



National Park Service



## Teaching Guide

### SEGMENT 7, WEBISODE 5

Please note: Each segment in this Webisode has its own Teaching Guide



#### Segment Overview

Chaos reigned after Chief Justice Roger Taney of the United States Supreme Court handed down a decision in *Scott v. Sanford* in 1857. Better known as the Dred Scott Decision, Taney and others on the court ruled that although Scott had lived in multiple free states, he was still a slave and a possession, certainly not an American citizen who even deserved a trial. For eleven years, Scott and his abolitionist lawyers had fought diligently. Northern newspapers called the decision “diabolical” and “thoroughly abominable.” Southerners applauded. Everyone held strong opinions. Who knew that in just a few years, our nation would be engaged in a great civil war.

At the same time that Southerners and Northerners were hotly debating states’ rights and slavery, one man decided there was too much talk and no action. Once John Brown learned that 126,000 miles of territory had just been opened for settlement west of Missouri, he gathered up his sons and a group of free men and stormed into Kansas saying, “I am going into Kansas to make it a free state.” In the meantime, the United States government decided to let the settlers vote for themselves on the issue of slavery in their new territory. This area soon came to be called Bloody Kansas because free-soilers were battling ‘border ruffians’ who tried to prevent anti-slavery people from voting at all.

Into this already chaotic scene came John Brown in 1858. He attacked two proslavery homesteads where he freed thirteen slaves (he eventually helped all to escape into Canada). But Brown had only begun to fight. In 1859, he attacked the United States arsenal in Harpers Ferry, Virginia. His goal was to seize weapons and ultimately help slaves rise up and relocate to a hide-away in the Appalachian Mountains. His plan failed. Eight of his men died, and Brown was captured and hung. People still argue today about whether Brown was a deranged zealot or a patriot.

#### Teacher Directions

1. Review the Kansas-Nebraska Act with the students.
2. Share information from the Overview so that students have background information about why Kansas was called “Bloody Kansas.” Stress the role that John Brown played when he raided homesteads in Lawrence, Kansas.
3. Distribute the Student Sheet: *Old John Brown: Madman or Patriot?* Students read the sheet in order to discuss the following questions.
4. Discuss the following questions with the students.



#### Let's Discuss

Let's Discuss, Cont.

- What did Brown mean when he said: "I'm going to Kansas to make it a free state?"
- Why did Brown plan the raid on Harpers Ferry? What were his goals?
- Look at a map. Where is Harpers Ferry? What two rivers meet there?
- Why do you think Frederick Douglass decided not to participate in the raid?
- What happened to Israel Green's sword?
- Do you think that it was right for Brown to break the law because he was fighting against slavery? Explain.
- Was Brown a brave man and a patriot for being the only person to take up arms in defense of slaves?
- People have said, "John Brown's War became the nation's war." Do you agree or disagree?
- When Brown led the raid on Lawrence, Kansas, he and his men killed five members of the Doyle family, all of whom were pro-slavery. Was this act justifiable?

5. The students vote: Was Brown a madman or a patriot?

### Teacher Directions

1. Read the following information to the students, pausing to discuss important points concerning the case of Dred Scott.

Dred Scott desperately wanted to be a free man. He was born "somewhere in Virginia" and sold to an army doctor named John Emerson who died in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1846. Scott remained the property of Emerson's wife who, by most accounts, was an abusive, harsh woman. In April 1846, Dred Scott filed a declaration stating that because he had lived with Dr. Emerson for over seven years at army posts in various free states, he should be considered a free man. Much of his argument was based on a previous 1836 Missouri Supreme Court decision that freed a slave named Rachel because she had been taken to live in free states.

Sadly, Dred Scott's eleven-year battle for freedom was denied on March 6, 1857, in the United States Supreme Court under Chief Justice Roger Taney. Taney was a skilled lawyer whose many contributions to constitutional law were quickly forgotten because of the Dred Scott decision. A majority of justices ruled that no slave or descendant of a slave could ever be a United States citizen, nor had they ever been citizens.

The court also ruled that the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which banned slavery in new territories, was unconstitutional. The Dred Scott case polarized the nation. A Pennsylvania newspaper called the decision "baser and more iniquitous[evil] than anything we had before conceived."

