



POLITICAL AND CIVIL RIGHTS

WHAT HAS NEW YORK TO DO WITH SLAVERY:

The Battle over Abolition 1830-1865



OVERVIEW

Through visual and textual analysis, students will learn about the tactics used by abolitionists in the mid-19th century.

STUDENT GOALS

- Students will view artifacts and analyze the iconography used by abolitionists to promote their cause.
- Students will learn about key abolitionists, such as Abigail Hopper Gibbons, Frederick Douglass, and Sojourner Truth, and the tactics they used to persuade Americans to denounce slavery.
- Students will analyze rhetoric and discuss the power of oration.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

Grade 4:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.7

Interpret information presented visually, orally, or quantitatively (e.g., in charts, graphs, diagrams, time lines, animations, or interactive elements on Web pages) and explain how the information contributes to an understanding of the text in which it appears.

Grade 6:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

Grades 11-12:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including analyzing how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term over the course of a text.

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KEY TERMS/VOCABULARY

- Abolition
 - Freedom
 - Fugitive
 - Natural Rights
 - Oration or Orator
 - Slavery
 - Symbol
 - Tactic
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ACTIVISTS

- Abby Hopper Gibbons
 - David Ruggles
 - Elizabeth Jennings
 - Frederick Douglass
 - Sojourner Truth
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ORGANIZATIONS

- American Anti-Slavery Society
 - New York Anti-Slavery Society
 - New York Committee of Vigilance
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INTRODUCING RESOURCES 1 & 2

Resource 1: James Gardner, *Abolitionist Abigail Hopper Gibbons, center front row, and other members of the United States Sanitary Commission with nurses at Fredericksburg, VA, 1864.* Digital Reproduction. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

Resource 2: *Shackle. These leg irons were removed from Sandy Dorsey, a fugitive slave. ca. 1863.* Museum of the City of New York.

New York City was a center of debate over slavery. After slavery ended in New York in 1827, a small but active group of abolitionists, black and white, continued to call for the immediate end of the southern slave system. Many abolitionists participated in anti-slave societies and helped slaves escape to the North or Canada. They denounced New Yorkers who profited from slavery through investment and trade (Northern bankers financed cotton plantations, and merchants and manufacturers profited by turning cotton into cloth and shipping it out of New York’s port). Not only did abolitionists believe that slavery was a sin, but they thought it contradicted the very freedoms on which America was founded.

Despite federal laws against aiding fugitives, abolitionists helped organize a secret network of New York “stations” on the Underground Railroad in churches, businesses, and homes that became sanctuaries for thousands of escaped slaves. Some abolitionists confronted bounty hunters and slave owners to seize African-American New Yorkers. According to family lore, the shackles shown here were given to abolitionist Abby Hopper Gibbons in 1864 by an escaped slave named Sandy who had managed to flee while bound by them. Gibbons then brought them back from Point Lookout, Maryland to New York.



James Gardner, *Abolitionist Abigail Hopper Gibbons, center front row, and other members of the United States Sanitary Commission with nurses at Fredericksburg, VA, 1864.* Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.



Shackle. These leg irons were removed from Sandy Dorsey, a fugitive slave. ca. 1863. Museum of the City of New York.

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DOCUMENT BASED QUESTIONS

- What do these shackles tell us about the conditions of being a slave?
- What can we infer about Sandy Dorsey, the fugitive slave who had worn them?
- How might abolitionists like Abigail Hopper Gibbons have used these shackles to advance their cause?
- How would using an object while speaking in public differ from relying on word? Do you think it gives voice to the person (Sandy) who wore them?

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INTRODUCING RESOURCES 3 & 4

Resource 3: Unknown, *Am I Not A Man And A Brother?*, 1837. Library of Congress Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Washington, D.C.

Resource 4: Unknown, *Am I Not A Woman And A Sister?*, ca. 1837. From: George Bourne. *Slavery illustrated in its effects upon woman and domestic society*. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6726/>

Abolitionists in the New York-based American Anti-Slavery Society (1833), the American & Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (1840), and other groups took advantage of Manhattan’s role as the nation’s center of publishing and the arts and became pioneers in using the printing press as a weapon for change. A steady stream of antislavery publications flowed in the hundreds of thousands from Manhattan presses.



Unknown, *Am I Not A Man And A Brother?*, 1837. Library of Congress Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Washington, D.C.



Unknown, *Am I Not A Woman And A Sister?*, ca. 1837. From: George Bourne. *Slavery illustrated in its effects upon woman and domestic society*. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6726/>

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DOCUMENT BASED QUESTIONS

- Describe the image (the subject, his and her position, gesture, and expression, and the text at the bottom). What is the overall message of the symbol of the shackles?
- Do you think the shackles are an effective symbol for their cause? Why or why not?
- Given that slavery was not legal in New York after 1827 (although the state upheld the Fugitive Slave Act), what kind of response might abolitionists have hoped these images in printed media would provoke?



