

West Virginia Studies Resource Development

Title of Lesson: The Legacy of John Brown
Grade level: 8th Grade (West Virginia Studies)
Summary: Students will examine the actions of abolitionist John Brown and identify how he is viewed today in society through those actions. Students will work to identify what legacy has been given to John Brown through his actions prior to the American Civil War. Students will learn about the increasingly divisive effects of slavery on national politics in the late 1850s in America. The students will also gain an understanding why the South became so angry with the North regarding the issue of slavery. The students will learn about John Brown and his raid on Harpers Ferry. The students will understand the controversial legacy of John Brown.
WV CCR Social Studies Standards: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• SS.8.22: Demonstrate an understanding of the American Civil War including its causes, effects and the major events that led to West Virginia statehood.• Explain the effect of key events leading to western Virginia’s separation from Virginia after secession (e.g., First and Second Wheeling Conventions and John Brown’s Raid).• Describe the moral, ethical and legal tensions that led to the creation of the new state of West Virginia and how these tensions were resolved (e.g., Virginia vs. West Virginia 1871).
Students will know and understand (content): <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is an abolitionist?• Who was John Brown?• What was John Brown’s role in “Bleeding Kansas” and the raid of Harpers Ferry?• Is John Brown considered a martyr or a madman and terrorist?• What is the legacy of John Brown?
Students will be able to do (skills): <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learn about John Brown and his role in helping to start the American Civil War.• Identify and understand John Brown’s legacy• Formulate an opinion and use primary sources and historical evidence to support their claim.
Materials & Resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• John Brown’s Body & Lyrics• Copy of John Steuart Curry’s “A Tragic Prelude” Painting• The Time Trial of John Brown from the Smithsonian Institute
Procedures: (West Virginia Studies) <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. After bell ringers: Ask students to examine closely the mural ‘A Tragic Prelude’ by John Steuart Curry from the Kansas State Capitol, paying special attention to the figure at the center. Ask them to describe what they see in the image and discuss what adjectives they would use to describe the man at the center.2. Discuss John Brown’s actions using the historical background included in this lesson, and note that while there were some in Brown’s lifetime who considered him a fanatic or considered him mad, there were others who described him otherwise, and that the mural

represents an interpretation of John Brown based on his legacy, or how he has been remembered over time.

3. Explain that the purpose of this lesson is to consider this legacy. How should he be remembered, as a hero, a madman, or something more complex?
4. Students will complete a time trial of John Brown and will view various video clips and act as the juror to debate John Brown's legacy and his character. The Time Trial and guiding questions come from the Smithsonian Institute. The link to the time trial is: <https://historyexplorer.si.edu/resource/time-trial-john-brown>.
5. Explain that students will have the opportunity to hear directly from John Brown about his actions, and will be able to debate with him directly. Play John Brown's introduction [<https://vimeo.com/129554643>], then ask students what they know about Brown. As they offer information on his background, play the related sections.
6. What happened at Harpers Ferry? [<https://vimeo.com/129577715>] Possible discussion prompt:
 - At Harpers Ferry, John Brown was making war on the government – when, if ever, is that justified?
 - Is violence against the government ever justified? [<https://vimeo.com/129679331>]Possible discussion prompts:
 - John Brown has just argued that we are living today in a nation founded as the result of violence against a government. Can we compare George Washington and John Brown? Are there similarities? Are there differences?
 - You've just heard John Brown give a defense of violence in pursuit of a political goal, the abolition of slavery. Are any political goals/causes so important, so right, that they justify violence?
7. What happened in Kansas? <https://vimeo.com/129583986>
Possible discussion prompt:
 - John Brown has just described a lawless Kansas with Free State men killed by pro-slavery men and nothing done about it. His violence was a response to this. Is this justified? Why or why not?
8. Next, encourage students to consider his tactics and motivations and why he chose violence to achieve his goals. Possible prompts and Brown's responses are included below. As students ask questions and listen to John Brown's responses, help students consider the alternative view. After each section, allow students to respond to Brown's argument and consider as a class what argument could be made against Brown's. Suggestions for prompting conversation are included after some sections, and suggestions for prompting discussion throughout the program are included here:
Possible discussion prompts:
 - I'm sure we can all agree that fighting against slavery was a noble cause, but does that excuse violence? Might there have been other things he could have done, other ways he could have opposed slavery?
 - Even if we say that he was right to attack slavery violently, what about his methods? Was the Harpers Ferry raid doomed from the start?
 - What else do we need to know more about to decide how he should be remembered?
9. Was John Brown a religious zealot? [<https://vimeo.com/129678630>]
Possible discussion prompts:
 - John Brown argues that religion has always played a big part in American life. What do we think about this in the context of his actions?

