

Teacher's Guide: Slavery and the U.S. Constitution

Recommended Grade Level: 5-8

(also applicable to grades 9-12 for students requiring significant support in learning)

Suggested Time: About 50-60 minutes spread over one or more class periods, plus additional time to complete a writing assignment

Goals

Following are the big ideas that students should take away after completing this lesson:

- Slavery was debated hotly at the Constitutional Convention
- Diversity and equality were not valued by all the delegates at the Convention
- Delegates compromised on some of their beliefs to agree on the final Constitution

Vocabulary

(See definitions on page 6.)

- abolish
- convention
- delegates
- emancipation
- liberty

Key Literacy Strategies

Following are the primary literacy strategies students will use to complete this activity:

- Making inferences (screens 4 and 9, writing assignments 2 and 3)
- Determining important information (screens 5, 6, and 7)
- Comparing and contrasting ideas (screen 9, writing assignment 1)

Note: In addition to using the key literacy strategies listed above, students will use each of the strategies below to complete this lesson:

- Monitoring comprehension
- Synthesizing
- Making predictions
- Developing vocabulary
- Connecting prior knowledge to new learning
- Developing a topic in writing
- Identifying and using text features (photographs, captions, diagrams, and/or maps)

Overview

Slavery and the U.S. Constitution is a student-directed learning experience. However, while students are expected to work through the lesson on their own, teachers should be available to keep the lesson on track, organize groupings, facilitate discussions, answer questions, and ensure that students meet all learning goals.

The following is a summary of the lesson screens:

- Screen 1: Students learn that they will explore why slavery was not abolished by the authors of the U.S. Constitution.
- Screen 2: Students read about slavery in the U.S. at that time and get context for the debates over slavery that took place at the Convention.
- Screen 3: Students learn what the goals are for the lesson, which skills they will be using to complete the lesson, and the important vocabulary words they will use during the lesson.
- Screen 4: Students watch a video about the inherent contradiction between supporting slavery and promoting liberty, as embodied by Thomas Jefferson. They also write one to two sentences to share their thoughts about this fundamental problem.
- Screen 5: Students watch a video about how the issue of slavery shaped the debate at the Constitutional Convention. They then write down one reason pro-slavery delegates gave for owning slaves.
- Screen 6: Students answer three multiple-choice questions to show their comprehension of the issues raised at the Convention.
- Screen 7: Students read a passage on how slavery shaped the Constitution. After they have finished reading, they list two to three ways in which slavery influenced different parts of the Constitution.
- Screen 8: Students complete an interactive vocabulary activity, and then choose two words from the vocabulary list and write a new sentence for each word. These tasks demonstrate their understanding of the meanings of the words.
- Screen 9: Students use an interactive activity to highlight text that answers two questions about how the debate was ultimately resolved.
- Final
Assignment: Students select and complete a writing assignment about the lesson topic.

Before the Lesson

- Go through each screen of the lesson, including all the interactive activities, so that you can experience ahead of time what students will be doing. As you go through each screen, jot down your own expectations for students' responses.
- Determine if students will be working individually or in pairs on the lesson. Some students may be able to work independently with little or no support. Students who are less familiar with the subject area or who struggle with literacy skills may benefit from working with another student. An effective way to do this is to pair a stronger student with a less able reader. You can also have students work individually on certain tasks and in pairs on others, depending on their experience and needs. If students will be working in pairs on any portion of the lesson, let them know if they will be expected to type in their notes individually or together.

- Provide instruction on key vocabulary (vocabulary words are defined in the lesson on screen 3, and on page 6 of this guide).
- Determine what students already know about slavery and the Constitutional Convention. You may want to use specific questions to start the discussion, such as: What do you know about the Constitution of the United States? What was the Constitutional Convention? What kinds of issues were debated there? What do you know about slavery in the U.S. in the 1700s? Why do you think slavery was a big issue at the Convention? Record their ideas on a chart, highlighting the words that may come up in the lesson. This will give you a sense of the background knowledge and possible misconceptions that students have before beginning this lesson. If time allows, return to the chart after students have completed the lesson to add new learning and correct misconceptions. Note: You may want to record their new learning in a different-colored ink so they can see how much they've learned.
- Arrange computers with Internet access so students can work individually or in pairs.
- Before students begin, suggest a timeline for completing the lesson, mention the different types of media they will encounter, and let them know how you expect them to submit their work. You may want to provide an outline of this information on a chart, chalkboard, or whiteboard, or as a handout.

Lesson Assessments

The following are descriptions of the lesson features that will be part of the packet of materials that students will submit. Students will use the packet for reference when writing their final assignment. It also serves as a formative assessment tool to monitor students' work as they're progressing through the lesson.

- **Notes** - Students take notes on screens 4, 5, and 7. If time allows, review their notes before students begin their writing assignment.
- **Multiple-choice questions** - Students complete the three questions on screen 6. Walk around to make sure students answer all three questions in the quiz before they move on. If students click to go to the next page before they finish, their work on the quiz will not be saved.
- **Match It!** - Students complete an interactive vocabulary activity on screen 8. They begin by placing the vocabulary terms into the correct sentences. After they finish and save their work, they will be able to check their answers against an answer key. When they are done, they will be asked to choose two vocabulary words and write a new sentence for each word. Sentences should demonstrate a clear understanding of the meaning of each word. An inappropriate response would be "He was a delegate." An appropriate response would be "Each delegate to the Convention took part in the debate about slavery."
- **Highlight It!** - Students complete the comprehension activity Highlight It! on screen 9. Students read a passage about the debate at the Convention and highlight sentences that will help them answer two questions about the text.

Following are some of the statements students may highlight to answer each question.

