

9-12 The Everyday Lives of Enslaved People

How can we use primary sources to learn about the everyday lives of enslaved women in the United States?



Slave Story. , 1920. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2016828481/>.

Supporting Questions

1. How did enslaved women adapt concepts from Christianity?
2. Did enslaved women have unique challenges?
3. How did the words of enslaved people represent resistance to slavery?

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Compelling Question? Where do gender norms emerge?	
Content Angle and Standards	<p>D2.His.1.9-12. Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts.</p> <p>D2.His.2.9-12. Analyze change and continuity in historical eras.</p> <p>D2.His.11.9-12. Critique the usefulness of historical sources for a specific historical inquiry based on their maker, date, place of origin, intended audience, and purpose.</p> <p>D4.1.9-12. Construct arguments using precise and knowledgeable claims, with evidence from multiple sources, while acknowledging counterclaims and evidentiary weaknesses.</p> <p>D4.2.9-12. Construct explanations using sound reasoning, correct sequence (linear or non-linear), examples, and details with significant and pertinent information and data, while acknowledging the strengths and weaknesses of the explanation given its purpose (e.g., cause and effect, chronological, procedural, technical).</p>
Staging the Compelling Question	The teacher will guide students through full group and small group conversations about the topic of resistance to slavery, using narratives from the survivors of the institution.

Supporting Question 1	Supporting Question 2	Supporting Question 3
How did enslaved people adapt concepts from Christianity, and how did their version of Christianity help to create a cohesive community?	What can we learn from the words of enslaved people?	How did the words of enslaved people represent resistance to slavery?
Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task
Students will analyze lyrics from two spirituals that refer to the exodus, liberation, and freedom. Students will discuss responses of enslaved people to attempts to use religion to control them.	Students will compare sources created in the antebellum period to those recorded by the Federal Writers Project in the 1930s.	Students will compare and contrast the sources and complete a detailed Venn Diagram.
Featured Sources	Featured Sources	Featured Sources
Source A: song, "Oh Mary" Source B: spiritual, "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?" Source C: White preacher's admonition to enslaved people to	Source A: excerpt from Solomon Northup's <u>Twelve Years a Slave</u> Source B: quotations from the Federal Writers Project narratives relating to religion	Source A: master's view of that slavery was a "natural state" for Africans Source B: enslaved persons' responses to accusations of stealing

obey their masters and mistresses
 Source D: enslaved woman's assertion of her version of Christianity

Source C: Susan Broadus narrative excerpt that reveals the cohesion of the slave community

Summative Performance Task	<p>ARGUMENT: Narratives created by enslaved people provide valuable information about everyday life in the slave community. Students may see contrasts between the words of former enslaved people who wrote prior to the Civil War and those elderly survivors who relied on their memory of slavery in the 1930s when they were interviewed by the Feder Writers Project.</p> <p>EXTENSION. After the above lessons, consider one of the following extensions to the learning.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion: Consider facilitating a discussion of the analysis questions. Ask students to share their response with someone, or if they already worked in a group, ask them to nominate someone to represent their group to the class as a whole. Socratic Seminar: Consider doing a "Socratic seminar" to extend the learning and get students to question what they still don't know or understand. Start with the inquiry's question. Students should be encouraged to answer one another's question directly, but also to answer the question with another question. This continues the conversation and gets at more rich ideas. The teacher should try to say as little as possible and let the students lead the dialog. Structured Academic Controversy: Consider turning the lesson into a "structured academic controversy." Take the overarching question and turn it into a "debate" over interpretations of the various narrative excerpts.
Taking Informed Action	<p>UNDERSTAND Most religious traditions provide rules for living. These might be as complex as a legal code, as straightforward as commandments, or as simple as the Golden Rule.</p> <p>ASSESS Students should consider how their own traditions provide them with rules or guidelines for their behavior.</p> <p>ACT Students could take informed action in one of the following ways:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Find an example of rules "to live by" in their own culture. Examine the Judeo christian traditio's "Ten Commandments." Compare how some of these commandments were used to control the lives of enslaved people versus how those same commandments represented aspects of resistance to the enslaved people.

**Featured sources are suggested and links are provided. It may be that these links are broken and we apologize in advance for the inconvenience*

Overview

Inquiry Description

This inquiry leads students through an investigation of the content of narratives of enslaved people, especially as they relate to women's experience in slavery. This inquiry highlights the following additional thematic standards from NCSS:

- **POWER, AUTHORITY, AND GOVERNANCE:** Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people create, interact with, and change structures of power, authority, and governance.
- **TIME, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE:** Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the past and its legacy.
- **CULTURE:** Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity.

