laws of the United States in the late 18th century and early 19th century, analyze the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, analyze Pennsylvania’s Gradual Abolition Law, and analyze primary source documents relating to the Pennsylvania Abolition Society.

Strategies

In order to accomplish this unit, the teacher will use various strategies. The majority of lessons are designed for cooperative groups within a classroom. The lessons require that the students use graphic organizers, geography skills, and critical thinking skills, creative and analytical writing skills, and conduct a mock trial of a case. Unless otherwise noted, each lesson is designed for a fifty-minute class period.

Classroom Activities

Lesson 1: The Liberation of Jane Johnson (July 1855)

Objectives: Students will:

1. Identify prominent figures in the Philadelphia anti-slavery movement
2. Understand the effects the Jane Johnson case had on Philadelphia, the region and the nation
3. Identify prominent figures in Philadelphia's free black community

Materials:

The Liberation of Jane Johnson by Phil Lapsansky

www.librarycompany.org/JaneJohnson/

Jane Johnson's picture

Webbing Graphic organizer

Introduction:

Jane Johnson was a slave who along with her two children was brought to Philadelphia by their master, Col. John H. Wheeler of North Carolina. Wheeler was the American minister to Nicaragua. He and Johnson were passing through Philadelphia on their way to board a steam ship for Nicaragua when Jane escaped with her children. Jane had planned to escape from Wheeler in New York but when the opportunity presented itself in Philadelphia, she took advantage of the situation. This case resulted in the involvement of many Philadelphia residents including Passmore Williamson and William Still, who were involved in the Vigilance Committee. Ultimately, those who helped Jane Johnson were arrested and imprisoned for various lengths of time. Although Jane Johnson's rescue was newsworthy, the case gained notoriety due to the prominence of Passmore Williamson, who was imprisoned in Moyamensing Prison for over three months. The case became a battleground for state versus federal laws and jurisdiction. The judge in the case held that slave masters should be able to travel anywhere in the country with their slave property, which was significant because it occurred before the Dred Scott decision. The judge also determined that Williamson was more wrong than the others involved because he was the only white person involved.

Jane Johnson became involved in her own case by testifying in court and also speaking at abolitionist meetings. This story has become the basis for Lorene Cary's novel, *The Price of a Child*.

Activity:

Have students view a picture of Jane Johnson. Do not tell the students her name before doing this activity. Distribute a webbing graphic organizer to each student. Give the students approximately three to five minutes to brainstorm ideas about who they think Jane Johnson was based on viewing her picture. Using a webbing chart, on the board or on chart paper, have the class brainstorm about who she was, what her life was like, and why she may have been important to the topic of slavery and abolitionism.

Distribute the handout, the Liberation of Jane Johnson, to each student. Individually, in groups, or as a whole class, have students read the story. Use discussion questions to explore this case.

1. What was the purpose of Jane Johnson's trip north to Philadelphia?
2. Who was William Still and what was his involvement in this case?
3. What role did Passmore Williamson have in Jane Johnson's liberation?
4. What were the consequences for the men who helped Jane Johnson and her children?
5. What legal reasoning did Judge Kane use to imprison Williamson? What other reasons were used to make this decision?
6. Why did this case become national news?
7. Why didn't the federal Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 apply to this case?
8. How long did Williamson stay in prison? What was the final outcome of his case?
9. What role did Jane Johnson play in the cases of Still, Williamson and the anti-slavery movement?
10. Where did Jane Johnson and her children finally settle?

Extension Activity:

Have students read *The Price of a Child* by Lorene Cary. This novel is an adaptation of the Jane Johnson story. Students should write a book review, comparing and contrasting the real life of Jane Johnson and the fictional life of Mercer Gray.

Lesson 2: The Liberation of Jane Johnson (July 1855)

Objectives: Students will:

1. Identify related streets, landmarks and locations on a map.
2. Create maps, comparing and contrasting antebellum Philadelphia to the present day landscape.
3. Visually identify related historic sites on a walking tour of Jane Johnson's journey to freedom through Philadelphia.

Activity:

Have an enlarged copy of the "*Price of a Child Map*" from www.librarycompany.org/JaneJohnson/map and an enlarged copy of a current map of the same area of Philadelphia posted for the students to view. (This can also be done by transferring the maps onto transparencies and projecting them onto a screen.) Distribute student copies of each map. Have the students work in teams of four to analyze each map. Use the "*Price of a Child Map*" and the story "*The Liberation of Jane Johnson*," to have students trace the steps of Jane Johnson using a colored pencil or red pen. Then have students analyze the map of present day Philadelphia.

