

## LESSON 18

### MUSEUM CONNECTION: Family and Community

#### Lesson Title: Josiah Henson and the Abolitionist Cause

**Purpose:** In this lesson students will examine the impact of slavery on the life of Josiah Henson and his quest for freedom. They will examine excerpts from Henson's autobiography in order to determine the characteristics that Harriet Beecher Stowe found admirable enough to immortalize in her anti-slavery epic, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

**Grade Level and Content Area:** Middle, Social Studies

**Time Frame:** 2-3 class periods

#### Correlation to Social Studies Standard:

USH 2.8.8.3 Analyze the experiences of African American slaves in the South, the experiences of freed Blacks in the North who founded schools and churches to advance black rights, and the rise of anti-slavery forces.

#### Social Studies: Maryland College and Career Ready Standards

5.C.5.b (Grade 8) Analyze the experiences of African American slaves, free Blacks and the influence of abolitionists.

6.F.1 (Grade 8) 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 (Grade 8) Listen to critically, read, and discuss texts representing diversity in content, culture, authorship, and perspective, including areas such as race, gender, disability, religion, and socioeconomic background.

1.E.3.a (Grade 8) Select and apply appropriate strategies to make meaning from text during reading.

3.A.8.c (Grade 8) Analyze and evaluate the relationship between a literary text and its historical, social, and/or political context.

#### Objectives:

- Students will describe the rise of the anti-slavery movement.
- Students will examine the life of former slave Josiah Henson to determine his response to enslavement.
- Students will explain how abolitionists used the stories of Henson and others to raise awareness of the evils of the institution of slavery.

#### VOCABULARY AND CONCEPTS:

**Abolitionist** – A person advocating for or participating in the movement to end slavery was called an abolitionist.

**Anti-slavery** – A person who opposed or acted against slavery was anti-slavery.

**Anti-Slavery Society** – The American Anti-Slavery Society was an organization formed by black and white abolitionists in Philadelphia in 1833 to make people aware of the conditions of enslaved people and to end slavery.

**Autobiography** – An account of a person’s life written by himself or herself is an autobiography.

**Broadside** – A broadside was one-sided print material used to expedite the dissemination of news and/or art forms such as songs and poems.

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

**Propaganda** – Propaganda is defined as ideas or information, sometimes false, advocating for a point of view or for change in a policy or practice.

**Slave Narrative** – A slave narrative is the written autobiography or reminiscences of an escaped and freed slave.

**Underground Railroad** – The network of “safe houses” and trails by which many enslaved African Americans escaped to freedom before the Civil War was called the Underground Railroad.

## **MATERIALS**

### **FOR THE TEACHER:**

**Teacher Resource Sheet 1** – Broadside, 1837

**Teacher Resource Sheet 2** – Title Page of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*

**Teacher Resource Sheet 3** – The Original “Uncle Tom”

### **FOR THE STUDENT:**

Redman-Rengstorf, Susan. “The Rise of the Anti-Slavery Movement.” *Cobblestone*, February 2003.

**Student Resource Sheet 1** –The Rise of the Anti-Slavery Movement

**Student Resource Sheet 2** – Josiah Henson and the Abolitionist Cause

**Student Resource Sheet 3** – Childhood

**Student Resource Sheet 4** – Trusted Slave

**Student Resource Sheet 5** – Finding Religion

**Student Resource Sheet 6** – Trouble

**Student Resource Sheet 7** – Journey South

**Student Resource Sheet 8** – Betrayal

**Student Resource Sheet 9** – Escape

## **RESOURCES**

### **PUBLICATIONS:**

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

Rossi, Ann. *Freedom Struggle: The Anti-Slavery Movement, 1830-1865*. Canada: National Geographic, 2005.

### **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* by Josiah Henson

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/henson/henson.html>

Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture

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

## **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 of these was represented by the attempts of owners 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 better future in which no restrictions would be placed on their lives. Another aspect of slave culture included 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 Anti-Slavery Movement**

The American Anti-Slavery Movement began during the Revolutionary Era. Made up of both black and white abolitionists, this movement had its roots in the 1730s when Quakers in New Jersey and Pennsylvania became convinced that the institution of slavery was at odds with their belief in spiritual equality. Armed with those beliefs, Quakers worked diligently throughout the 18th century to abolish slavery. Quakers from Philadelphia organized the first anti-slavery society in 1775, and other anti-slavery societies soon formed. The Anti-Slavery Movement drew all types of people – Blacks and Whites, men and women, southerners and northerners. By the middle of the 19th century, leaders of the movement included William Lloyd Garrison, Sarah and Angelina Grimke, and Frederick Douglass. Abolitionists fought slavery in many ways: they organized conventions, boycotted southern goods, published books and newspapers preaching about the evils of slavery, assisted the escape of enslaved people on the Underground Railroad, and organized political parties.

