

Halfway to Freedom

Lesson 2: Historical Heads

Focus Questions

Who were John and Mary Jones? How did the Illinois Black Laws affect the lives of African Americans in Chicago? What did the abolitionists of Chicago risk by their civil disobedience? What various factors in life can affect people's decision-making?

Core Understandings

Students will understand why John and Mary Jones were such important figures in 19th-century Chicago. They will understand that while Illinois was a free state, the institution of slavery still had an impact on the lives of free African Americans.

Knowledge

Students will know that Mary and John Jones were prominent abolitionists in Chicago and among the most important African American citizens in the city's history. They will know how the institution of slavery affected both the lives of slaves and free African Americans.

Skills

Students will use their interpretive skills to identify the circumstances, opportunities, and limitations imposed on both free and enslaved African Americans in the 1850s. They will use their analytical skills to discern between fact and fiction. They will use their language arts skills to summarize their interpretations verbally.

Common Core ELA Standards

CCSS.R.1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
CCSS.R.3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.
CCSS.SL.1. Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
CCSS.SL.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

ISBE Social Science Standards

Goal 15: Understand economic systems, with an emphasis on the US.
Goal 16: Understand events, trends, individuals and movements shaping the history of Illinois, the US, and other nations.
Goal 17: Understand world geography and the effects of geography on society, with an emphasis on the US.
Goal 18: Understand social systems, with an emphasis on the US.

In This Lesson

This lesson uses the "historical head" conceptual framework derived from the work of James Percoco to explore the thoughts and feelings of the characters in *Halfway to Freedom*. The story elements of setting, character, and obstacles/problems are addressed. This lesson was researched and written by Kris Ballard.



Activity

Begin by reviewing *Halfway to Freedom* and the guided-reading questions from the Lesson 1 Home Connection.

Next, divide the class into five groups and give each a blank “historical head” representing one of the following characters: Hannah, Shepherd, Mary Jones, John Jones, and a Slave Hunter. Blank heads should be drawn in profile using a heavy black marker on full-sized easel-board sheets. (For examples, see Lesson 2 of the *Angelo’s Saturdays* unit.)

Instruct students to fill in the head with the various ideas, hopes, memories, and dreams of the assigned character. Make sure students include what each character was risking by his or her actions. Students should reference the story as much as possible and quote directly from the story as needed. Both words and pictures are acceptable additions; students can use printouts of the *Halfway to Freedom* artifact image set, printouts from the interactive history map, or their own drawings.

Finish by having each group present its historical head to the entire class.

Materials & Resources

- **Printouts of the *Halfway to Freedom* narrative:**
http://www.GreatChicagoStories.org/pdf/story/Halfway_to_Freedom_by_Melody_Herr.pdf
- **Printouts of the *Halfway to Freedom* artifact image set (optional):**
http://www.chicagohistory.org/greatchicagostories/pdf/artifacts/artifacts_halfway_to_freedom.pdf
- **Butcher-block or easel-board paper**
- **Markers and other art supplies**

Instructional Notes

For more information about James Percoco’s “historical head” activity, see page 31 of his book *A Passion for the Past: Creative Teaching of U.S. History* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1998).

You may wish to post the heads in the classroom for the duration of the unit.

Extension Activities

Have students do a reader’s theater performance of *Halfway to Freedom*. For tips on facilitating reader’s theater, see the Classroom Activities section of the *Great Chicago Stories* website.

<http://www.chicagohistory.org/greatchicagostories/classroom/reader.php>

“Living Under the Black Laws of Illinois” and/or “John Jones and the Fight to Repeal the Black laws of Illinois,” two of the Chicago History Museum’s History Lab lessons, offer a number of valuable learning activities about African American life in 19th-century Chicago.

<http://www.chicagohistory.org/education/resources/history-lab/african-american-life-in-the-nineteenth-century>