Ask, "Have any of the street names have changed?"

Ask for student volunteers to plot the course on the large map.

Have students write a paragraph detailing the route Jane Johnson traveled, and the locations of William Still and Passmore Williamson's offices.

Extension Activity:

Walking tour of historic Philadelphia.

Arrange a walking tour of Old City Philadelphia, using the "*Price of a Child Map*" as a guide.

Lesson 3: The Laws of Slavery

Objectives: Students will:

1. Compare and contrast the laws in Pennsylvania to the laws of the United States. (State versus federal laws)
2. Analyze the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 and the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850.
3. Analyze Pennsylvania's Gradual Abolition Act of 1780 and Personal Liberty Law of 1826.
4. Examine the causes and effects of the Christiana Riots.
5. Conduct a mock trial based on the case of Jane Johnson

Activity: Each lesson is designed for a fifty minute class period

Day One:

Distribute copies of the Gradual Abolition Act of 1780, the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793, the Personal Liberty Law of 1826 and the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. Have students analyze each document using the "Written Document Analysis Worksheet" (www.archives.gov/digital_classroom/index.html). Compare and contrast each document as a class. Discuss the purpose of each document. Ask students to describe the difference between the federal laws and the state laws.

Day Two:

Distribute handout, *Prigg v. Pennsylvania* (1842). Have students read the case information and the Opinion of the Court.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the facts of this case?
2. What is the opinion of the Court?
3. What does this mean for African Americans in Pennsylvania at this time?
4. Would the opinion in this case affect Jane Johnson in 1855? If so, what would the effect be?

Divide the class into groups of no more than four students. Have students choose roles for each student in the group: Recorder, Reporter, Timekeeper and Facilitator. See appendix for role descriptions. Choose and distribute one Fugitive Slave Case Paper from the National Archives for each group. [www.archives.gov/midatlantic/.] In small groups have students discuss how the *Prigg* case would have affected the cases the students read from the Fugitive Slave Case Papers. Have the students report out to the whole class.

Day Three:

Distribute the newspaper account of the Christiana Riots. Read article as a whole class and discuss how the laws of the day may have contributed to the cause of the riot. Also discuss the effects of the riot on the laws in Pennsylvania. Have students write a newspaper article describing the riot or the ensuing legal proceedings.

Extension Activity: Conduct a mock trial of either the Christiana Riot case or the Jane Johnson case.

Lesson 4: The Role of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS) in Philadelphia's Free Black Community

Objectives: Students will:

1. Analyze primary source documents relating to the work of the PAS.
2. Research and document history of the PAS.
3. Analyze the political and social views of the PAS.

Materials:

Emma J. Lapsansky-Werner's, "Teamed Up with the PAS: Images of Black Philadelphia," an article in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania's *Pennsylvania Legacies* [www.hsp.org]

Activity:

Distribute the article to students. As students read the article individually, have them answer the following focus questions.

1. Who was George Lewis and what happened to him?
2. Who was James Forten? What role did he have in Philadelphia's black community?
3. Who was Elijah Morris? What happened to him?
4. What do the stories of Lewis, Morris and Forten tell about the black community in Philadelphia?
5. What types of organizations and institutions were created as a result of the abolition movement in Philadelphia?
6. What was the role of the Philadelphia Free African Society and how did it differ from similar groups in New England?
7. How did the PAS help and hinder the black community in Philadelphia?

After students read the article and answer the discussion questions, conduct a class discussion about their answers. Post each question around the classroom on chart paper. Choose students to write their answers to one question on the chart paper.

Extension Activity

Schedule a class visit to either the National Archives or the Historical Society of Pennsylvania for a lesson on historical documents. Arrange for students to see and discuss some of the documents that relate to the Pennsylvania Abolition Society.

Or

Have students research members of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society and the Free African Society and write a 2-3-page summary, discussing the similarities and differences between the two groups. The summary should also discuss the number of female and African American members each group maintained. What were the main philosophies of each group? Who were the founders and leaders of each group?