This inquiry also highlights the following additional thematic standards from the Common Core:

- **Key Ideas and Details 1.** Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.
- **Key Ideas and Details 3.** Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.
- **Key Ideas and Details 7.** Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., quantitative data, video, multimedia) in order to address a question or solve a problem.
- **Key Ideas and Details 8.** Evaluate the hypotheses, data, analysis, and conclusions in a science or technical text, verifying the data when possible and corroborating or challenging conclusions with other sources of information.
- **Key Ideas and Details 9.** Synthesize information from a range of sources (e.g., texts, experiments, simulations) into a coherent understanding of a process, phenomenon, or concept, resolving conflicting information when possible.
- **Text Types and Purposes 8.** Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the specific task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.



It is important to note that this inquiry requires prerequisite knowledge of some key terms, which are defined and provided to students in the inquiries where relevant.

Students will be encouraged to inquire as to the sources of narratives, the time at which they were written or recorded, and the political and economic circumstances in which the narratives appeared. It will be important for students to understand the role of post-Civil War Jim Crow legislation in the lives of freed people in the south. Important questions for students to consider include: “Who created the narratives?” “When were they created?” “How might the repressive climate of the Jim Crow South have inhibited the people whose narratives were recorded in 1937?” “What role might advanced age and a reliance on memory have played in the content of the narratives?” “How is an understanding of the experiences of enslaved women especially important to developing a comprehensive narrative slavery?”

Note: This inquiry is expected to take 3-4 class periods. The inquiry time frame could expand if teachers think their students need additional instructional experiences (e.g., supporting questions, formative performance tasks, featured sources, writing). Teachers are encouraged to adapt the inquiry to meet the needs and interests of their students. This inquiry lends itself to differentiation and modeling of historical thinking skills while assisting students in reading the variety of sources.

Structure of the Inquiry

In addressing the compelling question students will do three performance tasks building to a Summative Performance Task that draws on student learning throughout the full inquiry. Throughout the inquiry, students are asked to do increasingly more challenging assignments and consider contrasting sources. This will help students develop their cognitive capacity to grapple with contradictory information and rise to the challenge of the Summative Performance Task. The focus of the inquiry is entirely on primary sources. Students will be asked to consider when a primary source is transformed into something a bit different, for example when literate free people write in a nineteenth century literary style or a southern white female recorded “interpreted” the language and content of the speeches of the elderly formerly enslaved people.



Staging the Compelling Question

To set the stage for this inquiry, students will need to develop an understanding of the rudiments of the Christianity with which enslaved people were familiar. The religious experience for enslaved people varied among different plantations and the desires of slave owners, to be sure, but there are a number of terms that will help students to understand the sources they are asked to discuss.

Consider doing a moving test of prior knowledge where students move about the room to different brainstorm boards, or sheets of paper, on which stimulating key-phrases are written such as:

- Slavery in the Old Testament
- The Biblical Exodus
- Who was Pharaoh?
- Who was Moses? (Why was Harriet Tubman called “Moses” for her work on the Underground Railroad?)
- The story of Daniel in the Lion’s Den

Students will write down what they know about these different terms and build on what their peers may have written.

Depending on the religious background of the students in the room, you could empower students who seem to know a good deal to tell their peers these stories, otherwise, the teacher could share the basics of these stories with students. Explaining that these stories were part of the “approved” religious experience for enslaved people because they perhaps endorsed slavery and that some of these stories resonated with enslaved people more than others, like the story of Moses.

The objective of this exercise is to help students recognize the role of religion in the lives of enslaved people, and the influence such stories would have had on the culture surrounding slavery.



Supporting Question 1: How did enslaved women adapt concepts from Christianity, and how did their version of Christianity help to create a cohesive community among enslaved people?

The first supporting question—How did enslaved people adapt concepts from Christianity, and how did their version of Christianity help to create a cohesive community among enslaved people?— gives students some insights into the culture and lives of enslaved people.

The formative task requires students to examine primary sources and compare and respond to the Supporting Question directly. Students should work on their own or with a partner to read, annotate, and complete a detailed Web Diagram for these two sources. What is different about them? What is similar about them? After organizing their ideas into a Web Diagram, students will respond to the supporting question in writing. As a class, consider facilitating a discussion about what additional information would be helpful in order to more fully answer this question? Are there any theories you've heard about that were not addressed in these sources?

