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Learning and Teaching about the Complicated, Complex and Courageous Lives of Enslaved Men and Women: Resource Review

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Learning and Teaching about the Complicated, Complex and Courageous Lives of Enslaved Men and Women: Resource Review
Curated & reviewed by Michelle Reidel, Georgia Southern University

Resources included in this collection center the experiences of enslaved men and women. More specifically, these websites, lesson plans, podcasts, primary and secondary sources highlight how enslaved people resisted their enslavers and how the experience of slavery differed depending on location, labor performed and gender. You will find materials about the lives of the enslaved in colonial New York, New England, and the Deep South; the choices free and enslaved African Americans made during the Revolution; and how enslaved men and women fought in a variety of ways to resist slavery, build community, and make significant contributions to our nation’s founding.

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<th>Online Interactives</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Slave Voyages</strong></td>
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<td>Slave Voyages is an international database that compiles information from more than 36,000 voyages that forcibly transported Africans across the Atlantic Ocean between 1514 and 1866. It is based on the efforts of dozens of historians, librarians, cartographers, curriculum specialists, computer programmers and web designers who worked with scholars at universities in Europe, Africa, South America, and North America. Decades in the making, Slave Voyages hosts three separate databases: the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, the Intra-American Slave Trade, and the People of the Atlantic Slave Trade. Visitors to the site can easily search the databases to learn about specific voyages and utilize Data Visualization, Timeline and Mapping tools to explore large patterns in the data. Slave Voyages includes several features that are of special interest for social studies educators. Lessons, written at the middle and high school level, utilize the databases to engage students in examination of the slave trade over four centuries and in the process develop a greater sense of the scale of the trade. The site also features an image gallery, a series of maps documenting the Transatlantic slave trade and 3D video constructions of slaving vessels. A great resource for both you and your students!</td>
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| **People Not Property**: Stories of Slavery in the Colonial North |
| People Not Property is an interactive website created by the non-profit Historic Hudson Valley with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Based on the work of expert historians, People Not Property seeks to expand Americans’ knowledge of enslavement by focusing specifically on slavery in the colonial North. Divided into four chapters including Defining Slavery, Being Enslaved, Choosing Resistance and Seeking Justice, the site takes students on a journey through New England and the Mid-Atlantic |
colonies centering the experiences of enslaved men and women. For example, the chapter titled “Being Enslaved” includes the sub-topics of Skilled Labor, Marriage, Family, Elders, and Community. Each sub-topic is explored through a variety of materials including vivid illustrations, historical maps and embedded videos featuring both historical reenactments and professional historians. The site also hosts a Time Map that provides context for the specific histories and personal stories featured on People Not Property. Teachers will also find lesson plans and links to historic sites where students can learn more about the enslaved people who lived and worked at these locations.

Finding Freedom
Finding Freedom is the creation of the educational team at the Museum of the American Revolution, and it provides students with an engaging, dramatic and complex portrait of enslaved people’s experiences during the American Revolution. Focused on the experiences of five real people of African descent living in Virginia during the Revolution, Finding Freedom invites students to consider the tensions between slavery and Revolutionary ideals of liberty and freedom through the stories of Eve, Landon, Jack, Deborah and Andrew. To learn Andrew’s story, for example, students navigate through a series of pages featuring visuals and ‘hot buttons’ that link to pop-up windows with more information about specific topics. For example, Andrew and his father were drafted into the Continental Army and the ‘hot button’ on this page links to more information about what it meant to be drafted during the Revolution. Each story features a Timeline that illustrates how the experiences of Eve, Landon, Jack, Deborah, or Andrew are connected to the larger narrative of American history. Each story also includes a section titled “How Do We Know?” which explains how historians utilized primary sources to reconstruct the stories of these five men and women. The Finding Freedom site also includes a series of lesson plans built around the stories of Eve, Landon, Jack, Deborah and Andrew and reflect broader trends in the history of people of African descent in the 17th and 18th centuries. These lessons align with the eight(8) Big Ideas of the Finding Freedom exhibit: Learning from Primary Sources, 18th century African-American Identity, Slavery in American Life, Agency & Resistance, Slavery & Revolutionary Ideas, Choosing Sides, Wartime Experiences and After the War. Finding Freedom is easy to navigate, includes high-quality graphics and is thoroughly researched. I highly recommend you share it with your students.

Primary & Secondary Sources:
Lives of the Enslaved in the North & the South
Lesson plans, primary and secondary sources.

