

The Lives of the Enslaved in Texas

OVERVIEW:

This lesson plan centers on the different lived experiences of enslaved people across Texas. This one-day activity asks students to read short narratives, collect and compare evidence, generate themes that connect enslaved people's experiences based on their evidence, and then write a short paragraph using that evidence.

BACKGROUND:

As an institution, specific things defined what it meant to be enslaved under the law—the lack of individual rights and autonomy; limited mobility, meaning enslaved people's movements were controlled and they had to have passes to leave the places they were enslaved; pervasive experiences of violence; the constant threat of sale and separation from loved ones; prohibitions against owning personal property; and the inability to control and profit from their own labor. As a *lived* experience, slavery was different within each slaveholding household because enslavers established and enforced different rules. In some places, enslaved people had access to better food, clothing, and living conditions. In small slaveholding households, enslaved people lived and worked in close proximity to their enslaver—meaning they were under constant surveillance. On large plantations, enslaved people were more likely to live among family and belong to a distinct community. Enslavers used violence to compel compliance, regardless of household size. All these things shaped their lived experience.

OBJECTIVE & LEARNING OUTCOME:

Students will compare enslaved people's lived experiences for what they reveal about slavery in Texas.

TEKS:

(8.7) History. The student understands how political, social, economic, and social factors led to the growth of sectionalism and the Civil War. The student is expected to:

(A) analyze the impact of slavery on different sections of the United States.

(8.8) History. The student understands individuals, issues, and events of the Civil War. The student is expected to:

(B) explain the central role of the expansion of slavery in causing sectionalism, disagreement over the states' rights, and the Civil War.

(8.23) Culture. The student understands the relationships between and among people from various groups, including racial, ethnic, and religious groups, during the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. The student is expected to:

(C) identify ways conflicts between people from various racial, ethnic, and religious groups were addressed.

(8.29) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired through established research methodologies from a variety of valid sources, including technology. The student is expected to:

- (A) differentiate between, locate, and use valid primary and secondary sources such as media and news services, biographies, interviews, and artifacts to acquire information about the United States.
- (C) organize and interpret information from outlines, reports, databases, and visuals, including graphs, charts, timelines, and maps;
- (D) identify bias and points of view created by the historical context surrounding an event;
- (E) support a point of view on a social studies issue or event;
- (F) evaluate the validity of a source based on corroboration with other sources and information about the author;

WARM UP:

- Show students the images of the exterior and interior of the restored slave cabins on the Seward Plantation that appear in “Slave Dwellings and Memory: Spatial Analysis and Slave Cabins on the Seward Plantation.”
- Give them a few minutes to really look at each image.
- Have students make a list of 3-5 details from the photographs that they think are important for showing what life was like for the people who lived in this cabin.
 - Teachers can do this as a think, pair, share exercise in which students come up with a list on their own, compare their list with another student, and then share with the class.
- Ask students to volunteer (or call on students directly) to share one of the ideas from their list or partnered discussion with the class. Make a list of their responses.
 - Have them explain why they think each detail is important.
- Ask students what questions they have about enslaved people’s lives after looking at the images. Teachers can make a separate list of these questions to return to at the end of the class period.

ACTIVITY: (1 class period)

- Divide students into small groups (3-6 students).
 - Assign each student in the group one of the following stories. Make sure at least one person in the group is reading each story found on the website.
 - “Lives of the Enslaved in Red River County: Interviews with Harriet Jones and Mose Hursey, 1936-8”
 - “On the Run: Moving Toward Freedom & Family”
 - “Sarah Mitchell Ford: Slavery and Freedom in Brazoria County, 1854-1945”
- For larger groups, where more than one student will read the same story, it allows you to pair students with different reading abilities together.
- If your students are relatively on the same reading/comprehension levels, then this is not necessary.

- As they read, ask students to think about:
 - What does each story reveal about life for enslaved people in this place?
- After they read, have each student identify three details from the narrative and, using the worksheet, explain what that detail shows.
 - For example:
 - EVIDENCE: *Harriet Jones—the slave owners watched their enslaved people celebrate Christmas*
 - THIS EVIDENCE SHOWS: *Even when allowed to celebrate a holiday, the enslaved people in this household were under surveillance by the people who enslaved them. They were limited in how they could celebrate.*
- When the students in each group have finished, have them summarize the narrative they read for their group and then share the details they selected.
- After all students have summarized and shared their details with each other (in their groups), have them come up with 1-2 themes that connect specific details.
 - Possible themes: resistance, punishment, violence, living conditions, family, etc.
- Have students organize the themes and evidence to collaboratively write a paragraph explaining what life was like for enslaved people in Texas. This requires them to form broader conclusions drawn from the narratives and their selected pieces of evidence to support those conclusions.

*Possible variation, expand into a 2-day lesson.

- Day 1, end the class by bringing the whole class back together to discuss each narrative one at a time. Have students who read the narrative being discussed share their evidence and ideas.
- Day 2, give groups half of the class period to write their paragraphs. During the second half of class, have students exchange paragraphs with another group. Direct them to read, discuss, and provide feedback on the other group's paragraph. This kind of peer editing helps students evaluate others' writing, use of evidence, conclusions, etc. that will improve their own analytical and writing skills.
 - Ask them to consider:
 - What does paragraph do well?
 - How could the paragraph be better?

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DIRECTIONS: Read the short, assigned passage. Identify three pieces of evidence from the reading. For each piece of evidence, briefly explain what that evidence shows.

EVIDENCE: _____

THIS EVIDENCE SHOWS: _____

EVIDENCE: _____

THIS EVIDENCE SHOWS: _____

EVIDENCE: _____

THIS EVIDENCE SHOWS: _____

Using specific evidence, write a paragraph explaining what life was like for enslaved people in Texas.
