

LESSON 17

MUSEUM CONNECTION: Family and Community

Lesson Title: Josiah Henson: From Slavery to Freedom

Purpose: In this lesson students will examine the life of the slave Josiah Henson and his quest for freedom. They will examine the hardships of slavery and the determination of the people who lived through it to gain their freedom. Students will discuss their attitudes and views by reading primary source documents to analyze Josiah Henson's thoughts and feelings.

Grade Level and Content Area: Intermediate Elementary/Social Studies

Time Frame: 1-2 class periods

Correlation to Social Studies Standard:

USH 2.3.5.4 Examine the gradual institutionalization of slavery into America, including various responses to slavery, and how slavery shaped the lives of the colonists and Africans in America

Social Studies:

Maryland College and Career Ready Standards

- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| 3.A.1 (Grades 4 and 5) | Locate places and describe the human and physical characteristics of those places using geographic tools |
| 3.C.1.b (Grade 4) | Identify reasons for the movement of people to, from and within Maryland |
| 5.A.1.c (Grade 4) | Describe the establishment of slavery and how it shaped life in Maryland |
| 5.B.2.c (Grade 5) | Describe the different roles and viewpoints of individuals and groups, such as: women, men, free and enslaved Africans, and Native Americans during the Revolutionary period |
| 6.F.1 (Grades 4 and 5) | Interpret information from primary and secondary sources |

Correlation to State Reading and English Language Arts Maryland College and Career Ready Standards:

- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| 1.E.1.a (Grades 4 and 5) | Listen to critically, read, and discuss texts representing diversity in content, culture, authorship, and perspective, including areas such as race, gender, disability, religion, and socio-economic background |
| 1.E.3 (Grades 4 and 5) | Use strategies to make meaning from text (during reading) |

Objective:

Students will analyze the life of Josiah Henson and the impact of slavery on his life and quest for freedom.

VOCABULARY AND CONCEPTS:

Abolitionist – An abolitionist advocated for or participated in the movement to end slavery.

Anti-slavery – Anti-slavery individuals and groups opposed the institution of slavery.

Auction – An auction is a public sale of goods or property in which articles are sold to the person who offers the most money.

Fugitive – A person who runs away or tries to escape captivity is called a fugitive.

Hardship – A hardship is something that causes suffering.

Settler – A person who makes a home in a new land is called a settler.

Underground Railroad – The secret network of safe houses and trails by which many slaves escaped to freedom was called the Underground Railroad.

MATERIALS

FOR THE TEACHER:

Recording of dramatic reading of **Student Resource Sheet 5**, “Father Henson’s story of His Own Life”

FOR THE STUDENT:

Student Resource Sheet 1 – Slavery K-W-L Chart

Student Resource Sheet 2 – Note-Taking Guide

Student Resource Sheet 3 – From Slavery to Freedom

Student Resource Sheet 4 – Josiah Henson’s Life

Student Resource Sheet 5 – Father Henson’s Story of His Own Life

RESOURCES:

African Americans: Voices of Triumph. Alexandria, Virginia: Time-Life Books, 1994.

Blassingame, John, ed. *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977.

Chapelle, Suzanne, and Glenn Phillips. *African American Leaders of Maryland: A Portrait Gallery*. Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 2004.

Christian, Charles M. *Black Saga: The African American Experience*. New York: Basic Civitas, 1999.

Jacobs, Harriet. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. New York: Signet Classics, 2000.

Schwartz, Marie Jenkins. *Born in Bondage: Growing Up Enslaved in the Antebellum South*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000.