### **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; he carried a special pass while traveling, 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 own 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 was also assisted by workers on 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 on 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:** Display **Teacher Resource Sheet 1**, Broadside, 1837.

Ask: What is the purpose of this broadside? What cause is it advocating?

2. Explain to students that broadsides were only one way that abolitionists publicized their opinions on slavery. Tell them that they will be reading an article about the rise of the Anti-Slavery Movement.
3. Distribute “The Rise of the Anti-Slavery Movement,” from the February 2003 *Cobblestones* magazine, and **Student Resource Sheet 1**, The Rise of the Anti-Slavery Movement. Direct students to read the article independently and to take notes using **Student Resource Sheet 1**.
4. After students have completed this task, lead a class discussion of the reading and the information that students have included on **Student Resource Sheet 1**. Place a special emphasis on the section entitled, “Strategies of the Organizations.” Explain to students that those strategies were not the only strategies used by anti-slavery organizations (see “Teacher Background”).
5. Display **Teacher Resource Sheet 2**, Title Page of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.  
 Ask: What is this? (*title page of a book called Uncle Tom’s Cabin*)  
 What is the subtitle of this book? (*Life Among the Lowly*)  
 What does the subtitle tell you about the characters of the book? (*They were not well thought of by society.*)  
 When was this book published? (*1852*)  
 What do you think this book is about? (*Answers will vary.*)

Tell students that this book was used as a tool by abolitionists to educate the public about the evils of the institution of slavery. It became so popular that it was credited with causing the Civil War. In fact, upon meeting its author, Harriet Beecher Stowe, President Abraham Lincoln is supposed to have said, “So you are the little woman who wrote the book that started this Great War!” Explain to students that the main character of the book, Uncle Tom, was based on a former slave from Maryland, Josiah Henson. Display **Teacher Resource Sheet 3**, The Original Uncle Tom.

6. Explain to students that abolitionists found the stories of slaves like Josiah Henson very compelling and often promoted the abolitionist cause with the publication of their stories. Harriet Beecher Stowe took one of those stories about the life of Josiah Henson and wrote a fictionalized account of Josiah Henson’s life. That account became one of the best selling books of the 19th century. Tell students that they will be examining the life of Josiah Henson in order to determine the aspects of his life and personal characteristics that led Stowe to choose him as a model for her book.
7. Break students into six groups. Each group will be responsible for reading one of the excerpts from Henson’s autobiography **Student Resource Sheets 3 through 9**. As they read, students should complete **Student Resource Sheet 2**, Josiah Henson and the Abolitionist Cause.
8. Each group should report out to the class the information they learned in their assigned reading. Students should fill in the corresponding sections of **Student Resource Sheet 2**, Josiah Henson and the Abolitionist Cause, as their classmates report out. Lead students in a discussion of the events of Henson’s life and his reaction(s) to those events. Ask students to identify the events that abolitionists might have found most useful in promoting their cause.
9. **Assessment:** Individual students should complete the following task:  
 It is 1853. You are a teenager living in the North who has recently read *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and, as a result, you have become involved in the Anti-Slavery Movement. You want to share your excitement about this movement with your cousin who lives in the South on a cotton plantation. Write a letter to your cousin including the following:
  - information about the rise of the Anti-Slavery Movement

- examples of strategies that activists in the movement use to inform others about the evils of slavery
- information about Josiah Henson and how his story influenced you to become an active supporter of the Anti-Slavery Movement
- explain how ideas spread by *Uncle Tom's Cabin* impacted the social climate.

10. **Closure:** Ask student volunteers to share their letters with the class. Discuss the impact that the individuals involved in the Anti-Slavery Movement had on the movement. Ask: Do you think the movement would have been successful if it hadn't been for the tireless work of individuals like Harriet Beecher Stowe and Josiah Henson? Why or why not?

### **THOUGHTFUL APPLICATION:**

Research the various groups of people involved in the Anti-Slavery Movement. How did the different goals and strategies of those groups affect the movement?

### **LESSON EXTENSIONS:**

- Visit the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture.
- Examine other methods that abolitionists used to educate the public (e.g., posters, poems, songs, speeches).
- Examine additional slave narratives (Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, etc.), and compare those narratives to that of Josiah Henson.
- Read *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and compare Josiah Henson's story to that of the character Uncle Tom.
- In today's world, the term "Uncle Tom" is often seen as derogatory. Examine the evolution of Uncle Tom from being a "hero" to being a "sell-out." What occurred in United States history that may have led to that transformation?
- Examine the influence of John Brown's actions on the Abolitionist Movement.
- Visit the National Historical Park at Harper's Ferry, West Virginia in order to learn more about John Brown (<http://www.nps.gov/hafe/educate.htm>).