Question 1: Which of these compromises allowed slavery to continue in the United States?

Highlighted information to answer question 1 should include the idea that all of the compromises allowed slavery to continue. However, one compromise in particular was very important: by keeping the federal government strategically limited in its power over the states and commerce, the pro-slavery delegates were able to protect slavery very effectively.

Question 2: How did the compromises protect the power of the slaveholding states?

Highlighted information to answer question 2 should include that state populations would be based on the number of free persons and three-fifths of “all other persons” (enslaved people) living in that state. This would keep slave states powerful, even though they had much smaller free populations than the free states did. Answers should also include that Congress could not vote to end the African slave trade before 1808. Also relevant is the fact that the words “slave” and “slavery” did not actually appear in the Constitution.

- **Final Assignment** - Students complete one final writing assignment. You can choose to let students make their own selection, or assign one according to your goals for the lesson. Use the rubric on page 7 to assess the writing assignments.

Lesson Aids and Extensions

Use the following suggestions to help students if they are stuck on a particular screen, to prepare students for completing their writing assignments, or as follow-up discussions to reinforce learning.

- **Watching Videos** - Encourage students to watch the videos more than once. After the initial viewing, provide students with a specific content focus to frame their next viewing(s) of the video. This will help them draw connections between the main topic and the information that the videos have to offer.
- **Participating in Discussions** - Organize class discussions or encourage students to talk about their questions in pairs. You may want to use the following discussion starters.
 - o What does Colin Powell mean when he comments that the high ideals of liberty expressed by Jefferson “didn’t apply to black folks”?
 - o How did the delegates justify to themselves this exclusion of black Americans?
 - o How might they have justified it to the nation?
 - o Do you think most Americans were comfortable with denying liberty to black Americans who were enslaved?
- **Reading the PDF Text** - Before they read the PDF text on screen 7, ask students to make predictions about the delegates’ final decisions on each issue based on their knowledge of U.S. government today.

- **Sharing Student Work** - It may be motivational, and a further learning opportunity, for students to post their final essays so that their classmates, peers, and/or parents can see them. This may also provide an opportunity for students to comment on and discuss each other's essays.

If you do not already have access to an online writing community, Teaching Matters™ provides TeXT, free classroom publishing tools that allow teachers and students to create and publish their own online eZine. More information and a free signup are available at Teaching Matters: TeXT (<http://text.teachingmatters.org>).

- **Reflection and Self-Assessment** - After students have turned in their writing assignments, you can choose to have them assess their learning. Bring students together as a whole class or in small groups to discuss the questions below. You may want to return to the chart of their ideas developed before the lesson and record their new learning. You may also have students respond individually to the questions and then convene the class to discuss the chart.
 - o What did you learn?
 - o What was surprising?
 - o What questions do you still have?
 - o What was the easiest for you to understand and do?
 - o What was the most difficult?

Vocabulary Definitions

abolish

To end something completely.

convention

A large meeting where the people who attend discuss specific topics.

delegates

People chosen to represent a larger group at a meeting or event.

emancipation

Freeing people who have been denied their rights. This word is usually used to describe the process of freeing people from slavery.

liberty

Freedom to do whatever you want as long as it does not harm others.

Final Assignment Rubric Slavery and the U.S. Constitution

- Describe in your own words how slavery was an issue at the Constitutional Convention. What compromises over slavery did the delegates reach in the Constitution?
- Imagine that you are a Constitutional delegate from a Northern state. Write up a short argument establishing your position on what should be done about slavery in the new nation.
- Imagine that you are a delegate from a Southern state. Write up a short argument establishing your position on what should be done about slavery in the new nation.

4	3	2	1
Provides a clear and accurate response to the question. Ideas are elaborated, with three or more relevant supporting details from the reading passage, video, and other materials in the lesson.	Provides an adequate response to the question. Topic and ideas are generally well organized, with two relevant supporting details from the reading passage, video, and other materials in the lesson.	Provides a generally accurate response, with one supporting detail from the reading passage, video, and other materials in the lesson.	Provides an inaccurate response to the question or fails to address the question. May include misinterpretations. Understanding of the topic is not apparent.
Uses at least three vocabulary words (or a form of the vocabulary words) from the lesson, and uses them all correctly.	Uses two vocabulary words (or a form of the vocabulary words) from the lesson, and uses them both correctly.	Uses one vocabulary word (or a form of the vocabulary word) from the lesson, and uses it correctly.	Does not use any vocabulary words, or uses vocabulary words incorrectly.

Scoring the Rubric

Here are two suggestions for scoring the final assignment rubric. Select the option that best meets your needs or develop your own grading system.

Option 1: This option provides one score for each submitted assignment.

Assign a score of 4 or below for the written response (first row of the rubric) and a score of 4 or below for the use of vocabulary (second row of the rubric), for a total maximum score of 8. The interpretation of scores is as follows:

Score	Grade	Narrative Interpretation
7-8	A	Excellent
5-6	B	Good
4	C	Adequate (Fair)
3 or below	D	Minimal

Option 2: This option provides two scores for each submitted assignment: one for written content and one for the use of key vocabulary. An advantage of separate scores is that you can weight students' comprehension and composition differently than you do their knowledge of vocabulary. It can also help you identify specific needs for future instruction.

Assign a score of 4 or below for the written response (first row of the rubric) and a score of 4 or below for the use of vocabulary (second row of the rubric) and then score them separately. The interpretation of scores is as follows:

Score	Grade	Narrative Interpretation
4	A	Excellent
3	B	Good
2	C	Adequate (Fair)
1	D	Minimal

The final grade may look like this: A/B (A for content and B for vocabulary use).