



Ethnic Studies Lesson 4C: African Americans and the Slavery System

TOPIC:

AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY

GRADE LEVELS:

11-12

TIME:

1½ HOURS

California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Themes, Values, and Principles Alignment

Theme:

3. Systems of Power

Values and Principles:

4. Critique empire building in history and its relationship to white supremacy, racism, and other forms of power and oppression.
5. Challenge racist, bigoted, discriminatory, and imperialist/colonial beliefs and practices on multiple levels.

California English and Social Science Standards Alignment

English Language Arts Standards (11th and 12th Grade):**Reading—Informational Text (RI.11-12)**

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas. (RI.11-12.2)

Social Sciences Standards (11th and 12th Grade):**History-Social Science Content Standards—(Grades 9-12)**

Analyze the causes and consequences of European exploration and expansion in the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries. (7.11)

Analyze the influence of African kingdoms and the trans-Saharan trade on the development of Islamic civilization and African societies. (7.4)

Analyze the political, social, economic, and cultural impacts of the transatlantic slave trade on Africa, the Americas, and Europe. (8.7)

Lesson Purpose

Students will study the unique slavery system of the United States and identify its dehumanizing factors.

Essential Questions

How was the US system of slavery different from slavery in other parts of the world, and how was it dehumanizing?

How has life changed for African Americans over the last 250 years?

Materials

[University of Alabama Huntsville, What is the correct terminology, Black, African American or People of Color?](#)

[The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, Historical Context: Facts about the Slave Trade and Slavery](#)

[The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, The horrors of slavery, 1805](#)

[RH Smith Center for the Constitution, The Laws of Slavery](#)

[Unit 4 KWL Chart](#)

Vocabulary

dehumanizing

chattel

manumission

inhuman

slave codes

emanicipation

antebellum

Lesson Steps

Step 1:

- As a class, ask students about their thoughts on how African Americans would rather be referred to. How do they know? Let students know that terminology changes over time. Read the [University of Alabama](#) article as one possible source of terminology. For this course, using *Black* or *African American* would be appropriate unless someone has immigrated from a specific country and would rather be referred to by their citizenship in that country. Capitalizing *Black* is particularly important, as the word *black* that is not capitalized refers to a color.
- Ask students to help you define the word *inhumane* and ask for examples from the Middle Passage of inhumane treatment of slaves making that voyage. Ask students to help you define *dehumanizing*. What are some ways that someone could take away a student's humanity? (Answers may include taking away rights, removing your name, not allowing freedom, not allowing education, not allowing you to marry, etc.) Remind students that approximately 40 percent of the 10,000,000 slaves that survived the Middle Passage ended up in the American colonies. Create a Venn diagram on the board and label the left-hand circle "US" and the right-hand circle "South America and the Caribbean." Use popcorn, round robin, or another whole-group reading strategy to read out loud [The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, Historical Context: Facts about the Slave Trade and Slavery](#). As students read, stop to have them fill in the differences and similarities between slavery in the US and South America. Differences could include the high rate of slave reproduction in the US, and the US domestic slave trade.

Step 2:

- Remind students that for over 250 years in the US, slaves were kept under control primarily by a slavery system rather than by fences and chains. Besides not being allowed to choose their own family names and to have official marriages or other freedoms, slaves were also subjected to physical torture and laws that eliminated their rights. Students will be divided into two groups and will create a poster/chart to describe some of the methods of the slavery system that dehumanized slaves.
- Group 1 will read [The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, The horrors of slavery, 1805](#)
- Group 2 will watch [RH Smith Center for the Constitution, The Laws of Slavery](#)
- When students have completed their research, have them present their charts to the class. Make sure that students have touched on the physical cruelty of slavery, the separation of families, the law that traced an individual's slave status to that of their mother, and the lack of all basic rights.

Step 3:

- Ask students to answer this lesson's questions, "How was the US system of slavery different from slavery in other parts of the world, and how was it dehumanizing?" Also, ask students the unit question, "How has life changed for African Americans over the last 250 years?" Add what has been learned to this unit's KWL chart.

Essential Question Assessment, Application, Action, and Reflection

As time allows, and for homework, have students watch [PBS: Cotton Gin, The African Americans](#). Ask students to write a short paragraph and answer the questions, "How did the invention of the cotton gin in 1781 result in a Second Middle Passage? Why would this forced migration within the US be compared to the original slave trade?"

Additional Readings and Resources

Davis, David Brion. *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2014.

Davis, David Brion. *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823*. Cornell University Press, 1975.

Hummel, Jeffrey R. *Emancipating Slaves, Enslaving Free Men: A History of the American Civil War*, 2nd ed. Open Court, 2014.

[Hummel, Jeffrey Roger. U.S. Slavery and Economic Thought, Concise Encyclopedia of Economics](#)

[National Underground Railroad Freedom Center: Modern Abolition](#)

[PBS: Cotton Gin, The African Americans](#)

Sowell, Thomas. "The Economics of Slavery." In *Markets and Minorities*. Basic Books, 1981, 82-102.

Sowell, Thomas. *Ethnic America: A History*. Basic Books, 1981, 183-224.

Sowell, Thomas. "Race and Slavery." In *Race and Culture*. Basic Books, 1994, 186-223.

Sowell, Thomas. "The Real History of Slavery." In *Black Rednecks and White Liberals*. Encounter Books, 2005, 111-169.

Sowell, Thomas. "The Slavery Card." In *The Thomas Sowell Reader*. Basic Books, 2011, 245-247.

[Thomas Sowell: "Legacy of slavery" a legacy of cliches and lazy thinking](#)

Thomas SowellTV, “Thomas Sowell Debunks Myths about Slavery.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H4g5dY7mVyQ&t=156s>

NOTE TO EDUCATORS REGARDING ADDITIONAL READINGS AND RESOURCES: America is a pluralistic country, ethnically. It is also a pluralistic country politically—left, right, and center. Ethnic studies educators have ready access to resources from the left-of-center in the [2021 California Model Curriculum](#) and in the [Liberated Model Curriculum](#). This Comparative Cultures Ethnic Studies curriculum favors teachers exposing students to views from across the political spectrum. Educators often lack guidance to materials from outside the left-of-center. Therefore, in the sections on Additional Readings and Resources, the Comparative Cultures Ethnic Studies curriculum alerts educators to credible resources that provide an alternative to the other Model Curricula. In doing so, this curriculum encourages educators to acquaint students with evidence-based views from left, right, and center.

Ethnic Studies 4A: KWL Chart

KNOW	WONDER	LEARNED
<i>What do we think we already know about this topic?</i>	<i>What do we wonder about this topic? Write your questions below.</i>	<i>After the research is completed, what did we learn? Make sure to cite your source.</i>