Teacher Resource Sheet 1

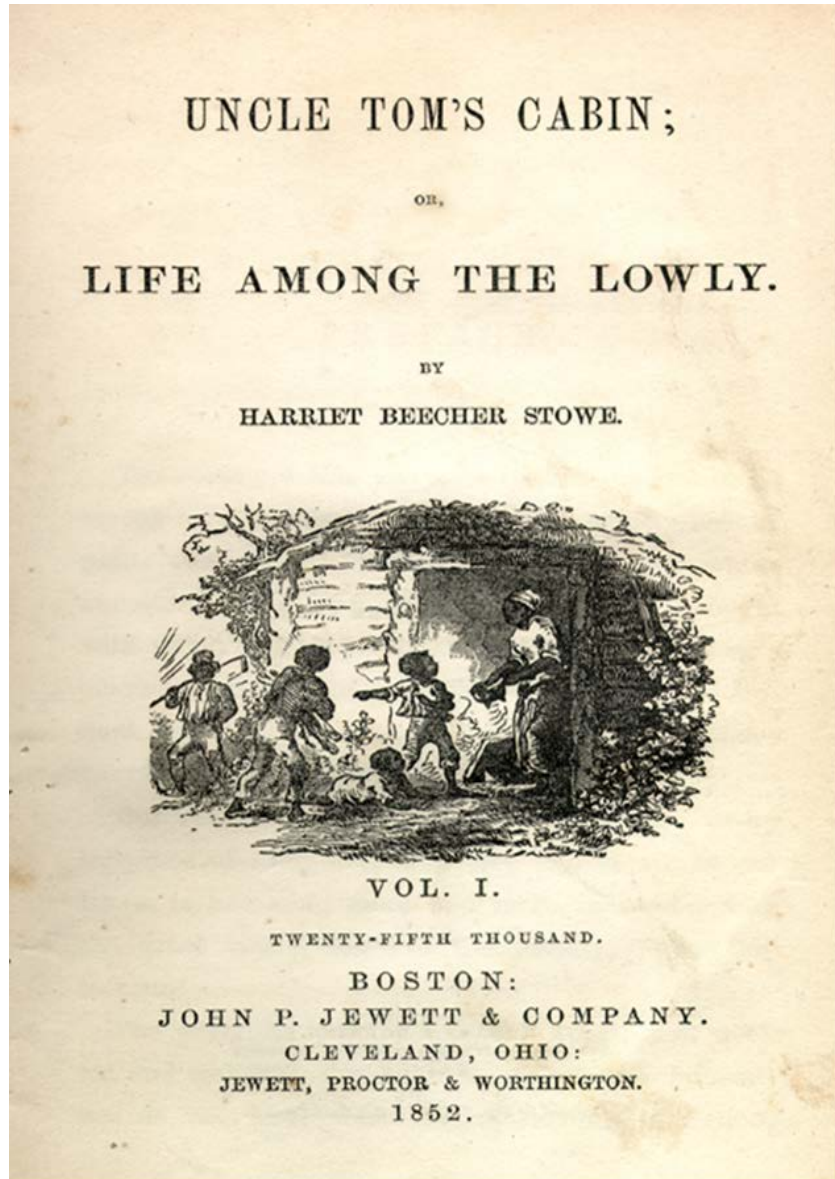
**Broadside, 1837**



Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division [LC-USZC4-5321]



