

People

John Chavis



Lesson Plan

OBJECTIVE: To better understand the impact of John Chavis on the history of North Carolina and the United States.

Social Studies Objectives: 3.04, 9.02

Social Studies Skills: 1, 2, 3, 5

Language Arts Objectives: 1.03, 1.04, 2.01, 5.01, 5.02, 6.01, 6.02

Resources / Materials

- Biographical sketch of John Chavis
- Activities page
- Internet access for Activity 1

Procedures

- Students will read and discuss the biographical sketch of John Chavis either as a whole class or in groups. Reading can also be done independently.
- Students will complete Activities page as designated by the teacher.

Evaluation

- Student participation in reading and discussion of John Chavis
- Student performance on the Activities page

Bibliography

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<http://www.ncsu.edu/ligon/about/history/intro.htm>

"John Chavis, Educator and Mentor."
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John Chavis

Biographical Sketch

John Chavis was born in either 1762 or 1763 to parents who were legally free during the era of slavery. Scholars have debated his birthplace, although two places in North Carolina, Pitt County and Granville County, show evidence that he was born in the Tar Heel state. Little is documented of his early life, and stories differ as to how John Chavis was educated. However, one part of his life remains clear: John Chavis was a deeply religious man. One story suggests that he studied under John Witherspoon, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and president of the College of New Jersey. A scholar of Greek and Latin, Chavis attended what is now called Washington and Lee University, graduating with honors in 1801. He attracted public attention because his academic record contradicted the widely-held belief that African Americans were intellectually inferior to whites. "Intellectually he was inferior to few North Carolinians," said historian John Hope Franklin. During the antebellum period, John Chavis was the most prominent free African American in North Carolina and was considered probably the most learned African American man in the United States.

John Chavis fought in our nation's struggle for independence as a soldier in the Fifth Regiment of Virginia. Enlisting in December 1778, he served three years in the Revolutionary War. He was identified as a free African American and as the owner of one horse in the 1789 tax list of Mecklenburg County, Virginia. John and his wife, Sarah Frances Anderson, had one son, Anderson Chavis.

In 1799, Chavis was licensed to preach and served as a missionary for the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church to slaves in Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. In 1807, Chavis traveled to Raleigh and preached to African American and white congregations in Granville, Orange, and Wake Counties. Unfortunately, his preaching days abruptly

ended in 1832, after Nat Turner's Rebellion. Nat Turner was an educated slave and preacher in Virginia who led a bloody insurrection ending in the murder of dozens of whites. Because of this rebellion, slaveholding states enacted laws forbidding African Americans to preach.

John Chavis was an educator as well as a preacher. He taught full-time following the ruling banning African Americans from preaching. John Chavis taught both races together in a school he opened in his home until white parents objected. Then he taught white children during the day for \$2.50 per quarter and African American children in the evenings charging them \$1.75 per quarter. Chavis' influence on African Americans and whites was far reaching. Running a school for free African Americans for thirty years, John Chavis did all he could to prepare free African American children to face the challenges of the 1830s. His school was considered one of the best in the state—either African American or white—and he taught the children of some of the most powerful men in white society. North Carolina Whig Senator Willie P. Mangum, North Carolina Governor Charles Manly, and New Mexico Governor Abram Rencher were among the more notable white students that he taught.

John Chavis died in 1838. The circumstances surrounding his death are unclear. However, many suspect that he was murdered because of his work to better the lives of African Americans. John Chavis' contributions to Raleigh were memorialized when the Chavis Height apartments and Chavis Park were named in his honor in 1938. John Chavis' influence on both whites and African Americans as a preacher as well as a teacher was far reaching. Few free African Americans in the South equaled John Chavis in literacy or financial status. He was a dedicated opponent of slavery as well as an influential civil rights leader in the South.



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Activities

Personal Response

As a result of Nat Turner's Rebellion, John Chavis was not allowed to preach. Do you think Chavis' change of career to teaching, since he could no longer preach, was the best way for him to handle the situation? Explain.