• John Brown has just argued that he was acting as a Christian in opposing slavery with violence. How do we feel about that?

Why didn't John Brown use nonviolence? [<https://vimeo.com/129679889>]

Possible discussion prompt:

10. • John Brown has just recounted to you how moral suasion -- non-violence -- was tried for decades and found unable to stop the spread of slavery. Other abolitionists like Frederick Douglass came to this same conclusion. Does it justify his violence that he and other abolitionists exhausted the avenue of non-violence? Why or why not?
11. Was John Brown a murderer? [<https://vimeo.com/129680688>]
Possible discussion prompt:
 - John Brown has just accused us of opposing his violence because it was done in the cause of freedom for enslaved people. Does he have a point? What makes John Brown's violence different from theirs?
12. Watch the following segment: Was John Brown insane? [<https://vimeo.com/129681875>]
13. Watch the following segment: Would slavery have ended anyway? [<https://vimeo.com/129682161>]
14. After the students have had a chance to discuss John Brown's actions, his justifications for them, and their thoughts on the issues, ask how many of them believe that they support John Brown and that his legacy is a positive one. Have students explain their reasoning. Then, ask the students how many do not believe Brown's actions were justified and do not believe that history should remember him positively, and have them explain their reasoning. Play one of John Brown's closing remarks:
15. Ending 1 (John Brown believes he has received a fair trial) [<https://vimeo.com/129683332>] or Ending 2 (John Brown does not believe he has been fairly considered) [<https://vimeo.com/129683836>] based on the class decision.
16. Explain that the purpose of the trial is not to make a definitive judgment on John Brown's actions, but rather to show that history is complicated, that our memory of historical events can be altered over time, and that there are many sides to every event. Have students brainstorm additional figures in history whose legacy has been debated or whose legacy has been contested over time.
17. As an exit tickets have students decide if John Brown was a hero/martyr or a terrorist? The response should be 5-7 sentences and should include evidence to support their position.

Checking for Understanding:

Students will be evaluated for understanding by participating in a class discussion. Students will be prompted with guiding questions during the time trial for the teacher to use to gauge their understanding. Students will also be evaluated for understanding by using an exit ticket to justify their opinion regarding John Brown's legacy.

Accommodations:

Through this lesson there are modifications that need to be made with a diverse group of students. There are modifications that are listed on specific student's IEPs in regards to this lesson and class work. It will be crucial to keep the students on task and organized during the class period. The teacher will keep the students on task by constantly walking throughout the room to check on the student's progress through the lesson and will create handouts or write lists on the white board

that will direct the students step-by-step to let them know what is coming next within the class period. If students have learning disabilities in the area of reading, the teacher will modify how students will read the text selections with the text being read aloud by either the teacher or other students in the class or by using the audio recordings from the textbook if the teacher has access. The teacher will also read directions aloud and repeat the directions several times throughout the class period. Redirection will be used to keep students on task during instructional time. The teacher will walk around the room during the lesson to answer any questions one-on-one with the students and also to assist them in reading the material they may have difficulty reading. Extended time may be given to students during class activities and homework assignments if needed and recommended in their IEPs.

High Level Learners: Students will use primary sources located in the John Brown DBQ to identify John Brown's legacy. Students will use the information in the primary sources to analyze John Brown's role in helping to start the American Civil War.