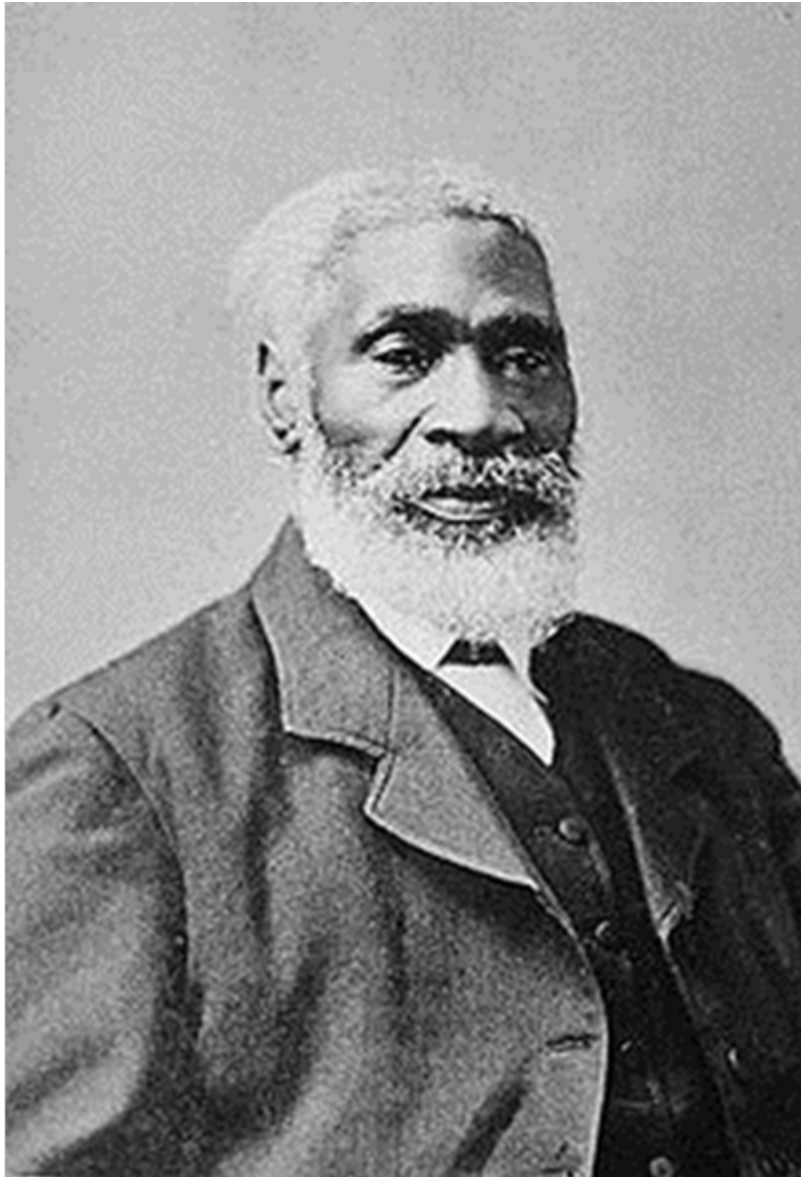
**Title Page of *Uncle Tom's Cabin***



Courtesy of Historic Graphics, Baltimore, Maryland

Teacher Resource Sheet 3

## The Original Uncle Tom



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josiah\\_Henson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josiah_Henson)

**The Rise of the Anti-Slavery Movement**



**Implications of the Anti-Slavery Movement for today:**

Student Resource Sheet 2

**Josiah Henson and the Abolitionist Cause**

<b>Excerpt</b>	<b>Impact on Henson's Life</b>	<b>Potential Importance to Abolitionist Cause</b>
<b>Childhood</b>		
<b>Trusted Slave</b>		
<b>Finding Religion</b>		
<b>Trouble</b>		
<b>Journey South</b>		
<b>Betrayal</b>		
<b>Escape</b>		

### Childhood

I was born, June 15, 1789, in Charles County, Maryland, on a farm belonging to Mr. Francis N., about a mile from Port Tobacco. My mother was the property of Dr. Josiah McP., but was hired by Mr. N., to whom my father belonged. The only incident I can remember, which occurred while my mother continued on N.'s farm, was the appearance of my father one day, with his head bloody and his back lacerated. He was in a state of great excitement, and though it was all a mystery to me at the age of three or four years, it was explained at a later period, and I understood that he had been suffering the cruel penalty of the Maryland law for beating a white man. His right ear had been cut off close to his head, and he had received a hundred lashes on his back. He had beaten the overseer for a brutal assault on my mother, and this was his punishment. Furious at such treatment, my father became a different man, and was so morose, disobedient and intractable, that Mr. N. determined to sell him. He accordingly parted with him, not long after, to his son, who lived in Alabama; and neither my mother nor I, ever heard of him again...

...After the sale of my father by N., and his leaving Maryland for Alabama, Dr. McP. would no longer hire out my mother to N. She returned, therefore, to the estate of the doctor, who was very much kinder to his slaves than the generality of planters, never suffering them to be struck by any one... My mother, and her young family of three girls and three boys, of which I was the youngest, resided on this estate for two or three years, during which my only recollections are of being rather a pet of the doctor's, who thought I was a bright child, and of being much impressed with what I afterwards recognized as the deep piety and devotional feeling and habits of my mother. I do not know how, or where she acquired her knowledge of God, or her acquaintance with the Lord's prayer, which she so frequently repeated and taught me to repeat. I remember seeing her often on her knees endeavoring to arrange her thoughts in prayers appropriate to her situation, but which amounted to little more than...the repetition of short phrases, which were within my infant comprehension, and have remained in my memory to this hour.

