Uncle Tom's Cabin: Pre-Civil War Literature Lesson Plan Teaching Guide

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How did Uncle Tom's Cabin affect Antebellum America and its views towards slavery?

OVERVIEW

In 1852, Harriet Beecher Stowe published *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly* in book form. The passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act inspired Stowe to write a novel to persuade Americans against the evils of the institution of slavery. She drew from numerous sources for inspiration, often giving voice to lesser-known accounts from self-emancipated people. The book made many abolitionists and created social inspiration and reaction that pushed the nation closure to Civil War; however, harmful stereotypes proliferated by the work have marred its legacy today.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, the students will be able to:

1. Knowledge
    - Students will be able to understand the role that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and anti-slavery legislation played in antebellum society's opinion on the institution of slavery.
    - Students will also be able to understand the change over time of how impactful the institution of slavery was in contributing to the outbreak of the Civil War.
2. Comprehension/Application/Analysis
    - Read a summary of Uncle Tom's Cabin and read an excerpt from the novel; then answer inquiry questions to explore the factual and emotional appeals within the original book.
3. Evaluation
    - Discuss observations from and about the historic novel and evaluate as a class the book's impact.

ACTIVITIES

1. Use the Lesson Plan's PowerPoint to explore the context and history.
2. As a class or in groups read this article Uncle Tom's Cabin for the story plot and context (paragraph three especially)
3. As a class or in groups, read one of the excerpts from Uncle Tom's Cabin.
    - Eliza's Escape
    - George's Fight for Freedom
    - Tom's Death
4. Distribute the primary source worksheet and have students fill out their answers. (Or use the questions for verbal discussion.)
5. Encourage a class discussion about *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and literature.
    - Does this writing influence people?
    - What other examples of books or writings can you think of that have shaped

society?

- Though Uncle Tom's Cabin uses language and ethnic dialogue that was acceptable in the 19th Century, some of it is considered stereotypical or racist today. Does this affect the message of the book? Does it impact how we view the book and its historical effects?
- Have you heard the phrase "the pen is mightier than the sword"? Do you think that is true with Stowe's book and other anti-slavery writings?

STANDARDS

Please visit the Lesson Plan Page and select the "Common Core and NCSS Standards for Social Studies" to view the details.

RESOURCES

Visit the Lesson Plan Page to find all resources in one convenient place. You'll find everything mentioned or linked in this Lesson Plan along with additional videos, articles, primary sources, and biographies.

Quick Links

- PowerPoint
- Lesson Plan Worksheet
- Uncle Tom's Cabin (article)
- Eliza's Escape
- George's Fight For Freedom
- Tom's Death

OPTIONAL HOMEWORK/ASSESSMENT/ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:

Option 1: Responding to the Fugitive Slave Act

Read the Fugitive Slave Act, and then read this following excerpt from the last chapter of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Use the questions for a writing or verbal discussion with your students.

"For many years of her life, the author avoided all reading upon or allusion to the subject of slavery, considering it as too painful to be inquired into, and one which advancing light and civilization would certainly live down. But, since the legislative act of 1850, when she heard, with perfect surprise and consternation, Christian and humane people actually recommending the remanding escaped fugitives into slavery, as a duty binding on good citizens,--when she heard, on all hands, from kind, compassionate and estimable people, in the free states of the North, deliberations and discussions as to what Christian duty could be on this head,--she could only think, These men and Christians cannot know what slavery is; if they did, such a question could never be open for discussion. And from this arose a desire to exhibit it in a living dramatic reality."

Questions:

1. Why does Stowe say she wrote the book? What was she trying to accomplish?

2. How does this statement relate to the Fugitive Slave Act?
3. What does she mean by 'Christian and humane people'?
4. Why might 'Christian and humane people' argue for the capture of people who were enslaved?
5. Why would citizens in non-slave holding states be upset with the Fugitive Slave Act?
6. How could the Fugitive Slave Act and Stowe's authorship of this narrative put more strain on the country?