Lesson 5: Life Stories

Objectives: Students will:

1. Examine the life of four free black Philadelphians
2. Write an auto-biography of their life as a Philadelphian

Materials:

Biographies of Fanny Jackson Coppin available at

www.digilib.nypl.org/dynaweb/digs/wwm97253/@Generic_BookTextView/2472

William Still available at www.slaveryinamerica.org/narratives/bio_william_still.htm

Richard Allen available at www.slaveryinamerica.org/narratives/bio_richard_allen.htm

Octavius Catto available at www.afrolumens.org/rising_free/waskie1.html

Chart paper

Markers

Activity:

Break students up into groups of no more than four students per group. Assign each student a number from one through four. Distribute a different biography to each member of the group. Have students read about the life of the person that they were assigned. Students should answer the following questions about aspects of the person's personal life:

1. Was this person born free or slave?
2. What was their family life like? Did they know their family?
3. How did this person contribute to the black community in Philadelphia?
4. Why is this person important to learn about today?

After the students read the biographies, they should take turns discussing their person with their teammates. Allow approximately twenty minutes for discussion. Have chart paper with each person's name on it hung around the classroom. Send students to the papers group by group while the discussions are held. Have each student write one interesting fact they found about the person they were assigned. Everyone should write something different if possible. Close the lesson by discussing what was written on the chart papers. If time runs out, the closing activity can be done the next day as a class opener.

Extension Activity:

Have students write a 2-4-page autobiography of their lives in Philadelphia. This writing should reflect their real life experiences either as a native born or immigrant Philadelphian

Appendix/Standards

Standards:

This unit corresponds with Pennsylvania History Standard 8.1, 2, 3 A, 8.1, 2, 3 B, 8.1, 2, 3 C, and 8.1, 2, 3 D.

The standards for 8.1 are Historical Analysis and Skills Development:

- A – Chronological Thinking
- B – Historical Comprehension
- C – Historical Interpretation
- D – Historical Research

The standards for 8.2 Pennsylvania History and 8.3 United States History:

- A – Contributions of Individual Groups
- B – Documents, Artifacts and Historical Places
- C – Influences of Continuity and Change
- D – Conflict and Cooperation Among Groups

The complete standards are available online at

www.pde.state.pa.us/stateboard_ed/lib/stateboard_ed/E.HISTORY-web03.pdf

Teacher Resources

Cooperative Group Roles

Facilitator: This student makes sure that the group stays focused on the assigned task.

Timekeeper: This student makes sure the group stays within the assigned time limits.

Recorder: This student writes all information for the group.

Reporter: This student speaks for the group and shares the assignment with the class.

See bibliography for a list of books and websites used in this unit.

Annotated Bibliography

Finkleman, Paul. *Slavery and the Law* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2002).

This book is a series of articles discussing the way in which slavery affected the creation and abolition of the laws in the United States. It discusses the theories of democracy, constitutional law, criminal and civil law, and comparative law.

Finkleman, Paul; Urofsky Melvin I. *Documents of American Constitutional and Legal History: Volume One From the Founding through the Age of Industrialization* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press. 2002).

This book is a compilation of one hundred forty-one constitutional and legal documents with a brief introduction explaining each document's significance or meaning.

Horton, James Oliver. *Free People of Color: Inside the African American Community* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993).

This book is a series of articles chronicling the activities of various free African American communities in the nineteenth century.

Lapsansky-Werner, Emma J. "Teamed Up with the PAS: Images of Black Philadelphia," *Pennsylvania Legacies*, Volume 5 (November 2005): pp. 11-15.

This article discusses the connection between the black community and the Pennsylvania Abolition Society and the way in which this helped the black community in Philadelphia develop.

Nash, Gary. *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1810* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988).

This book gives a history of African Americans in the city of Philadelphia during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

Websites:

www.librarycompany.org/JaneJohnson/

www.archives.gov/digital_classroom/index.html

www.archives.gov/midadlantic/

www.hsp.org

www.digilib.nypl.org/dynaweb/digs/wwm97253/@Generic_BookTextView/2472

www.slaveryinamerica.org/narratives/bio_william_still.htm

www.slaveryinamerica.org/narratives/bio_richard_allen.htm

www.afrolumens.org/rising_free/waskiel.html

www.pde.state.pa.us/stateboard_ed/lib/stateboard_ed/E.HISTORY-web03.pdf

www.doheritage.state.pa.us/documents/slaveryabolition.asp

Notes

¹ King, Dana, African American History Curriculum

² Nash, Gary B., *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community* p. 8

³ Ibid, p. 10

⁴ Nash, Gary B., *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community*

⁵ Ibid

⁶ www.doheritage.state.pa.us/documents/slaveryabolition.asp