WEB SITES:

The Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave, Now an Inhabitant of Canada. A Narrative by Himself, by Josiah Henson

<http://www.iath.virginia.edu/utc/abolitn/henson49hp.html>

Truth Stranger Than Fiction: Father Henson's Story of His Own Life by Josiah Henson
<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/henson58/henson58.html>

Uncle Tom's Story of His Life: An Autobiography of the Rev. Josiah Henson. Josiah Henson
<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/henson/henson.html>

National Underground Railroad Freedom Center
<http://www.undergroundrailroad.org>

Pathways to Freedom: Maryland and the Underground Railroad, Josiah Henson
<http://pathways.thinkport.org/eyewitness/hensonintro.cfm>

Testimony of the Canadian Fugitives
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snrelated.html>

Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture.
<http://www.iath.virginia.edu/utc/sitemap.htm> 1

TEACHER BACKGROUND

Slavery

Although the focus of this lesson is on Josiah Henson, there are some aspects of slavery that allow us to better understand Henson and to put his life in context. For example, Marie Schwartz, a noted historian, identifies separate stages of slave life from childhood to adulthood. She notes that infancy ends with the weaning of the child and early childhood ends when children are able to work and receive training in job responsibilities, which includes an awareness of punishment for poor performance. Another stage includes the assumption of adult work, somewhere between 10 and 12 years of age. Although the narrative of Harriet Jacobs (*Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*) documents the abusive exploitation of slave girls, it also describes life in the slave community that includes adults courting, marrying, having children, and being responsible mothers and fathers.

As enslaved children became aware of their status, sometimes they were lashed by the owner and overseer for disciplinary reasons. On other occasions, children were made to witness their parents being punished by the owner. Frederick Douglass witnessed his aunt being whipped and said that the memory was seared in his brain. Splitting family members by sales could be traumatic experiences for enslaved children, but this is where the enslaved family served, as historian John Blassingame says, "as a survival mechanism." In essence, there seemed to be two educational processes contending on plantations. One process was implemented by owners as they attempted to mold subservient and loyal slaves who would learn their inferior status and be restricted by slave codes (for example, slaves could not be taught to read or to write and could not leave the plantation without a pass). The other process inhered in teachings by the enslaved family and the slave community. Young children were taught self-esteem, proper etiquette in front of Whites in order to avoid punishment, and the importance of education (reading and writing), freedom, friendship, and cooperation with other slaves. These two teaching processes frequently collided. Most slaves never abandoned their desire for freedom, despite the fact that enslaved individuals and families displayed loyalty to owners and "got along" to benefit from their acquiescence; some owners were so consistently abusive that enslaved individuals and families succumbed to the owner's indoctrination.

Enslaved people developed cultural values, such as respect for the extended family, promoting their mutual support and survival. Blacks created their own religion by integrating their history and values with nineteenth-century Christianity. For many, Jesus became their friend, comforter, and protector. Religion became a way for many enslaved Africans to cope with everyday problems, and it provided hope for a

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better future in which no restrictions would be placed on their lives. Another aspect of slave culture involved status among their peers. Within the community, for example, elders on the plantation had a certain prominence in relation to other slaves. Slaves who could read or write were highly regarded. Slaves who were skilled in a trade, trapped game, or tended gardens to supplement the community's rations of food and provisions were also respected. Other means of recognition and positions of status depended on the size of the farm or plantation and the diversity of work required.

Within the slave culture, some values were very important. Enslaved Africans valued friendship, education, and most importantly freedom. They tried to gain their freedom in all kinds of ways including purchasing themselves (if the owner allowed this arrangement), running away, or through rebellions. Because so many slaves ran away to find freedom, the Underground Railroad emerged as a network to help them escape. In most places, the Underground Railroad was comprised of individuals, families, and organizations that formed a loosely connected network of Blacks and Whites who helped runaways get to the free states. Some slaves ran away by themselves while others ran away in groups; some forged passes and used various disguises to escape to freedom; and some even mailed themselves to safe houses to make their escape.

The Life of Josiah Henson

Josiah Henson was born in Charles County, Maryland, on June 15, 1789. He was the youngest of six children, all of whom were born into slavery. When Josiah was a young child, his father was whipped 100 times, and his ear was cut off. This event is one of Josiah's clearest memories of his father and it was one that he never forgot. As was frequently done during the time of slavery, Josiah's father was "sold south," leaving his mother alone with six children.