Option 2: Abolition Supporters/Anti-Slavery Advocates

Students will conduct research on an individual in American history, finding four sources and then listing information about the historical figure and their ideas. Students will then compare individuals and their ideas.

1. Have your students define what abolition is, for example Merriam-Webster defines abolition as, "the act of officially ending or stopping something: the act of abolishing something: the act of officially ending slavery."

2. From that definition, students should conduct research to find antebellum era or earlier American abolitionists who wanted to end the institution of slavery.
    a. Have your students look for at least two primary sources related to the individual and at least two secondary sources related to the individual.
    b. Some examples of abolitionists in American history are:
        i. John Quincy Adams
        ii. Susan B. Anthony
        iii. John Brown
        iv. Levi Coffin
        v. Frederick Douglass
        vi. William Lloyd Garrison
        vii. Josiah Henson
        viii. Thomas Wentworth Higginson
        ix. Abraham Lincoln
        x. Lucretia Mott
        xi. William Seward
        xii. Lysander Spooner
        xiii. Thaddeus Stevens
        xiv. Sojourner Truth
        xv. Harriet Tubman
        xvi. Nat Turner

3. Students will create a resume detailing their accomplishments, ideas on the institution of slavery, and the main arguments that they used to persuade others to abolish the institution of slavery in America. Use this example of Harriet Beecher Stowe as an example to show the class. (next page)

EXAMPLE RESUME

Harriet Beecher Stowe

Litchfield, CT | 1811-1896

ABOLITIONIST

Highly educated and experienced author with a background in teaching and public speaking. A wife, mother, daughter, and Christian. Offers experience having lived just over the border from slave-holding Kentucky in Cincinnati, Ohio, housing escaping slaves on their way to freedom. Additional life experiences include the death of her mother and toddler son. Objective is to create awareness to the moral evils of slavery through empathy, especially the empathy of mothers.

EDUCATION

Sarah Pierce Academy | Litchfield, CT
Primary School Academics and Ornamental Arts

Hartford Female Seminary | Hartford, CT
Student of literature and mathematics. Later served as a teacher

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EXPERIENCE/EVENTS

Authored *Uncle Tom's Cabin* | Maine, USA
1851
Written as a series for an abolitionist newspaper, *The National Era*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* proved so successful that it was published as a novel. The novel became a best-seller, with only the Bible leading it in sales through the 19th century. Stowe would go on to write three additional antislavery works.

Speaking Tour | USA
After 1873
Two speaking tour promoting progressive ideals.

PROBLEMATIC FEATURES OR EVENTS

Incredibly privileged to have the education, financial freedom, and support of her family and community. Note: this can be seen as problematic because it limited her exposure to the realities of the subject she was writing about.
Limited exposure to slavery.
Created characters that helped create and perpetuate stereotypes.

FAMOUS QUOTES

I BESEECH YOU, PITY THOSE MOTHERS THAT ARE CONSTANTLY MADE CHILDLESS BY THE AMERICAN SLAVE-TRADE! – STOWE

PAINT A WORD PICTURE OF SLAVERY. - STOWE

SO, YOU'RE THE LITTLE WOMAN WHO WROTE THE BOOK THAT STARTED THIS GREAT WAR – A. LINCOLN

THERE IS MORE DONE WITH PENS THAN WITH SWORDS – STOWE

SOURCE MATERIAL

"Harriet Beecher Stowe House." https://stowehousecincy.org/index.html

Harriet Beecher Stowe Life." Harriet Beecher Stowe Center. Accessed January 15, 2019. https://www.harrietbeecherstowecenter.org/harriet-beecher-stowe/harriet-beecher-stowe-life/.

Stowe, Harriet Beecher. "45." Edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Hollis Robbins. In *The Annotated Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 463-72. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007.
The original text written by Stowe was used for this source.

"Uncle Tom's Cabin in the National Era." Uncle Tom's Cabin in the National Era. Accessed January 15, 2019. https://nationalera.wordpress.com/.

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