In the fall of 2005, the New York Historical Society began a two-year exploration of the history of slavery in the state. Curriculum materials, created as part of this initiative, are still available through the website and offer educators a variety of resources including lesson
plans and secondary sources that provide background knowledge about a variety of subjects. Of particular interest is a series of Life Stories that use available historical sources to “re-imagine enslaved and free blacks at the center of their own stories.” These profiles are based on primary sources including runaway notices, advertisements for sales of the enslaved and legal papers and focus on incidents in the lives of the enslaved.

(The link above is the Education page for the Slavery in New York exhibit. You can access and download the entire 136 page curriculum from this page.)

**New England Bound: Slavery in Early New England**  
Episode from Ben Franklin’s World podcast (43:00 minutes)  
This podcast features an interview with historian Wendy Warren and explores when and how New England colonists adopted the practice of slavery. Warren also discusses the lives and work of enslaved men and women in colonial New England.

**Diverse Experiences of the Enslaved**  
Teaching Hard History Podcast, Season 1, episode 7 (50:00 minutes)  
Hasan Kawme Jeffries, the host of the Teaching Hard History podcast, discusses how the experiences of the enslaved varied based on time, location and gender with historian Deirdre Cooper Owen in this episode.

**The Transatlantic Slave Trade Report**  
This report from the Equal Justice Initiative examines how American port cities from Boston to New Orleans were shaped by the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Including chapters on slavery and the slave trade in New England, Mid-Atlantic and Southern colonies, the report draws our attention to the role of the slave trade and the labor of enslaved people in the construction of many of our nation’s most iconic cities. Teachers can read portions of the report to deepen their own knowledge and share excerpts with students as part of a larger study on the institution of slavery in US history.

By clicking on the hyperlink above, you can read the report online or download it as a PDF.

**African Founders: How Enslaved People Expanded American Ideals**  
by David Hackett Fisher, 2021  
Drawing on over two decades of research and ground-breaking work of scholars like Gwendolyn Hall and Elizabth Donnan, *African Founders* explores how free and enslaved Africans acted as agents of change in early American history. Fisher utilizes a regional approach to examine the experiences of Africans in early America and the ways in which they responded to race-based slavery through the 17th and 18th centuries. Northern regions include New England, the Hudson Valley and the Delaware Valley; Southern regions include Chesapeake Virginia and Maryland, Coastal Carolinas, Georgia and Florida and Louisiana, Mississippi and the Gulf Coast and Frontier regions include the Western Frontier, the Maritime Frontier and the Southern Frontier. For each region, Fisher blends micro and macro
history to reveal how Africans and African Americans from New England to the Western frontier contributed to the expansion of individual rights and the American tradition of continuing reform as they leveraged the ideals of liberty and freedom to resist enslavement. Fisher does not ignore or minimize the brutality and cruelty of slavery and racism, but he is intent on bringing attention to how cultural folkways and technological skills Africans brought with them had far-reaching influence. Like other resources included in this collection, Fisher’s text brings attention to how enslaved men and women resisted slavery, found inventive ways to build and sustain community and made significant contributions to our nation’s founding.

**Pictures Books: Stories of Agency and Resistance**

The picture books listed below include titles from the National Council for the Social Studies annual Notable Trade Books for Young People as well as Caldecott and Newberry Award winners. My goal with this collection was to highlight picture books that are firmly grounded in historical research and depict enslaved men and women as historical actors instead of one-dimensional victims.

*Freedom Over Me* by Ashley Bryan
The inspiration for Bryan’s beautiful and poignant tale of eleven enslaved men and women is an 1828 estate appraisal that reads: “Eleven slaved are listed for sale with the cows, hogs, cotton; only the names and prices of the slaves are noted (no age is indicated).” Writing in verse, Bryan includes two poems for each man, woman, and child; one focused on the work they performed and the hardships they bore and the other a dream poem that reveals a life beyond the confines of slavery.

