

Harriet Jacobs



Lesson Plan

OBJECTIVE:

To better understand the life of a slave.

Social Studies Objectives: 3.03, 3.04, 9.02

Social Studies Skills: 1, 2, 3, 5

Language Arts Objectives: 1.02, 1.03, 1.04, 2.01, 2.02, 6.01, 6.02

Resources / Materials

- Biographical sketch of Harriet Jacobs
- *Activities* page

Procedures

- Students will read and discuss the biographical sketch of Harriet Jacobs independently, as a small group or as a whole class.
- Students will complete *Activity* page.
- Discussion and extensions will follow as directed by the teacher.

Evaluation

- Student participation in reading and discussion of Harriet Jacobs
- Student performance on *Activity* page.

Bibliography

Mercer, Trudy. "Harriet Ann Jacobs: Writer and Activist 1813-1897. Author of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*." Copyright 2002.

<http://www.drizzle.com/~tmercercer/jacobs>

<http://www.drizzle.com/~tmercercer/jacobs/cron.shtml>

(link no longer active)

Washington, Margaret. "Margaret Washington on Harriet Jacobs." Contributing Editor: Jean Fagan Yellin.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4i3089.html>

Search related entries:

Margaret Washington on Harriet Jacobs

"Harriet Jacobs." Date accessed 2/22/03.

<http://pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p2923.html>

Harriet Jacobs



Biographical Sketch

Harriet Ann Jacobs was born a slave in Edenton, North Carolina, in 1813. Harriet Jacobs' parents were both slaves but were owned by different masters. Jacobs' mother was Delilah, the daughter of Molly Horniblow and the slave of Margaret Horniblow. Jacobs' father was a carpenter, and the slave of Dr. Andrew Knox. As a child, Jacobs lived with her mother. In 1819, at the age of 6, Jacobs' mother died. She was then placed in the care of Margaret Horniblow, her mistress. Miss Horniblow was kind to Jacobs and taught her to read and write. Jacobs was very hopeful that Miss Horniblow would emancipate her.

In 1825, Margaret Horniblow died when Jacobs was only 12 years old. Her freedom seemed to slip further away when Jacobs was willed to Miss Horniblow's 3-year-old niece, Mary Matilda Norcom, the daughter of Dr. James Norcom. Jacobs moved into the home of Dr. Norcom and was a house servant. In 1829, Joseph, her first child was born, followed by Louisa Matilda, born in 1833. The children's father was a white neighbor, Samuel Tredwell Sawyer, a lawyer. Conflicts arose between Jacobs and Dr. Norcom. As a result, Jacobs was ordered to work on one of Dr. Norcom's plantations as a field hand. Her children were bought by their father, Mr. Sawyer.

Harriet Jacobs refused to work as a field hand on one of Dr. Norcom's plantations and ran away. She hid for six years and eleven months in a garret above the home of her grandmother, Molly Horniblow. The space was 9 feet long, 7 feet wide, and 3 feet high. The sloping ceiling did not allow her room to turn

while laying down without hitting her shoulder. Rats and mice crawled over her and there was little light or ventilation. Jacobs would leave this space only for brief periods of time at night.

In 1842, Jacobs escaped by boat and eventually arrived in New York. She worked as a nursemaid for the family of an abolitionist. During that period of time, she not only helped free other slaves, but she also was reunited with her own children.

The passage of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 placed Jacobs' freedom in jeopardy. Jacobs did manage to evade capture by the bounty hunters with the help of friends and abolitionists. She finally received her freedom in 1852, when the Willis family purchased her from her former owners and legally granted her freedom.

Jacobs became actively involved in the abolitionist movement. Friends convinced her to write an account of her life as a slave. The book, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, was one of the first publications to reveal the abuse suffered and endured by slave women. In 1861, she toured with the abolitionist groups speaking and selling her book. In addition to writing, Jacobs returned to Edenton, North Carolina, after the end of the Civil War in 1865, to help the newly freed slaves adjust to their new lives. She died on March 7, 1897. Harriet Jacobs has been saluted as a writer and activist whose belief in justice has impacted the history of North Carolina.

Harriet Jacobs



Activities

Personal Response

Imagine yourself in a very small space for a period of five days. Generate a five-day journal of your feelings and emotions. Reflect on your life as it was before this confinement.

