

Research Lesson Plan: Slavery and the Constitution

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Targeted Grade Level: 8

Essential Question: Why did the Founding Fathers keep slavery in the Constitution?

Formative Assessment Prompts:

Instructional Chunk #1: What does the *Slavery Grievance* tell us about Jefferson’s views on slavery when he wrote the Declaration of Independence?

Instructional Chunk #2: Why did the founding fathers keep slavery in the Constitution if the Declaration of Independence claimed, “all men are created equal”?

Instructional Chunk #3: Why would different historians have explanations as to why the founding fathers kept slavery in the Constitution?

Standard Addressed:

History Standard Three: Students will interpret historical data [Interpretation].

6-8a: Students will compare different historians' descriptions of the same societies in order to examine how the choice of questions and use of sources may affect their conclusions.

Problematic Prior Knowledge (PPL) Addressed

- Students may think that the reason slavery wasn’t abolished in the Constitution was because at that time everyone was in favor of slavery.
- They may not understand that NOT including slavery was in fact a compromise.
- They may think that the decision to abolish the slave trade actually reduced slavery.

Activating Strategies: identify the strategy(ies) you will use to tap prior knowledge, activate schema, warm the students up for the lesson.

Strategy 1: Do Now: What do you know about the arguments for and against keeping slavery in the union around the time of the American Revolution?

Strategy 2: Reference to previous lesson

Strategy 3: Class discussion

Key Vocabulary to preview

Slavery
Grievance
Constitution
Historical Interpretation

Teaching Strategies:

- Direct Instruction
- Strategic groupings
- Class/Whole Group Discussion

Graphic Organizer:

- Graphic organizer provided as part of the SHEG lesson available online (see below)

Materials Needed:

- All documents and lesson resources can be found on the SHEG website under the lesson [Slavery in the Constitution Lesson Plan](#)

Differentiation Strategies:

- Groupings based on reading levels (using the modified documents or the full documents)
- Other strategic groupings

Instructional Plan:

Instructional Chunk #1: What does the *Slavery Grievance* tell us about Jefferson's views on slavery when he wrote the Declaration of Independence?

1. **Procedures:** After discussing the "Do Now" pass out the Slavery Grievance sheet. Provide background on the document. In groups ask students to read the document, and answer the questions at the bottom of the page.
2. **Debrief:** discuss the questions. Explain that the grievance was deleted because the southern states opposed it.

3. **Check for Understanding/Summarizing Activity:** Class discussion and responses on their grievances sheet.

Instructional Chunk #2: Why did the founding fathers keep slavery in the Constitution if the Declaration of Independence claimed, “all men are created equal”?

1. **Procedures:** Say: “The slavery grievance didn’t make it into the Declaration of Independence in 1776, but the document did claim that, “all men are created equal.” Eleven years later, in 1787, the founders drafted the Constitution and they didn’t eliminate slavery. This raises the question: “Why did the founding fathers keep slavery in the Constitution”?

Hand out Slavery Documents and graphic organizer. Have students read the documents and fill in their organizer.

2. **Debrief:**

- Overall did these men realize that slavery was a problem?
- Who did think it was a problem and who didn’t?
- For those who did think it was a problem, why didn’t they do anything to abolish slavery?

3. **Check for Understanding/Summarizing Activity:** Class discussion

Instructional Chunk #3: Why would different historians have explanations as to why the founding fathers kept slavery in the Constitution?

1. **Procedures:** Three of the documents you looked at were Historian Interpretations. What do we mean when we say “Historian Interpretation?”
 - “What are the three interpretations about why slavery was included in the Constitution?”
(Answer: 1: economic stability; 2: racism; 3: compromise to create a union)
 - Great a list of **possible** explanations as to how three historians arrived at three different conclusions.

2. **Debrief:** discuss list

3. **Check for Understanding/Summarizing Activity:** Students response to the following questions on an “exit ticket”:

- Why would different historians have explanations as to why the founding fathers kept slavery in the Constitution?
- Which interpretation do you most agree with and why?