After this brief period of comparative comfort, however, the death of Dr. McP. brought about a revolution in our condition...In consequence of his decease it became necessary to sell the estate and the slaves, in order to divide the property among the heirs; and we were all put up at auction and sold to the highest bidder, and scattered over various parts of the country. My brothers and sisters were bid off one by one, while my mother, holding my hand, looked on in an agony of grief, the cause of which I but ill understood at first, but which dawned on my mind, with dreadful clearness, as the sale proceeded. My mother was then separated from me, and put up in her turn. She was bought by a man named Isaac R., residing in Montgomery County, and then I was offered to the assembled purchasers. My mother, half distracted with the parting forever from all her children, pushed through the crowd, while the bidding for me was going on, to the spot where R. 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*

### Student Resource Sheet 3b

as well as herself, and spare to her one of her little ones at least. 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?

...Almost immediately...I fell sick, and seemed to my new master so little likely to recover, that he proposed to R., the purchaser of my mother, to take me too at such a trifling rate that it could not be refused. I was thus providentially restored to my mother; and under her care, destitute as she was of the proper means of nursing me, I recovered my health, and grew up to be an uncommonly vigorous and healthy boy and man.

...The principal food of those upon my master's plantation consisted of corn meal, and salt herrings; to which was added in summer a little buttermilk, and the few vegetables which each might raise for himself and his family, on the little piece of ground which was assigned to him for the purpose, called a truck patch. The meals were two, daily. The first, or breakfast, was taken at 12 o'clock, after laboring from daylight; and the other when the work of the remainder of the day was over. The only dress was of tow cloth, which for the young, and often even for those who had passed the period of childhood, consisted of a single garment, some think like a shirt, but longer, reaching to the ankles; and for the older, a pair of pantaloons, or a gown, according to the sex; while some kind of round jacket, or overcoat, might be added in winter, a wool hat once in two or three years, for the males and a pair of coarse shoes once a year. Our lodging was in log huts, of a single small room, with no other floor than the trodden earth, in each ten or a dozen persons – men, women, and children – might sleep, but which could not protect them from dampness and cold, nor permit the existence of the common decencies of life. There were neither beds, nor furniture of any description – a blanket being the only addition to the dress of the day for protection from the chillness of the air or the earth. In these hovels were we penned at night, and fed by day; here were the children born, and the sick – neglected. Such were the provisions for the daily toil of the slave.

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

BOSTON: ARTHUR D. PHELPS. 1849.

Text transcribed by Apex Data Services, Inc.

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- First Edition, 2001.

Lee Ann Morawski and Natalia Smith

CH

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2001.

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/henson49/henson49.html>

## Student Resource Sheet 4

### Trusted Slave

...I obtained great influence with my companions, as well by the superiority I showed in labor and in sport, as by the assistance I yielded them, and the favors I conferred upon them, from impulses which I cannot consider as wrong, though it was necessary for me to conceal sometimes the act as well as its motive. I have toiled and induced others to toil, many an extra hour, in order to show my master what an excellent day's work had been accomplished, and to win a kind word or a benevolent deed from his callous heart...I was much more easily moved to compassion and sympathy than he was; and one of the means I took to gain the good-will of my fellow sufferers, was by taking from him some things he did not give, in part payment of my extra labor. The condition of the male slave is bad enough, Heaven knows; but that of the female slave, compelled to perform unfit labor, sick, suffering, and bearing the burdens of her own sex unpitied and unaided, as well as the toils which belong to the other, has often oppressed me with a load of sympathy. And sometimes, when I have seen them starved, and miserable, and unable to help themselves, I have helped them to some of the comforts which they were denied by him who owned them, and which my companions had not the wit or the daring to procure. Meat was not a part of our regular food; but my master had plenty of sheep and pigs, and sometimes I have picked out the best one I could find in the flock, or the drove, carried it a mile or two into the woods, slaughtered it, cut it up, and distributed it among the poor creatures, to whom it was at once food, luxury, and medicine. Was this wrong? I can only say that, at this distance of time, my conscience does not reproach me for it, and that then I esteemed it among the best of my deeds.

By means of the influence thus acquired...I was promoted to be superintendent of the farm work, and managed to raise more than double the crops, with more cheerful and willing labor, than was ever seen on the estate before.

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"My situation, as overseer, I retained, together with the especial favor of my master, who was not displeased either with saving the expense of a large salary for a white superintendent, or with the superior crops I was able to raise for him. I will not deny that I used his property more freely than he would have done himself, in supplying his people with better food; but if I cheated him in this way, in small matters, it was unequivocally for his own benefit in more important ones; and I accounted, with the strictest honesty, for every dollar I received in the sale of property entrusted to me...."