Analyzing Information

1. Create a timeline of important events in the life of Harriet Jacobs. Use color and graphics to better explain the events.
2. Explain the circumstances surrounding the transfer of Jacobs' ownership to Mary Matilda Norcom.
3. Trace the events that led to Jacobs' decision to run away.
4. Describe how Jacobs evaded capture after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850.
5. Explain the importance of Harriet's book on the history of North Carolina.

Interpreting Meaning

Directions: Read the selection. Locate each of the following terms. Write the sentence in which the term is located. Explain the meaning of the word as it is used in the biographical sketch of the life of Harriet Jacobs.

1. carpenter
2. mistress
3. emancipate
4. plantation
5. bounty hunter
6. abolitionist
7. garret

Creative Responses

1. **NCFMP:** Spend some time looking through Harriet Jacobs' book, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. If you had to pick a phrase or sentence from this book to carve on a wall as part of the NC Freedom Monument, what few words would best capture the life of this woman in her own words?
2. Create a replica of the space where Harriet Jacobs spent almost seven years of her life.
3. Construct a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting the life of Harriet Jacobs and Harriet Tubman.
4. Many important historical events happened during the lifetime of Harriet Jacobs.

Research one of the following events: Missouri Compromise, Compromise of 1850, the Fugitive Slave Act (1850), the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the Dred Scott decision, John Brown's Raid, or the Emancipation Proclamation. Using your research, write a report using desktop publishing and present the information to the class in an interesting way.

Harriet Jacobs



The AFRICAN
AMERICAN
EXPERIENCE
in North Carolina

North Carolina Freedom Monument Project

Activities ■ Answer Key for Teachers

Personal Response

Imagine yourself in a very small space for a period of five days. Generate a five-day journal of your feelings and emotions. Reflect on your life as it was before this confinement.

Responses will vary and can serve as a springboard for discussion.

Analyzing Information

1. Create a timeline of important events in the life of Harriet Jacobs. Use color and graphics to better explain the events.

Responses will vary.

2. Explain the circumstances surrounding the transfer of Harriet's ownership to Mary Matilda Norcom.

Harriet's mistress, Margaret Horniblow, died, and Harriet was willed to Miss Horniblow's 3-year-old niece, Mary Matilda Norcom.

3. Trace the events that led to Harriet's decision to run away.

1. The relationship between Harriet and Mr. Sawyer angered Dr. Norcom.
2. Dr. Norcom ordered Harriet to work as a field hand.
3. Harriet refused to work as a field hand and ran away.

4. Describe how Harriet evaded capture after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850.

Harriet evaded capture with the help of friends and abolitionists.

5. Explain the importance of Harriet's book on the history of North Carolina

Harriet's book was one of the first publications to reveal the abuse suffered and endured by slave women.

Interpreting Meaning

Directions: Read the selection. Locate each of the following terms. Write the sentence in which the term is located. Explain the meaning of the word as it is used in the summary of the life of Harriet Jacobs.

1. carpenter (a person who builds or repairs wooden structures) Harriet's father was a carpenter, and the slave of Dr. Andrew Knox.

2. mistress (a woman who had authority and control like that of a master) In 1819, at the age of 6, Harriet's mother died and she was then placed in the care of Margaret Horniblow, her mother's mistress.

3. emancipate (to free from slavery) Harriet was very hopeful that Miss Horniblow would emancipate her.

4. plantation (a large farm or estate) Harriet Jacobs refused to work as a field hand on one of Dr. Norcom's plantations and ran away.

5. bounty hunter (a person who finds slaves and returns them to an owner for a profit). Harriet did manage to evade capture by the bounty hunters with the help of friends and abolitionists.

6. abolitionist (a person who wanted to do away with slavery) Harriet became actively involved in the abolitionist movement.

7. garret (a room or unfinished part of a house just under the roof) Harriet hid for six years and eleven months in a garret above the home of her grandmother.

Creative Responses

1. **NCFMP:** Spend some time looking through Harriet Jacobs' book, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. If you had to pick a phrase or sentence from this book to carve on a wall as part of the NC Freedom Monument, what few words would best capture the life of this woman in her own words?

2. Create a replica of the space where Harriet Jacobs spent almost seven years of her life.

3. Construct a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting the life of Harriet Jacobs and Harriet Tubman.

4. Many important historical events happened during the lifetime of Harriet Jacobs.

Research one of the following events: Missouri Compromise, Compromise of 1850, the Fugitive Slave Act (1850), the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the Dred Scott decision, John Brown's Raid, or the Emancipation Proclamation. Using your research, write a report using desktop publishing and present the information to the class in an interesting way.

Responses will vary.