Josiah's mother found solace in her faith and often recited the Lord's Prayer and other scriptural verses. Her faith sustained her and she would often teach these verses to her children. Day to day she lived with the fear that her children would be sold away from her. Soon her nightmare became a reality when all of her children were sold to different owners.

Josiah's mother tried desperately to beg for Josiah to stay with her since he was the last child to be auctioned. The auctioneer was cruel, and he sold Josiah while she cried and wept uncontrollably. Mrs. Henson was sold to Isaac Riley. Soon after this, Josiah became very ill and was not able to work as hard as his new owner had planned, so he was sold to Mr. Riley for a cheap price.

Mrs. Henson was overjoyed! She was able to nurse her son back to health. Like most slave children, Josiah's early jobs consisted of bringing food and water to the field slaves. A typical food for the slaves consisted of corn mush. As he grew older and became stronger he took on more difficult jobs. Sometimes Josiah would kill a pig or a hen in order to add variety to the slaves' meals. He would do this secretly as it was a crime for which he would be punished.

Josiah soon became a strong and trustworthy slave. His owner trusted him so much that he was often allowed to go to town to buy and sell goods for his owner. One day Josiah's owner got into a fight, and, when Josiah came to Riley's aid, the other man fell and blamed Josiah. It was against the law for a black man to hit a white man. Josiah was severely beaten for this crime.

Josiah continued in his trustworthy ways and was soon allowed to take 21 slaves to Kentucky. The slaves had to walk the entire journey. The trip took the slaves by the Ohio River. Ohio was a free state, and many slaves knew that once they were there they would be free; however, out of a sense of loyalty, Josiah and the other slaves did not cross the Ohio River.

Josiah then worked for Amos Riley, his owner's brother. It was during this time that the other slaves on the plantation were sold, everyone except for Josiah and his family. At this point he began to think seriously about his freedom. Josiah remembered the early teachings of his mother and decided to begin preaching. He was able to travel around to preach and as people gave him donations for his preaching he saved his money. He was allowed to preach because he was trusted to return to his master; while traveling, Josiah carried a special pass stating his destination and identifying his owner.

Josiah began asking about the price for his freedom. During this time, many slave owners would allow slaves to purchase their freedom. Josiah's price was \$450, a substantial amount of money for a slave to obtain. Josiah saved his money and offered it to his master, who then raised the price. Josiah was very hurt by this trickery.

Soon Josiah learned that he would be sold away from his family. He was so angry that he took an axe and was going to kill his owner, but fate intervened and Josiah chose not to do this. He then decided to run away and take his family with him because he could not bear the thought of their being apart. Henson had to convince his wife, Charlotte, that running away was the only way to give their children a future. Josiah told only one other person, another slave, of his plan. Josiah, Charlotte, and their children left late at night. The trusted friend rowed them across the Ohio River from Kentucky to Ohio. They were going to Canada, the only place Josiah felt they would be safe.

The journey was long and difficult. His wife had made a knapsack large enough to carry his two youngest children, and Josiah carried them on his back while his two other children walked. Along the way they were befriended by some Native Americans who gave them food and shelter. The family also utilized the Underground Railroad. Josiah and his family arrived in Canada on October 28, 1830. He was 42 years old.

During his time in Canada, Josiah started the Dawn Settlement, a refuge and a new beginning for former slaves. Fugitive slaves were taught to read, write, and learn a trade. Josiah also became a leader with the Underground Railroad. He never forgot how the Underground Railroad helped him and his family, and he helped more than 200 slaves escape to Canada.

Josiah Henson is believed to be the model for Uncle Tom in Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Ms. Stowe was so impressed with Josiah Henson's life story that she based her main character on him. She was an avid abolitionist who spoke frequently against slavery, and her book affected many people who became outraged by the horrors of slavery.

Josiah Henson endured the horrors of slavery. Throughout his life, he showed himself to be a man of high ideals. Josiah is to be admired because he bravely made a better life for himself and his family and because he helped many other slaves escape to freedom.

