



Slavery in the United States – Primary Sources

By: Lori McDonald
Elementary school teacher; Ed.D. in School Leadership/Administration

Social Studies
Grades 6–8



Introduction

In this lesson, students will examine primary sources, primarily slave narratives, about slavery in the United States. Students will complete a group project and share findings from different primary sources.

Learning Objectives

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1](#); Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources

Materials Needed

- Have the stories (listed below) printed out in advance
- [Copies of graphic organizer](#) for each student

Procedure

Warm-up – Read-aloud a portion of the slave narrative of Silas Abbott (link below). Encourage students to discuss the trials and injustices of the slaves' experiences.

1. Tell students: "Today we are going to look at one aspect of U.S. History by examining a primary source. Many important stories have been told through the eyes of slaves in the Slave Narratives we will be looking at today".
2. Before beginning the narratives, discuss the purpose of the "[Federal Writers' Project](#)" and the importance and relevance of using oral histories and primary sources.
3. Listed below, there are several of the slave narratives that are grade-level appropriate. Put students into groups or pairs and assign each group a different slave narrative to read.
 - Sample stories that are grade-level appropriate are:
 - [Silas Abbott, Arkansas](#)
 - [Betty Abernathy, Missouri](#)
 - [Bill Austin, Florida](#)
 - [Sarah Ashley, Texas](#)
 - [William Baltimore, Arkansas](#)
 - [Charley Barber, South Carolina](#)

Continued on page 2



Slavery in the United States – Primary Sources

By: Lori McDonald

Elementary school teacher; Ed.D. in School Leadership/Administration

Social Studies
Grades 6–8



Continued from page 1

- [Millie Barber, South Carolina](#)
- [Adah Isabelle Suggs, Indiana](#)
- [Abe Whittess, Alabama](#)
- [Mary Jane Wilson, Virginia \(pioneer teacher\)](#)

4. As students work in their groups to read their slave narrative, they will also work together to fill out the graphic organizer.
5. After students have finished this activity, each group will be asked to share their findings with the rest of the class. The teacher should encourage discussion and discovery about the lives of each slave that is presented.
6. Discuss what was learned from these narratives that could not have been discovered in anything except a primary source. Make a list of important discoveries that were only made possible by the first-hand experiences of the slaves.

Evaluation

As a formative assessment, refer to Activity 6 and ask each student to reflect on the material they covered in the lesson. Which story stands out in their minds most? Why? Have each person document his or her answers in a learning log entry. If they need a jumpstart, they can begin entries with a statement such as **“When I think back on the story of (name of ex-slave), I will remember_____.”** Have them use specific examples of first-hand experiences from the primary source used.