2. Use the following questions to discuss the Dred Scott case with the students.



- Dr. Emerson owned Dred Scott. Why did Emerson travel so often and take Scott to so many free states?
  - How long did it take for the case to reach the Supreme Court?
  - How do you think escaped slaves or free African Americans living in the North would have reacted to the Supreme Court decision?
  - What is important about the story of the enslaved girl named Rachel?
  - Why did people say the decision in this case polarized the nation? (Polarized means separated and divided.)
3. Use a transparency of the Student Sheet: *Excerpts from the Dred Scott Decision*.
  4. Read each statement on the Student Sheet: *Excerpts from the Dred Scott Decision* and discuss it with the students.
  5. Help the students understand the case and the Supreme Court decision using discussion points and questions such as the following.  

The Supreme Court decided that slaves were not citizens because (a) \_\_\_\_\_ and (b) \_\_\_\_\_. (Most African Americans did not migrate to the United States voluntarily, and they were brought here as “merchandise,” not as human beings.)
  6. Discuss the reasoning behind the words “because they were an *enslaved* African race.” What do those words mean?
  7. Discuss the statement, “No one of that race had ever migrated to the United States voluntarily; all of them had been brought here as articles of merchandise.” Ask the students to consider if the statement is true. (Although some Africans migrated as indentured servants or as free persons, most (but not all) African Americans came to America involuntarily, as captured and enslaved persons. How do you think history would have been different if most African Americans had voluntarily migrated to the United States? Would slavery have existed?)
  8. What is the faulty logic in the following: In 1808, Congress ended the importation of slaves on slave ships. However, it still permitted slavery in some states. Discuss.
  9. Help students understand that this case reached the Supreme Court because it was really about whether Scott had the right to ask for a trial. The court declared Dred Scott was not a citizen, because he was a slave, and as such a piece of merchandise. Because of this, Dred Scott had no rights whatsoever guaranteed to real citizens, such as a trial in a United States Court.



What do you  
Think?

### Teacher Directions

1. Students choose a famous man or woman such as John Brown, Frederick Douglass, Daniel Webster, Abraham Lincoln, Roger Taney, or an ordinary person such as a free black or an abolitionist or a border ruffian who lived in the 1850s.
2. Students use library books, the Internet, their texts, or other resources to research their characters to determine their positions on slavery.
3. Students use that information to create sandwich boards or signs to carry that state, "I am \_\_\_\_\_ and I think that slavery \_\_\_\_\_."
4. Students must be able to defend their stand using information from their research.

### Teacher Directions

1. Tell students that John Brown and Frederick Douglass were friends. They met several times to discuss a variety of subjects including the slavery issue; how to help slaves escape; and whether or not slaves should be encouraged to rise up against their owners.
2. Explain the activity. Students write two brief letters:
  - **Letter #1** is from John Brown to Frederick Douglass. Brown asks Douglass to help him raid the arsenal and tells Douglass about his plans. He signs it "John Brown."
  - **Letter #2** is from Frederick Douglass to John Brown. Douglass praises his friend for his courage, but tells him the raid will fail, and he will not participate. Students can use Douglass quotes as well. He signs his letter "Frederick Douglass."
3. Students use the two Student Sheets: *Frederick Douglass: Eloquent Orator, Ardent Abolitionist, and Friend of John Brown* and *The Many Faces of John Brown* for information about the two men.
4. Students share letters with the class, teams, or partners. Mount the letters on construction paper and display them.



Moving Toward  
Freedom



## Connections

### Teacher Directions

Use the following activities with your students.

**Language Arts/Research** — Students write a newspaper article entitled “Dred Scott and His Quest for Freedom.” Be sure the students use the reporter’s Five Ws and an H to write their articles. Many newspapers in the nineteenth century were called “Intelligencers.” Students research why “Intelligencer” was a popular newspaper name.

**Geography** — Students locate Washington, D.C., and Harpers Ferry on a large map. Students calculate the number of miles between the two cities. Students investigate the terrain of the region, citing its position in the Allegheny Mountains and on the Potomac River. Does another river flow into the Potomac at Harpers Ferry? Follow the course of the Potomac. Also note that Harpers Ferry is now on the Appalachian Trail. In fact, Appalachian Trail headquarters are located in the town. Students trace the route of the trail from Georgia to Maine. It takes “through-hikers” six-months to walk the trail. Students estimate how long would it take to walk from Washington, D.C., to Harpers Ferry.

**Music** — Students locate a recording of the African American spiritual, “Follow the Drinking Gourd” and sing along.

**Art** — Students design either a Freedom Flag that could have been used by abolitionists or a Freedom Quilt. Students work individually, in pairs, or in teams. If creating the quilt, students use sturdy construction paper, and each student creates one square of the quilt. Display the flags or the quilt in the school hallway.

**Language Arts** — Place a transparency of “John Brown’s Mural” on the overhead. Students write a poem about him, his activities, and his personality. Students may wish to do additional research about John Brown.