Source A: Song, "Oh Mary"

Oh Mary, don't you weep, don't you mourn
Oh Mary, don't you weep, don't you mourn
Pharoah's army got drowned
Oh Mary don't you weep

If I could I surely would
Stand on the rock where Moses stood
Pharoah's army got drowned
Oh Mary don't you weep

Mary wore three links of chain
Every link was Jesus' name
Pharoah's army got drowned
Oh Mary don't you weep

One of these nights about 12 o' clock
This old worlds going to reel and rock
Pharoah's army got drowned
Oh Mary don't you weep

God told Moses what to do
To lead the Hebrew children through
Pharoah's army got drowned
Oh Mary don't you weep



Moses stood on the red sea shore
Smotin' the water with a two by four
Pharoah's army got drowned
Oh Mary don't you weep

Source B: Song, “Didn’t My Lord Deliver Daniel?”

Refrain:

Didn’t my Lord deliver Daniel,
deliver Daniel, deliver Daniel,
Didn’t my Lord deliver Daniel,
An’ why not-a every man.

1 He delivered Daniel from the lion’s den,
an’ Jonah from the belly of the whale;
An’ the Hebrew children from the fiery furnace,
An’ why not every man. [Refrain]

2 The win’ blows eas’ an’ de win’ blows wes’,
It blows like de judgment day;
An’ ev’ry po’ soul dat never did pray’ll
be glad to pray dat day. [Refrain]

3 I set my foot on de gospel ship,
an’ de ship begin to sail;
It landed me over on Canaan’s shore,
An’ I’ll never come back no more. [Refrain]

Source C: White preacher’s admonition to enslaved people to obey their masters and mistresses

Poor creatures! You little consider, when you are idle and neglectful of your masters’ business, when you steal, and waste, and hurt any of their substance, when you are saucy and impudent, when you are telling them lies and deceiving them, or when you prove stubborn and sullen, and will not do work you are set about without stripes and vexation—you do not consider, I say, that what faults you are guilty of toward your masters and mistresses are faults done against God himself, who hath set your masters and mistresses over you in his own stead, and expects that you would do for them just as you would do for Him . . . your masters and mistresses are God’s overseers, and that, if you are faulty towards them, God himself will punish you. . .

Frederick Law Olmstead, Journey in the Seaboard Slave States (New York: Dix and Edwards, 1856), p. 119 in Julius Lester, To Be a Slave, pp. 78-9.

Source D: Enslaved Woman’s Assertion of her Version of Christianity



“O! white preacher used to talk with their tongues without saying nothin’, but Jesus told us slaves to talk with our hearts.”

Federal Writers Project, The Negro in Virginia (New York: Hastings House, 1940), p. 108 in Lester, To Be a Slave, . 79.



Supporting Question 2 : Did enslaved women have unique challenges?

The second supporting question—What can we learn from the words of enslaved people?— gives students some insights into the perspectives enslaved people had on their resistance efforts.

The formative task requires students to examine the sources and compare and contrast their points to form a conclusion. Students will respond directly to the Supporting Question. As a class, consider facilitating a discussion about what additional information would be helpful in order to more fully answer this question? Are there any sources or ideas you've heard about that were not addressed in these sources?

Guiding Questions:

1. What claims are made in these sources? Do the sources differ?
2. Did enslaved women have unique challenges?

Source A: excerpt from Solomon Northup's Twelve Years a Slave

The day's work over in the field, the baskets are 'toted,' or in other words carried to the ginhouse where the cotton is weighed. No matter how fatigued and weary he may be--no matter how much he longs for sleep and rest--a slave never approaches the ginhouse with his basket of cotton but with fear. If it falls short in weight--if he has not performed the full task appointed him--he knows that he must suffer. And if he has exceeded it by ten or twenty pounds, in all probability his master will measure the next day's task accordingly.

Solomon Northup, Twelve Years a Slave, (Auburn, New York: Derby and Miller, 1853) in Julius Lester, To Be a Slave, pp. 71-2.

Source B: quotations from the Federal Writers Project narratives relating to religion

Nancy Williams recalled the grief experienced by Aunt Cissy each time her master sold one of her children. When the sixth of her seven children became ill and died, Aunt Cissy ain't sorrowed much. She went straight up to ol' massa and shouted in his face, 'Praise God! Praise God! My little child is gone to Jesus. That's one child of mine you ain't never gonna sell.