Analyzing Biographical Information

1. Explain why John Chavis' success in school was a complete surprise to the white community.
2. Interpret the quote by historian John Hope Franklin, "Intellectually he was inferior to few North Carolinians."
3. What evidence in John Chavis' life shows his concern for both whites and blacks?
4. Create a graphic organizer that shows how John Chavis demonstrated his concern for his country and his fellowman.

Interpreting Meaning

Directions: Find the term in the passage. Copy the sentence that contains the term. Explain the term by using context clues and/or the dictionary.

1. contradicted
2. inferior
3. prominent
4. enlisting
5. insurrection
6. rebellion

Creative Responses

Select one of the activities to complete.

■ Activity 1:

Directions: Using the North Carolina Division of Archives and History (<http://www.ah.dcr.state.nc.us>) as a resource, find and print pictures of Chavis Heights in Raleigh. Be able to explain the pictures and the significance of Chavis Heights.

■ Activity 2:

Directions: Create a "Bio Poem" honoring John Chavis using the format listed below. Copy each line except for line 2. For line 2, only list the nouns.

John Chavis

List two nouns describing Chavis.

(example: preacher)

■ Who lived from _____
(dates of birth and death)

■ Cared deeply for _____

■ Who helped _____

■ Who felt _____

■ Who would have liked to see

■ Who is remembered for

■ Resident of

■ Activity 3:

List the major events in John Chavis' life and divide up into teams that will take responsibility for illustrating one event. Using construction paper or felt squares, glue, and any other materials at hand, create a patchwork quilt depicting these events, including his memorialization in Raleigh. Each team should make one 10" square in collage form with one event depicted per square. Get your teacher to help you figure out how to join the squares. Present each square to the class in chronological order and then hang up the quilt. Discuss how a quilt can serve as a monument to a whole lifetime.

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Activities ■ Answer Key for Teachers

Personal Response

As a result of Nat Turner's Rebellion, John Chavis was not allowed to preach. Do you think Chavis' change of career to teaching, since he could no longer preach, was the best way for him to handle the situation? Explain.

Answers will vary and could serve as an impetus for discussion.

Analyzing Biographical Information

1. Explain why John Chavis' success in school was a complete surprise to the white community.

John Chavis' success in school was a complete surprise to the white community because African Americans were considered to be intellectually inferior to whites.

2. Interpret the quote by historian John Hope Franklin, "Intellectually he was inferior to few North Carolinians."

The quote means that John Chavis was one of the smartest or one of the most intellectual people, including whites, in North Carolina.

3. What evidence in John Chavis' life shows his concern for both whites and blacks?

John Chavis taught both African Americans and whites.

4. Create a graphic organizer that shows how John Chavis demonstrated his concern for his country and his fellowman.

John Chavis (1762 or 1763-1838)

Chavis was a soldier in the Fifth Regiment of Virginia during the Revolutionary War from 1778--1781.

Chavis was a preacher and a missionary.

Chavis taught both African American and white children.

Chavis taught free African American children for thirty years.

Chavis charged parents of the white children more than the African American children because most African Americans did not have as much money as the whites.

Interpreting Meaning

Directions: Find the term in the passage. Copy the sentence that contains the term. Explain the term by using context clues and/or the dictionary.

1. & 2. He attracted public attention because his academic record contradicted the widely-held belief that African Americans were intellectually inferior to whites.

Contradicted: state the opposite of

Inferior: lower in status or quality

3. During the antebellum period, John Chavis was the most prominent free African American in North Carolina and was considered probably the most learned African American man in the United States.

Prominent: well known

4. Enlisting in December 1778, he served three years in the Revolutionary War.

Enlisting: joining or enrolling in some branch of the armed forces

5. Nat Turner was an educated slave and preacher in Virginia who led a bloody insurrection ending in the murder of dozens of whites.

Insurrection: a rebellion

6. Because of this rebellion, slave-holding states enacted laws forbidding African-Americans to preach.

Rebellion: a rising up against established authority; an insurrection

Creative Responses

See *Activities* page. Answers will vary but should reflect knowledge of John Chavis based on information in the biographical sketch or further research.