## Old John Brown ~ Madman or Patriot?

Two rivers came together at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. A mountain loomed over the rivers. John Brown picked this spot because it was the site of a federal arsenal of weapons. If he could seize the weapons, he could arm slaves who could then escape into the mountains. It was a wild plan, but he thought it was a good one. He even tried to get orator/abolitionist and ex-slave Frederick Douglass to participate. Douglass wrote that his friend was walking into a "steel trap" and that he [Brown] would "never get out alive."

On October 10, 1859, John Brown took fourteen white men and 5 African Americans across the Potomac into the small city. He then took control of the railroad bridge, the United States Armory (arsenal) and the rifle factory. He sent his spy, a man named Cook, and six other men to capture principal citizens and to urge African Americans in the area to join him in an insurrection. He killed one railroad guard and took forty people as hostages.

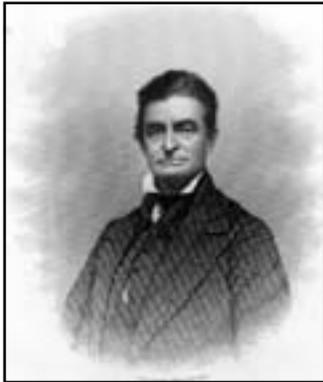
In the meantime, Lt. Col. Robert E. Lee, later to become the commander of the Confederate Army, was placed in command at Harpers Ferry. At first, Lee asked Brown to surrender. Lee then order his troops to storm the building. A young man named Israel Green confronted Brown, stabbed him with his saber, and took him captive. Brown was later hanged. One of Brown's sons was killed, and Israel Green's saber was badly bent. Brown suffered only a flesh wound.

On the day of Brown's execution, bells tolled in many towns in the North, and church services were held glorifying John Brown's courage. Brown had dedicated his life to the abolition of slavery. Many of Brown's twenty children followed in his abolitionist footsteps as well. Writer Henry David Thoreau called him "An Angel of Light."

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## The Many Faces of John Brown

*John Brown dedicated his life to the abolition of slavery. He believed that any actions he took to achieve the goal of ending slavery were justified. Brown was not worried about losing his own life in the process. People have called him a saint, a patriot, a madman, and an “angel of light.” People also have said that John Brown’s war ignited the Civil War.*

*Brown was born in 1800 in Connecticut. His father was an abolitionist as well. Brown married and fathered twenty children! Although he never became rich, he always supported the abolitionist cause. In 1847, former slave, abolitionist leader, and orator Frederick Douglass met Brown in Massachusetts for a long talk. Brown told his new ally that he had a plan to free the slaves. After creating an uprising, Brown wanted to move all slaves to an isolated area in the mountains.*

*On October 16, 1859, John Brown raided the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. He wanted to arm slaves with weapons he seized. He failed in his attempt. He was found guilty of murder, treason, and of inciting slave insurrection. On December 2, 1859, he was hanged.*

## **Excerpts from The Dred Scott Decision**

***"It becomes necessary...to determine who were citizens of the several states when the Constitution was adopted."***

***"...the language used in the Declaration of Independence [shows] that neither the class of persons who had been imported as slaves, nor their descendants...were...intended to be included ...in that memorable document."***

***"The general words [all men are created equal] ... would seem to embrace the whole human race....but it is too clear for dispute that the enslaved African race were not intended to be included.'***

***"No one of that race had ever migrated to the United States voluntarily; all of them had been brought here as articles of merchandise"***

***"And upon a full and careful consideration of the subject, the court is of the opinion that Dred Scott was not a citizen...and not entitled as such to sue in its courts"***

# Frederick Douglass

Eloquent Orator, Ardent Abolitionist, and Friend  
of John Brown

There he stood in front of a large crowd. He was only twenty-three years old. He was giving his first speech. He was nervous. But when he began to talk about his life as a slave, his voice grew strong. Soon he was known throughout the country for his vigorous words against slavery. One person reported that when Frederick Douglass spoke, “Flinty hearts were pierced and cold ones melted by his eloquence.”

Douglass was born in 1818 in Maryland. At age eight, he went to Baltimore where his owner taught him to read and write. However, when he was sent back to the Maryland plantation, he was given over to a slavebreaker named Edward Covey who whipped him daily. In 1838, Douglass escaped to Massachusetts where he became active in the abolitionist movement. He even met with John Brown prior to the Harper’s Ferry raid. And, later, he met with Lincoln and helped recruit Blacks into the Union Army. In his later years, Frederick Douglass continued giving speeches about women’s rights.