LESSON DEVELOPMENT

1. **Motivation:** Access prior knowledge about slavery using **Student Resource Sheet 1**, Slavery K-W-L Chart. Have students independently fill in the "know" section of the chart. As a class, discuss what students "know" and complete the "want to know" section of the chart.
2. Pre-teach vocabulary words.
3. Set the purpose for reading about Josiah Henson by posing the following questions.
 - What were the hardships he endured?
 - What were some of his accomplishments?
 - How were his beliefs and inspirational acts recognized by others?

4. Distribute **Student Resource Sheet 2**, Note-Taking Guide, and **Student Resource Sheet 3**, From Slavery to Freedom. Read **Student Resource Sheet 3** aloud with the class.
5. Show students how to underline information that should be placed on **Student Resource Sheet 2**. Model writing this information on a transparency of the resource sheet. Have students record this information on their own resource sheets.
6. Distribute **Student Resource Sheet 4**, Josiah Henson’s Life. Have students work in pairs to read this text and record information from the document on their resource sheet. When all pairs have completed this task, debrief as an entire class.
7. Distribute **Student Resource Sheet 5**, Father Henson’s Story of His Own Life. Have students listen to a recording of the selection or independently read the information. Have students add new information to their resource sheet. Discuss as a class.
8. **Assessment:** Have students answer the following question: What was the impact of slavery on the life of Josiah Henson? Be sure to have students include details from their Note-Taking Guide. Students may be given the option to present their responses by writing an essay, creating a poster, or presenting a speech.
9. **Closure:** Complete the “What I Learned” section of **Student Resource Sheet 1**, Slavery K-W-L Chart. Have students discuss the impact of slavery on the life of Josiah Henson and his quest for freedom.

THOUGHTFUL APPLICATIONS:

- What are some situations or hardships that students have to tolerate today? Can Josiah Henson be an inspiration and a role model today?
- What adjectives would you use to describe Josiah Henson? Select a contemporary person. Does that person share any of Henson’s characteristics? Would you consider that person to be a hero?

Lesson Extensions:

Visit the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture.

Student Resource Sheet 1

**SLAVERY
K-W-L CHART**

WHAT I KNOW	WHAT I WANT TO KNOW	WHAT I LEARNED

Student Resource Sheet 2

Note-Taking Guide

<p>Hardships</p>	
<p>Accomplishments</p>	
<p>Beliefs & Feelings</p>	
<p>Quotes</p>	

From Slavery to Freedom

Josiah Henson was born on June 15, 1789, in Charles County, Maryland. He was the youngest of six children, all of whom were born into slavery. When Josiah was a young child, his father was whipped 100 times, and his ear was cut off. This event is one of Josiah's clearest memories of his father, and it was one he never forgot. As was frequently done during the time of slavery, Josiah's father was "sold south," leaving his mother alone with six children.

Josiah's mother found solace in her faith and often recited the Lord's Prayer and other scriptural verses. She would often teach these verses to her children. Her faith sustained her, as was the usual case for slave mothers. Day to day she lived with the fear that her children would be sold away from her. Soon her nightmare became a reality when all of her children were sold to different owners.

Josiah's mother begged desperately for Josiah to be allowed to remain with her, since he was the last child to be auctioned. The auctioneer was cruel, and he sold Josiah while his mother cried and wept uncontrollably. Mrs. Henson was sold to Isaac Riley. Soon after this, Josiah became very ill and was not able to work as hard as his new owner had planned, so he was sold to Mr. Riley for a cheap price.

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Student Resource Sheet 3b

He was allowed to preach because he was so trusted to return to his master; while traveling, Josiah needed to carry a special pass stating his destination and identifying his owner.

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During his time in Canada, Josiah started the Dawn Settlement, a refuge and a new beginning for former slaves. Fugitive slaves were taught to read, write, and learn a trade. Josiah also became a leader with the Underground Railroad. He never forgot how the Underground Railroad helped him and his family, and he helped more than 200 slaves escape to Canada.

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Josiah Henson endured the horrors of slavery, yet always showed himself to be a man of high ideals. Josiah is to be admired because he bravely made a better life for himself, his family, and many other slaves escaping to freedom.