"Things remained in this condition for a considerable period; my occupation being to superintend the farming operations, and to sell the produce in the neighboring markets of Washington and Georgetown..."

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

Henson, Josiah, BOSTON:  
Inc.

Smith

Carolina at Chapel Hill,

ARTHUR D. PHELPS, 1849  
Text transcribed by Apex Data Services,

-First edition, 2001

2001/docsouth.unc.edu/neh/henson49/henson49.html

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ca. 150K in size. For more information, visit our website at [www.unc.edu/ehp](http://www.unc.edu/ehp)

Student Resource Sheet 5

Finding Religion

...There was a person living in Georgetown, a few miles only from R.'s Plantation, whose business was that of a baker, and whose character was that of an upright, benevolent, Christian man... This man occasionally served as a minister of the Gospel...One Sunday when he was to officiate in this way...my mother persuaded me to ask master's leave to go and hear him...I was then eighteen years old, I had never heard a sermon, nor any discourse or conversation whatever, upon religious topics, except what had been impressed upon me by my mother...I immediately determined to find out something more... and revolving the things which I had heard in my mind as I went home, I became so excited that I turned aside from the road into the woods, and prayed to God for light and for aid with an earnestness, which, however unenlightened, was at least sincere and heartfelt; and which the subsequent course of my life has led me to imagine might not have been unacceptable to Him who heareth prayer...I could not help talking about much on these subjects with those about me; and it was not long before I began to pray with them, and exhort them, and to impart to the poor slaves those little glimmerings of light from another world, which had reached my own eyes. In a few years I became quite an esteemed preacher among them, and I will not believe it is vanity which leads me to think I was useful to some.

The Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave, Now an Inhabitant of Canada, as Narrated by Himself  
Henson, Josiah, BOSTON: ~~ARTHUR D. PHILIPS, 1849~~  
Inc.

Smith  
Carolina at Chapel Hill,

2001/docsouth.unc.edu/neh/henson49/henson49.html

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-First edition, 2001

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University of North Carolina



## Student Resource Sheet 6

### Trouble

...My master's habits were such as were common enough among the dissipated planters of the neighborhood; and one of their frequent practices was, to assemble on Saturday or Sunday, which were their holidays, and gamble, run horses, or fight game-cocks, discuss politics, and drink whiskey, and brandy and water, all day long. Perfectly aware that they would not be able to find their own way home at night, each one ordered a slave, his particular attendant, to come after him and help him home. I was chosen for this confidential duty by my master... Of course, quarrels and brawls of the most violent description were frequent consequences of these meetings, and whenever they became especially dangerous, and glasses were thrown, dirks drawn, and pistols fired, it was the duty of the slaves, to rush in, and each one was to drag his master from the fight and carry him home... On one of these occasions, my master got into a quarrel with his brother's overseer, who was one of the party, and in rescuing the former, I suppose I was a little more rough with the latter than usual. I remember his falling upon the floor, and very likely it was from the effects of a push from me or a movement of my elbow. He attributed his fall to me, rather than to the whiskey he had drunk, and treasured up his vengeance for the first favorable opportunity. About a week afterwards, I was sent by my master to a place a few miles distant, on horseback, with some letters... This lane passed through some of the farm owned by my master's brother, and his overseer was in the adjoining field, with three negroes when I went by. On my return, a half an hour afterwards, the overseer was sitting on the fence; but I could see nothing of the black fellows. I rode on, utterly unsuspecting of any trouble, but as I approached, he jumped off the fence, and at the same moment two of the negroes sprung up from under the bushes, where they had been concealed, and stood with him, immediately in front of me; while the third sprang over the fence just behind me... The overseer seized my horse's bridle, and ordered me to alight... I saw that there was nothing else to be done, and slipped off the horse on the opposite side from him... he lifted a stick he had in his hand to strike me, but so suddenly and violently, that he frightened the horse, which broke away from him and ran home. I was thus left without means of escape... Meanwhile the cowardly overseer was availing himself of every opportunity to hit me over the head with his stick, which was not heavy enough to knock me down, though it drew blood freely. At length, tired of the length of the affray, he seized a stake, six or seven feet long, from the fence, and struck at me with his whole strength. In attempting to ward off the blow, my right arm was broken, and I was brought to the ground; where repeated blows broke both my shoulder blades, and made the blood run from my mouth copiously. The two blacks begged him not to murder me, and he just left me as I was, telling me to learn what it was to strike a white man...

The Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave, Now an Inhabitant of Canada, as Narrated by Himself  
Henson, Josiah, BOSTON: ARTHUR D. PHILIPS, 1849  
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### **Journey South**

...After a time... my master fell into difficulty, and from difficulty into a lawsuit with a brother-in-law, who charged him with dishonest management of property confided to him in trust. The lawsuit was protracted enough to cause his ruin, of itself. He used every resource to stave off the inevitable result, but at length saw no means of relief but removal to another State... The first time he ever intimated to me his ultimate project, he said he was ruined, that every thing was gone, that there was but one resource, and that depended upon me... I consented, and promised to do all I could to save him from the fate impending over him. He then told me I must take his slaves to his brother in Kentucky. In vain I represented to him that I had never traveled a day's journey from his plantation, and knew nothing of the way, or the means of getting to Kentucky. He insisted that such a smart fellow as I could travel anywhere, he promised to give me all necessary instructions, and urged that this was the only course by which he could be saved... There were eighteen negroes, besides my wife, two children, and myself, to transport nearly a thousand miles, through a country I knew nothing about, and in winter time, for we started in the month of February 1825. My master proposed to follow me in a few months, and establish himself in Kentucky. He furnished me with a small sum of money, and some provisions... Fortunately, for the success of the undertaking, these people had been long under my direction, and were devotedly attached to me for the many alleviations I had afforded to their miserable condition, the comforts I had procured them, and the consideration which I had always manifested for them. ..there was one source of anxiety which I was compelled to encounter, and a temptation I had to resist, the strength of which others can appreciate as well as myself. In passing along the State of Ohio, we were frequently told that we were free, if we chose to be so... My companions probably had little perception of the nature of the boon that was offered to them, and they were willing to do just as I told them, without a wish to judge for themselves. Not so with me. From my earliest recollection, freedom had been the object of my ambition, a constant motive to exertion, and ever-present stimulus to gain and save. No other means of obtaining it, however, had occurred to me, but purchasing myself of my master. The idea of running away was not one that I had ever indulged. I had a sentiment of honor on the subject, or what I thought such, which I would not have violated even for freedom; and every cent which I had ever felt entitled to call my own, had been treasured up for this great purpose, till I had accumulated between thirty and forty dollars. Now was offered to me an opportunity I had not anticipated. I might liberate my family, my companions, and myself, without the slightest risk, and without injustice to any individual, except one whom we had none of us any reason to love, who had been guilty of cruelty and oppression to us all for many years, and who had never shown the smallest symptom of sympathy with us, or with any one in our condition... But it was a punishment which it was not for me to inflict. I had promised that man to take his property to Kentucky, and deposit it with his brother; and this, and this only, I resolved to do.

Student Resource Sheet 7b

...I arrived at Daviess county, Kentucky, about the middle of April, 1825, and delivered myself and my companions to...the brother of my owner...There I remained three years, expecting my master to follow...In the spring of the year 1828, news arrived from my master that he was unable to induce his wife to accompany him to Kentucky, and he must therefore remain where he was. He sent out an agent to sell all his slaves, except me and my family, and to carry back the proceeds to him.

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Carolina at Chapel Hill,

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## Student Resource Sheet 8a

### Betrayal

...In the course of the summer of 1828, a Methodist preacher, a white man of some reputation, visited our neighborhood, and soon I became acquainted with him. He was soon interested in me, and visited me frequently, and one day talked to me in a confidential manner about my position. He said that I ought to be free; that I had too much capacity to be confined to the limited and comparatively useless sphere of a slave; "and though," said he, "I must not be known to have spoken to you on this subject, yet if you will obtain Mr. Amos's consent to go to see your old master in Maryland, I will try and put you in a way by which I think you may succeed in buying yourself." ... I soon resolved to make the attempt to get the necessary leave. ...Somewhat to my surprise, Master Amos made no objection; but gave me a pass to go to Maryland and back, with some remarks which showed his sense of the value of my services to him, and his opinion that I had earned such a privilege if I desired it... [I] traveled leisurely from town to town, preaching as I went, and, wherever circumstances were favorable, soliciting aid in my great object. I succeeded so well, that when I arrived at Montgomery county, I was master of two hundred and seventy-five dollars, besides my horse and my clothes... Amid expressions of an apparently cordial welcome, I could discern plainly enough the look of displeasure that a slave should have possession of such luxuries...

...I found my mother had died during my absence, and every tie which had connected me with this place was broken...and I had not a friend to consult but Master Frank, the brother of R.'s wife...My reception by Master Frank was all I expected... [and]...he readily agreed to negotiate for my freedom...Mr. Frank...brought [R.] to an actual bargain, by which he agreed to give me my manumission papers for four hundred and fifty dollars, of which three hundred and fifty dollars were to be in cash, and the remainder in my note. My money and my horse enabled me to pay the cash at once, and thus my great hopes seemed in a fair way of being realized.