Nancy Williams, The Negro in Virginia (Virginia Writers Project) in Julius Lester, To Be a Slave, p. 42.

As a child during the Civil War, Minnie Davis remembered that her master, Dr. Hoyt used to pray that the Lord would drive the Yankees back. He said that 'Niggers were born to be slaves.' My mother said that all the time he was praying out loud like that, she was praying to herself: 'Oh, Lord, please send the Yankees on and let them set us free.'

Federal Writers Project (Georgia), Volume I, p. 70 in George Rawick, From Sundown to Sunup, p. 36.



Source C: Susan Broadus narrative excerpt that reveals the cohesion of the slave community

Was serving gal for missus. Used to have to stand behind her at the table and reach her the salt and syrup and anything else she called for. Ol' massa would spell out real fast anything he didn't want me to know about. One day massa was fit to be tied, he was in such a bad mood. Was ravin' about the crops, and taxes, and the triflin' niggers he got to feed. 'Gonna sell 'em I swear fo' Christ, I'm gonna sell 'em,' he says. Then ol' missus ask which ones he gonna sell and tell him quick to spell it. Then he spell out G-A-B-E and R-U-F-U-S. Course I stood there without batting an eye making believe I didn't even hear him, but I was packing them letters up in my head all the time. And soon's I finished dishes I rushed down to my father and say 'em to him just like massa say 'em. My father say quietlike, 'Gabe and Rufus,' and told me to go back to the house and say I ain't been out. The next day, Gabe and Rufus was gone--they had run away. Massa nearly died. Got to cussin and ravin' so, he took sick. Missus went to town and told the sheriff, but they never could find those two slaves.

Federal Writers Project, The Negro in Virginia, p. 44 in Julius Lester, To Be a Slave, pp. 92-3.



Supporting Question 3: How did the words of enslaved people represent resistance to slavery?

The third supporting question—How did the words of enslaved people represent resistance to slavery?—gives students some insights into the perspectives enslaved people had on their resistance efforts.

The formative task requires students to examine the sources and compare and contrast their points.

Students should work on their own or with a partner to read, annotate, and complete a detailed Venn Diagram for these two sources. What is different about them? What is similar about them? After organizing their ideas into a Venn Diagram, students will respond to the supporting question in writing. As a class, consider facilitating a discussion about what additional information would be helpful in order to more fully answer this question? Are there any sources or ideas you've heard about that were not addressed in these sources?

Source A: George Fitzhugh on slavery as a “natural state” for Africans

The weak in mind or body require guidance, support and protection; they must obey and work for those who protect and guide them—they have a natural right to guardians, committees, teachers or masters. Nature has made them slaves, all that law and government can do, is to regulate, modify and mitigate their slavery.

Sociology For The South: Or The Failure Of A Free Society (1854), p. 178.

Were he a slave, he would enjoy in fact as well as in legal fiction, all necessary and essential rights. Pure air and water, a house, sufficient food, fire, and clothing, would be his at all times.”

Cannibals All!, or Slaves Without Masters (1857), p. 324

Source B: enslaved persons' responses to accusation of stealing from their masters
Charles Ball wrote in 1854:

I was never acquainted with a slave who believed that he violated any rule of morality by appropriating to himself anything that belonged to his master, if it was necessary to his comfort. The master might call it theft and brand it with the name of a crime; but the slave reasoned differently when he took a portion of his master's goods to satisfy his hunger, keep himself warm, or gratify his passion for luxurious enjoyment.

Ball, *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Charles Ball*, p. 257 in Julius Lester, *To Be a Slave*, p. 101.

Frederick Law Olmstead recounted the story of a house maid who was caught wearing her mistress's jewelry to church. "Don't say I'm wicked," she cried when she was caught. "It's all right for us poor colored people to appropriate whatever of the white folks' blessings the Lord puts in our way."



Frederick Law Olmstead, Journey in the Seaboard Slave States, p. 117 in Julius Lester, To Be a Slave, p. 102.



Summative Performance Task

At this point in the inquiry, students have examined the earliest primary sources and highly relevant secondary sources that display potential causes for gender norms and historical evidence of gender norms at the earliest known points.