Corretta Scott King Book Award Winner, 2017

*Midnight Teacher: Lilly Ann Granderson and Her Secret School*
By Janet Halfmann Illustrated by London Ladd
Granderson ran a secret night school in Mississippi for over a decade. This picture book recounts the risks Granderson undertook to empower others with the gift of literacy. Carter G. Woodson Honor Award Winner, 2019.
| **Steamboat School**  
By Deborah Hopkinson  
Illustrated by Ron Husband  
Reverend John Berry Meachum was born enslaved but purchased his own freedom working in saltpeter mines. Meachum ran a school for enslaved children in Missouri until a new law forbade teaching the enslaved to read and write. In response, Meachum raised funds, purchased a steamboat, and moved his school to the Mississippi River - which was under federal not state jurisdiction. | **Hammering for Freedom**  
By Rita Lorraine Hubbard  
Illustrated by John Holyfield  
Born into slavery in Tennessee, William “Bill” Lewis learned the blacksmith trade as a child. Exceptionally skilled, Lewis earned enough extra money fixing old tools and creating new ones to purchase his freedom and that of his entire family.  
Lee & Low New Voices Award Winner, 2018. |
| **Henry’s Freedom Box: A True Story from the Underground Railroad**  
By Ellen Levine  
Illustrated by Kadir Nelson  
Henry ‘Box’ Brown was born into slavery in the early 19th century. After his wife and children were sold away to North Carolina, Brown was determined to escape slavery and, with the help of Northern abolitions, he conspired to ship himself to Philadelphia.  
Caldecott Honor Award Winner, 2008. |
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<th>Title</th>
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<td>A Spy Called James: The True Story of James LaFayette, Revolutionary War Double Agent</td>
<td>By Anne Rockwell</td>
<td>Illustrated by Floyd Cooper</td>
<td>When the Revolutionary War began, James’ enslaver granted him permission to enlist. He served as a spy by pretending to be a runaway to gain access to General Cornwallis' headquarters. The information he provided was invaluable yet after the war he was denied his freedom. Though James petitioned Congress for his freedom, it was not until the French general Marquis de Lafayette intervened on his behalf that he received his manumission.</td>
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<td>Runaway: The Daring Escape of Ona Judge</td>
<td>By Ray Anthony Shepard</td>
<td>Illustrated by Keth Mallet</td>
<td>Told in verse, Runaway tells the story of Ona Judge, an enslaved woman who defied George and Marsha Washington and ran away from their home in Philadelphia in 1796. She was never caught. Notable Trade Book for Young People, NCSS, 2021.</td>
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<td>William Still &amp; His Freedom Stories: The Father of the Underground Railroad</td>
<td>By Don Tate</td>
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<td>Though Still is not as well-known as the Underground Railroad’s most famous ‘conductor,’ his efforts to aid freedom seekers are equally remarkable. The son of slaves, Still joined with other abolitionists in Philadelphia to form the General Vigilance Committee dedicated to assisting runaways on their route to freedom. Still dedicated himself to collecting and recording the stories of thousands of freedom seekers and in the process not only created invaluable resources but helped to reunite hundreds of families.</td>
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<td>The Remarkable Story of George Moses Horton: Poet</td>
<td>By Don Tate</td>
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<td>As a young man George Moses Horton taught himself to read and write and when separated from his family turned to poetry for solace. Tasked with selling vegetables to students and faculty at the University of North Carolina’s Chapel Hill campus, Horton began reciting</td>
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poems from memory to the great amazement of his white audience. Eventually, he would sell his poems for 25 cents each, yet he was never permitted to purchase his freedom. Carter G. Woodson Award Winner, 2016.

On Sundays, enslaved men and women in New Orleans would gather in Congo Square (located in what is now the Treme neighborhood) when for at least half a day they were free from relentless toil. Congo Square was a legal gathering spot for enslaved and free Blacks in New Orleans and every Sunday the square was filled with music and dancing. Caldecott Honor Award Winner, 2017 Corretta Scott King Award Winner, 2017 Freedom in Congo Square By Carole Boston Weatherford Illustrated R. Gregory Christie

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<th>Moses: When Harriet Tubman Led Her People to Freedom</th>
<th>Mumbet’s Declaration of Independence</th>
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<td>By Carole Boston Weatherford Illustrated by Kadir Nelson</td>
<td>By Gretchen Woelfle Illustrated by Alix Delinios</td>
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While Tubman’s story and accomplishments are familiar to many, Weatherford’s account centers Harriet’s spiritual journey by presenting a fictionalized account of her conversations with God. The book features a series of two-page borderless paintings by Nelson that are not only gorgeous but expertly convey Tubman’s strength and courage.

One of the first enslaved people in Massachusetts to file a “freedom suit” under the state’s new constitution, Mum Bett won her case and her freedom. Once liberated she chose to name herself Elizabeth Freeman. This picture book biography...