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ACTIVITY

In addition to using the press, abolitionists used oration as a means to persuade and stir emotions. While abolitionists like Abigail Hopper Gibbons were vital in aiding fugitive slaves and publically denouncing slavery, African Americans who were formerly enslaved also played a large role in educating the public by speaking in the first person about the inhumane conditions experienced by slaves.

In this exercise, either the teacher (or a student who has an interest in performance) will read an excerpt from Frederick Douglass's speech "The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro" delivered in Rochester, New York in 1852, and Sojourner Truth's speech "Ain't I A Woman?" delivered at the Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio in 1851. Use these links to download the texts:

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4h2927.html>

<http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/E151FA9D-6017-4556-981F-CD076D731A72/0/SecondaryTextGuideAnswerKeyAintWoman.pdf>

Before reading either speech, ask students to imagine they are a character sitting in the audience. Have them write their character's gender, race, age, region where they are from, and profession on a piece of paper at their desks. Then ask students to consider the following questions while listening to the speech.

1. As a person living in the 19th century, what surprised you in the speech?
2. What choices did you see the speaker make or emphasize in delivering this oration? Consider the speaker's pauses, emphasis, inflection, pitch, repetition, tone, and tempo (slowing down, speeding up).
3. Did the speech affect you on an emotional level? If so, how?
4. What is the speaker's basic argument?
5. What strategies did the speaker use to persuade you? (ex. logic, appealing to the emotions, use of figurative or descriptive language, etc).
6. What assumptions about African Americans does the orator challenge in their speech?
7. Was there a sentence or phrase in the speech that you found the most compelling? Why?
8. How do you imagine your character understood the issues of slavery differently when hearing African-American orators like Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth speak in their own voice rather than have their stories told by white abolitionists?

After hearing the speech and taking notes in response to the questions above, ask the students to create a memoir recalling their experience of listening to these powerful orators. Ask them to record their reactions and reflections about this historical moment in 1851-52.



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ADDITIONAL READING

THE NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLES

“The First Abolition Society,” January 12, 1854. Describes John Jay’s first lecture at the New York Anti-Slavery Society.

<http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9F00E7DD153DE334BC4A52DFB766838F649FDE>

“Abolition and Anti-Slavery Societies,” May 12, 1853. Compares and contrasts the American Anti-Slavery Society and the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society.

<http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=990DE5D91438E334BC4A52DFB3668388649FDE>

“The Abolition of Slavery,” January 19, 1859. Details Elhu Burritt’s unique anti-slavery activism.

<http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=980CE4DC1E31EE34BC4152DFB7668382649FDE>

CONTEMPORARY CONNECTIONS

“Gateway to Freedom,” by Eric Foner and Kevin Baker, January 28, 2015. Reviews a recent publication on the hidden history of the Underground Railroad.

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/01/books/review/gateway-to-freedom-by-eric-foner.html?_r=0

“South Caroline Settles Its Decades-Old Dispute Over a Confederate Flag” by Richard Fausset and Alan Blinder, July 9, 2015. Reviews the significance of Governor Nikki R. Haley signing into law a bill to remove the Confederate battle flag from the grounds of the State House.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/10/us/relief-and-resentment-after-confederate-flag-vote-in-south-carolina.html>

“The Voting Rights Act at 50” by The Editorial Board, August 5, 2015, discusses the current voter-identification requirements in the context of the Voting Rights Act.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/05/opinion/the-voting-rights-act-at-50.html>



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SOURCES

Douglass, Frederick. "The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro." Speech. Rochester, NY, July, 5, 1852.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4h2927.html>

Gardner, James, [*Abolitionist Abigail Hopper Gibbons, center front row, and other members of the United States Sanitary Commission with nurses at Fredericksburg, VA*], 1864. Digital Reproduction. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

Harris, Leslie M. *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*. Chicago, IL: University Of Chicago Press, 2004.

Schechter, Barnet. *The Devil's Own Work: The Civil War Draft Riots and the Fight to Reconstruct America*. New York: Walker Books, 2005.

Shackle. *These leg irons were removed from Sandy Dorsey, a fugitive slave*. ca. 1863. Museum of the City of New York.

Truth, Sojourner. "Ain't I a Woman?" Speech. Women's Convention, Akron, OH, May 29, 1851.

<http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/E151FA9D-6017-4556-981F-CD076D731A72/0/>

[SecondaryTextGuideAnswerKeyAintWoman.pdf](#)

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