



Unit 3 Activities

Slavery in American Life

Slavery and unfree labor stood at the heart of American life from the founding of the colonies, and benefitted even those who did not own enslaved people. It touched — and was practiced in — every colony, including all of those in the North. The purpose of this unit is to remind students that neither the American Revolution, nor the experiences and choices of people of African descent within it, can be grasped without this understanding.

Aims /Objective

The modular activities and extensions in this unit provide opportunities for students to:

- Compare and contrast the institutions of indentured servitude and slavery leading up to the American Revolution
- Discuss and visualize the significance of slavery and unfree labor in colonial America

Materials

Big Idea 3: Slavery in American Life

Finding Freedom Sources:

- Interactive: London’s Story

Other Resources:

- Worksheet: Indentured Servitude and Slavery (Included)
- Answer Key: Indentured Servitude and Slavery (Included)
- Worksheet: Virginia Laws on Manumission (Included)

Procedures

Note: Please be aware of the environment you and your students create when discussing the experiences of people of African descent, particularly enslaved people. This can be an emotional topic with the power to create lasting memories for students of all backgrounds, particularly those who continue to experience racism in the present.

Engagement

MEETING LONDON 10-20 minutes

Teacher Preparation: Review London’s story in the *Finding Freedom* interactive. Read *Big Idea 3: Slavery in American Life*.

As a group or individually, have students explore London’s story in the *Finding Freedom* interactive. Engage students in conversation around the following questions:

- Why do people hold others enslaved?
- Why don’t people want to be enslaved? What makes slavery bad?
- Is there such a thing as a good slave owner?
- Why might London have decided to run away from slavery?

Development

COMPARE AND CONTRAST 20 minutes

Teacher Preparation: Review *Big Idea 3: Slavery in American Life* and print enough copies for each student to have one. Also print copies of the *Indentured Servitude and Slavery worksheet* for students and a copy of the key for yourself.

Have students read *Big Idea 3*, focusing on the “Beginnings” and “Slavery and the Law” sections. Using what they’ve read, ask them to complete the *Indentured Servitude and Slavery worksheet*. Then have students highlight or circle the differences they think are most important. Discuss as a group.

LONDON AND THE LAW 20 minutes

After students have explored London's story in the *Finding Freedom* interactive, remind students that London's owner, Robert Pleasants, was a Quaker who planned to set London free once he reached the age of 30 years old. Distribute the "Virginia Laws on Manumission" worksheet. Ask students to work in pairs or small groups to analyze the primary source quotes on the worksheet, recording their answers. Then, as a class, review responses and discuss the following questions:

- How might London's life have been different had the law on manumission been changed sooner?
- Why do you think the Virginia General Assembly prohibited manumission? Who did it benefit?
- Why might the Virginia General Assembly have changed their approach to manumission in 1782?
- What was the relationship between the law and the economy, as seen in these excerpts?

Extensions and Adaptations

UNIVERSITIES AND SLAVERY

In recent years, many of the United States' oldest universities have begun to grapple with the ways in which they benefitted from — or directly engaged in — the practice of slavery. Ask students to choose one of the universities listed at the following links and create a report exploring how that institution benefitted from or participated in slavery in the 1600s or 1700s and what, if any, responsibility they believe the institution has for providing restitution today: Universities Studying Slavery (<https://slavery.virginia.edu/universities-studying-slavery/>), Penn & Slavery Project (<http://pennandslaveryproject.org/>), The Princeton & Slavery Project (<https://slavery.princeton.edu/>).

Culmination

RELATIONSHIP MAPPING COLONIAL SLAVERY

Research

Using Big Idea 3: Slavery in American Life as a starting point, and incorporating additional research, have students create a relationship map showing the various ways that slavery touched one of the colonies prior to the Revolutionary War. Lines can be used to show connections, arrows can be used to show causality, etc. Areas to consider: trade and the production of goods, daily life, laws, religion, geography and community design, architecture, security, food, language, and more.

Have students present their maps to one another or display as a silent gallery, then discuss as a class afterward.

SLAVERY TODAY

Most people believe that slavery was abolished with the 13th Amendment. However, though illegal "except as punishment for a crime," many people are still held in involuntary servitude in the United States today. Ask students to research modern slavery and write and record a public service announcement to inform their peers and community about the problem and possible solutions.