Summaries of Excerpts from

The Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave, Now an Inhabitant of Canada. Narrated by Himself

Now living in Kentucky and working for Amos Riley, Henson meets a white Methodist preacher, who encourages him to buy his own freedom and helps him devise a means to do so. Henson travels back to Maryland to meet with Isaac Riley, preaching to white Methodist congregations and raising money on the way. He arranges with Riley to buy his freedom for \$450, but upon returning to Kentucky finds that his master has deceived him, tricking him out of \$350 and leaving him a slave. "I consoled myself as well as I could...resolved to trust in God, and never despair" (27-37).

Henson is on the verge of being sold in New Orleans when Amos Riley, Jr., falls seriously ill and depends on Henson to carry him back to Kentucky. There Henson decides to escape to freedom, although it takes some time to convince his wife to accompany him along with their four children. The family is rowed across the Ohio by a fellow slave, helped in the Ohio wilderness by American Indians, and carried from Sandusky to Canada by the captain of a freight boat. Arriving in Canada on October 28, 1830, he finds work almost immediately as a day laborer (44-60).

After several years pioneering on new land, while making periodic trips back into Maryland and Kentucky to bring other slaves back to Canada with him, Henson finds white sponsors for the idea of his black community at Dawn. He buys land and founds the manual labor school (68-76).

From *The Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave, Now an Inhabitant of Canada. Narrated by Himself* by Josiah Henson (Boston: Arthur D. Phelps, 1849). Available online at <http://www.iath.virginia.edu/utc/abolitn/abaujha1t.html>

Student Resource Sheet 5

Excerpts from
Father Henson's Story of His Own Life

“Our term of happy union as one family was now, alas! at an end. Mournful as was the Doctor's death to his friends, it was a far greater calamity to us. The estate and the slaves must be sold and the proceeds divided among the heirs. We were but property – not a mother and the children God had given her.

Common as are slave-auctions in the southern states, and naturally as a slave may look forward to the time when he will be put up on the block, still the full misery of the event – of the scenes which precede and succeed it – is never understood till the actual experience comes. The first sad announcement that the sale is to be; the knowledge that all ties of the past are to be sundered; the frantic terror at the idea of being sent "down south;" the almost certainty that one member of a family will be torn from another; the anxious scanning of purchasers' faces; the agony at parting, often forever, with husband, wife, child – these must be seen and felt to be fully understood. Young as I was then, the iron entered into my soul. The remembrance of the breaking up of McPherson's estate is photographed in its minutest features in my mind. The crowd collected round the stand, the huddling group of negroes, the examination of muscle, teeth, the exhibition of agility, the look of the auctioneer, the agony of my mother – I can shut my eyes and see them all.

My brothers and sisters were bid off first, and one by one, while my mother, paralyzed by grief, held me by the hand. Her turn came, and she was bought by Isaac Riley of Montgomery County. Then I was offered to the assembled purchasers. My mother, half distracted with the thought of parting forever from all her children, pushed through the crowd, while the bidding for me was going on, to the spot where Riley was standing. She fell at his feet, and clung to his knees, entreating him in tones that a mother only could command, to buy her baby as well as herself, and spare to her one, at least, of her little ones. Will it, can it be believed that this man, thus appealed to, was capable not merely of turning a deaf ear to her supplication, but of disengaging himself from her with such violent blows and kicks, as to reduce her to the necessity of creeping out of his reach, and mingling the groan of bodily suffering with the sob of a breaking heart? As she crawled away from the brutal man I heard her sob out, "Oh, Lord Jesus, how long, how long shall I suffer this way!" I must have been then between five and six years old. I seem to see and hear my poor weeping mother now. This was one of my earliest observations of men; an experience which I only shared with thousands of my race, the bitterness of which to any individual who suffers it cannot be diminished by the frequency of its recurrence, while it is dark enough to overshadow the whole after-life with something blacker than a funeral pall. ... “ (10-13).

From *Truth Stranger Than Fiction. Father Henson's Story of His Own Life* by Josiah Henson (Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1858). Available online at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/henson58/henson58.html>.