Some time was spent in the negotiations for this affair, and it was not until the 9th of March, 1829, that I received my manumission papers in due form of the law. I was prepared to start immediately on my return to Kentucky, and on the 10<sup>th</sup>, as I was getting ready in the morning for my journey, my master accosted me in a very pleasant and friendly manner, and entered into conversation with me about my plans. He asked me what I was going to do with my freedom certificate; whether I was going to show it if I were questioned on the road. I told him yes, that I supposed it was given to me for that very purpose. "Ah," said he, "you do not understand the dangers to which you are exposed. You may meet with some ruffian slave-purchaser who will rob you of that piece of paper, and destroy it. You will then be thrown into prison, and sold for your jail fees, before any of your friends can know it. Why should you show it at all? You can go to Kentucky in perfect safety with your pass. Let me enclose that valuable document for you under cover to my brother, and nobody would dare to break a seal, for that is a State-prison matter; and when you arrive in Kentucky you will have it all safe and sound." This seemed most friendly advice, and I felt very grateful for his kindness.

Student Resource Sheet 8b

I accordingly saw him enclose my precious piece of paper in two or three envelopes, seal it with three seals and direct it to his Brother in Daviess county, Kentucky, in my care...

...[M]y walk of five miles brought me to the plantation at bed-time. I went directly to my own cabin, where I found my wife and little ones well; and of course, we had a good deal to communicate to each other. Letters had reached the "great house," as the master's was always called, long before I had arrived, telling them what I had been doing...It was not long before Charlotte began to tell me with much excitement what she had heard, and to question me about how I had raised the money I had paid, and how I expected to get the remainder of the thousand dollars I was to give for my freedom. I could scarcely believe my ears; but before telling her how the case exactly was, I questioned her again and again as to what she had heard. She persisted in repeating the same story as she had heard it from my master's letters and I began to perceive the trick that had been played upon me, and to see that management by which Isaac R. had contrived that the only evidence of my freedom should be kept from every eye but that of his brother Amos, who was instructed to retain it till I had made up six hundred and fifty dollars, the balance, I was reported to have agreed to pay. Indignation is a faint word to express my deep sense of such villainy. I was without a means of setting myself right.

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## Student Resource Sheet 9

### Escape

...I must get ready to go to New Orleans with his son Amos, a young man of about twenty-one years of age, who was going down the river with a flat boat, and was nearly ready to start: in fact he was to leave the next day, and I must go and take care of him, and help him dispose of the cargo... We arrived in New Orleans, and the little that remained of our cargo was soon sold, the men were discharged, and nothing was left but to dispose of me, and break up the boat, and then Mr. Amos would take passage on a steamboat, and go home. There was no longer any disguise about the purpose of selling me... I could not sleep that night, which seemed long enough to me, though it was one of the shortest in the year... A little before daylight master Amos awoke indisposed. His stomach was disordered, but he lay down again thinking it would pass off. In a little while he was up again and felt more sick than before, and it was soon evident that the river fever was upon him. He became rapidly worse, and by eight o'clock in the morning he was utterly prostrate; his head was on my lap, and he was begging me to help him, to do something for him, to save him. The tables were turned... He entreated me to dispatch matters, to sell the flat boat... and to get him and his trunk... on board the steamer as quick as possible, and especially not to desert him so long as he lived, nor to suffer his body, if he died, to be thrown into the river. I attended to all his requests... when we arrived at our landing he was still unable to speak and could only be moved on a sheet or a litter... As we approached the house, the surprise at seeing me back again... [was] extreme.

...[A]s soon as Amos began to recover, I began to meditate upon a plan of escape from the danger in which I constantly stood, of a repletion of the attempt to sell me in the highest market... I determined to make my escape to Canada... for notwithstanding there were free States in the Union, I felt that I should be safer under an entirely foreign jurisdiction.

...At length the eventful night came. I went up to the house to ask leave to take Tom home with me that he might have his clothes mended. No objection was made, and I bade Master Amos "good night" for the last time. It was about the middle of September, and by nine o'clock in the evening all was ready. It was a dark, moonless night, and we got into the little skiff in which I had induced a fellow-slave to take us across the river... We landed on the Indiana shore, and I began to feel that I was my own master. But in circumstances of fear and misery still! We were thrown absolutely upon our own poor and small resources, and were to rely on our own strength alone... we dared look to no one for help. But my courage was equal to the occasion, and we trudged on cautiously and steadily, and as fast as the darkness, and the feebleness of my wife and boys would allow... When I got on the Canada side, on the morning of the 28th of October 1830, my first impulse was to throw myself on the ground, and giving way to the riotous exaltation of my feelings to execute sundry antics which excited the astonishment of those who were looking on....

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