

Halfway to Freedom

Lesson 3: DBQ Essay

Focus Questions

How did the Illinois Black Laws affect the lives of African Americans in Chicago? When are acts of civil disobedience justified? How can historical documents and secondary sources be used to support or refute a thesis?

Core Understandings

Students will understand the complex forces that resulted in acts of civil disobedience on the part of abolitionists. They will gain historical empathy as well as an understanding of the abolitionist movement in 1850s Chicago. They will understand how primary and secondary sources are used to support or refute historical positions.

Knowledge

Students will know key historical figures, circumstances, and events of the abolitionist movement in Chicago in the 1850s. They will know how to cite primary source documents and secondary scholarship to support or refute a thesis. They will know the difference between fact and fiction.

Skills

Students will use their analytical skills to interpret primary and secondary historical sources. They will use their writing and interpretive skills to persuasively argue a position.

Common Core ELA Standards

CCSS.R1. 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.R2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

CCSS.R.7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCSS.R8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

CCSSW1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

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

Students will write an essay on John and Mary Jones and the abolitionist movement in 1850s Chicago using the document-based questions approach. The story elements of character and conflicts/problems are addressed. This lesson was researched and written by Kris Ballard.



Activity

Begin the lesson by distributing and reviewing the background information for *Halfway to Freedom*. http://www.chicagohistory.org/greatchicagostories/pdf/background/Halfway_Background_Information2.pdf Also distribute printouts of the *Halfway to Freedom* artifact image set. http://www.chicagohistory.org/greatchicagostories/pdf/artifacts/artifacts_halfway_to_freedom.pdf

Direct students to write a two-page essay in response to the following question: Was Illinois a “free” state in the 1850s?

Students should complete this assignment using a document-based question (DBQ) approach. Students should draw upon all resources provided in the unit thus far plus any other sources you would like to provide. (Suggestions are listed under Materials & Resources.)

Essays should be structured according to the following outline:

- I. Introduce the background and lay out a thesis.
- II. Lay out the merits of your thesis, supported by evidence and documents.
- III. Lay out the merits of an opposing view, supported by evidence and documents.
- IV. Explain why your chosen argument prevails, comparing and contrasting documents and other evidence.

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:**
http://www.chicagohistory.org/greatchicagostories/pdf/artifacts/artifacts_halfway_to_freedom.pdf
- **“Meet John and Mary Jones,” a Chicago History Museum History Lab lesson:**
http://chicagohistory.org/static_media/pdf/historylab/CHM-historylabAALL1.pdf
- **“Living Under the Illinois Black Codes,” a Chicago History Museum History Lab lesson:**
http://chicagohistory.org/static_media/pdf/historylab/CHM-historylabAALL2.pdf
- **“John Jones and the Fight to Repeal the Black Laws of Illinois,” a Chicago History Museum History Lab lesson:**
http://chicagohistory.org/static_media/pdf/historylab/CHM-historylabAALL3.pdf
- **Additional resources about the Fugitive Slave Act, the abolitionist movement, and/or other key historical figures such as Frederick Douglass (optional)**

Instructional Notes

Students can review and cite their Artifact Analysis worksheets from Lesson 1 to support their theses.

Extension Activities

Have students read their essays aloud to the class.

Review and discuss the lyrics of “Wade in the Water” and/or other songs from this era that contained a coded message.

Handout: DBQ Essay

Was Illinois a “free” state in the 1850s?

Today you will write a two-page essay in response to the question above. In order to answer this question, you will be required to use a document-based question (DBQ) approach citing at least six pieces of evidence. Draw upon all resources provided, including the *Halfway to Freedom* story and artifact images.

Essays should be structured according to the following outline:

- I. Introduce the background and lay out a thesis.
- II. Lay out the merits of your thesis, supported by evidence and documents.
- III. Lay out the merits of an opposing view, supported by evidence and documents.
- IV. Explain why your chosen argument prevails, comparing and contrasting documents and other evidence.

For example, if you decide that Illinois was not truly free, here is something you might write:

John and Mary Jones were among the majority of Chicago’s citizens who found the Fugitive Slave Act unjust and inhuman. In fact, even the Chicago City Council passed a resolution condemning the law in 1850. (Source: “Fugitive Slave Law of 1850” in *The Electronic Encyclopedia of Chicago*.)

Or, you might argue the opposite:

John and Mary Jones were free to own their own home and business, and by carrying their freedom certificates at all times, they could safely avoid infringement on their civil rights. (Source: John Jones’s certificate of freedom, *Halfway to Freedom* interactive history map.)