

Letter to the Editor

General

Grade Level

Middle School

Author Info

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Type of Lesson

Challenge

Type of Project (Individual/Group/Both)

Individual

Duration

90-120 minutes

Challenge Question

You live in Virginia as threats of Civil War loom. You have been researching the issues for and against slavery. It has inspired you to write a letter to the editor of the Virginia Gazette about the topic. Using the SAC method, you will discuss with your peers both points of view on slavery based on the information provided in the documents. From what point of view will you write about? (Who will you represent? A planter? A child of a planter? A freedman? An abolitionist?)

Rationale

Students will read primary sources on the arguments for and against slavery. They will determine a point of view based on these documents and write an argumentative letter to support it. They will also add an image to help illustrate the argument and invoke emotion. Students will have to justify the choice of the image.

Controversial two sided topics can be difficult. See the link below to help teach students how to deal with

the topic academically instead of personally to avoid conflict before you give them this challenge. This SAC method should be practiced prior to the activity.

<http://teachinghistory.org/teaching-materials/teaching-guides/21731>

Steps

1. Go to My Collection and read the following documents: Fragment of an Original Letter on the Slavery of Negroes, Address to the Public, and Remarks on the Slave Trade

Go to <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/slavery-a-positive-good/> (to read a speech by John C. Calhoun in support of slavery. Focus on paragraphs 4-6.)

Go to

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/sociology-for-the-south-or-the-failure-of-free-society/> (to read an excerpt from a book by George Fitzhugh in support of slavery.)

2. After reading the primary sources create a word cloud with two of the sources that you plan to quote. Review the most common words used and choose 5-7 of them to include in your letter. Underline the words in your letter.
3. Choose 2-3 quotes from the readings to use as back up to support your argument. These quotes must show examples or specific incidents that you feel strongly back up your argument for or against slavery. Use quotes from at least two sources.
4. Write a 1-2 paragraph letter to the editor of the Virginia Gazette arguing for or against slavery as one of the roles listed below using the quotes that you chose to back up your reasoning.
Roles: Planter, slave trader, child of a planter, small non-slave owning farmer, abolitionist, freedman, slave.
5. Then write a 1-2 paragraph letter to the editor of the Virginia Gazette with the argument from the opposite point of view using 2-3 quotes to back up that argument. (Use the roles listed in the step above)
6. Choose one or two images from the choice of images in My Collection to reinforce your letter and the arguments that you have made for or against slavery. Add the image (s) to the screen with the letter.
7. Add a short paragraph at the bottom of the screen that explains why you chose the images that you included. How do they illustrate your argument and evoke emotion in the readers of the Virginia Gazette?