Students should be expected to demonstrate the breadth of their understanding and their abilities to use evidence from multiple sources to support their claims. In this task, students will stretch their learning to determine the origins of gender norms, how far back, and where they emerge, responding directly to the Compelling Question.

Students' arguments will likely vary, but could include any of the following:

- Gender norms are engrained and biological.
- Gender norms have cultural variations and some similarities, showing some environmental flexibility.
- Gender norms have been pretty engrained, but do not have to remain so as we begin to see it as more of a spectrum.

To support students in their writing they can use this provided organizer for a body paragraph. The organizer refers to the HAPPY acronym: Historical Context, Audience, Point of View, Purpose and whY is this significant?

First Argument	
Write a topic sentence that summarizes the paragraph and tells how this proves the thesis	<i>(Repeat the first part of your thesis)</i>
Provide background information here. Cite anyone you paraphrase or quote!	<i>When...</i>
What textual evidence proves this? Describe 1 or 2 HAPP elements about the source of your evidence.	
What textual evidence proves this? Insert a short quote here.	



<p>What makes this quote credible, valid, or helpful in providing insights to this issue?</p>	<p><i>The quote revealed...</i></p>
<p>Who disagrees or disputes a piece of your argument?</p> <p>Describe 1 or 2 HAPP elements about the source of your evidence.</p>	<p><i>Others claimed that...</i></p>
<p>What textual evidence do you have?</p> <p>Insert a short quote here.</p>	
<p>What makes this quote seem untrue, inaccurate, or only partly true?</p>	<p><i>While it may be true that _____, it was clear that...</i></p>

To extend their arguments, once students have written or formed an argument, consider doing one of the following extension activities:

1. **Discussion:** Consider facilitating a discussion of the analysis questions. Ask students to share their response with someone, or if they already worked in a group, ask them to nominate someone to represent their group to the class as a whole. Capitalize on differences between group responses. Why did one group answer differently than another? What impacted them or stood out more?
2. **Four Corner Debate:** Consider a "four-corner debate." In the corners of the room tack up a piece of paper with four differing and possible answers to the inquiry question. After students complete the lesson packet, pose the question to the room at large and ask students to move to the corner of the room (or in between locations) that represent their answer. Then, ask students to explain their choice. As students discuss they are allowed to move closer or further from ideas. This is a great strategy for kinesthetic learning.
3. **Socratic Seminar:** Consider doing a "Socratic seminar" to extend the learning and get students to question what they still don't know or understand. Start with the inquiry's question. Students should be encouraged to answer one another's question directly, but also to answer the question with another question. This continues the conversation and gets at more rich ideas. The teacher should try to say as little as possible and let the students lead the dialog. One strategy for this is to seat students in a circle. Give each of them a cup and 2-3 tokens. When a student makes a substantive contribution to the discussion the teacher will walk over and place a token in the cup signaling that they have contributed. Students will become aware of who has spoken and who has not, and leave space for one another.
4. **Structured Academic Controversy:** Consider turning the lesson into a "structured academic controversy." Take the overarching question and turn it into a "debate." Students can choose or be assigned a side in the debate and use the documents provided to argue their "answer" to the overarching question. They can argue over interpretations and credibility of some documents.
5. **Reacting to the Past:** Consider doing some role play with your class. Reacting to the Past is an active learning pedagogy of role-playing games designed by Barnard University. In Reacting to the Past games, students are assigned character roles with specific goals and must communicate, collaborate, and compete effectively to advance their objectives. Reacting promotes engagement with big ideas, and improves intellectual and academic skills. Provide



students with a set of rules about staying in character and what types of things they must know about their character. Students should be provided with a packet of role sheets with instructions on their individual goals and strategies for game play. Students can use sources and information from these activities, and can search for more details online about their individual character. Reacting roles and games do not have a fixed script or outcome. While students are obliged to adhere to the philosophical and intellectual beliefs of the historical figures they have been assigned to play, they must devise their own means of expressing those ideas persuasively in papers, speeches, or other public presentations.

Students have the opportunity to Take Informed Action by doing one of the following suggested action activities:

1. Find an article or book about history that misrepresents women and gender in history and write to the author or editor.
2. Write a letter to the Secretary of Education for your state about the teaching of women and gender history.
3. Investigate women and gender rights issues that persist and engage with the movement by attending a protest, signing a petition, or donating to the cause.
4. Make a PSA video, blog, or social media post with the intent to persuade the audience to better understand women from history or a persistent gender rights from this inquiry.