

TEACHING HARD HISTORY

TEACHING AMERICAN SLAVERY THROUGH INQUIRY



LEARNING FOR JUSTICE

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Teaching About American Slavery Through Inquiry

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The Teaching Tolerance publication *A Framework for Teaching American Slavery*¹ represents an important starting place for defining the key themes and curricular content for teaching about American history and the fundamental roles that slavery and white supremacy have played in shaping the nation. The framework will help teachers construct a coherent narrative about how slavery and white supremacy are inescapably and intricately woven into the American story. By focusing on the key concepts that span our nation's history, *A Framework for Teaching American Slavery* demonstrates that slavery should not just appear as a single topic in a unit on the Civil War. Instead, it should permeate our understanding of how the country was formed and how the original sin of American slavery echoes today.

By design, even the best of standards documents—like this framework—are a necessary but insufficient step in affecting classroom practice. Standards represent the *what* and sometimes the *why* of teaching historical or social studies content, but standards rarely answer the question of *how* to teach a particular concept or idea. In order for content standards to come alive for social studies students, teachers need to animate content through dynamic and engaging instruction—and, in social studies, we focus that instruction around inquiry. If history students merely memorize a canonical list of names, dates and events, we have done

little to prepare them for the more ambitious outcomes of a strong social studies education that include questioning interpretations of the past and using that analysis to shape our understanding of the present.

But helping teachers instruct through inquiry is no simple task. Since John Dewey began writing at the turn of the 20th century,² educators have been touting the benefits of inquiry-based instructional practices and the potential of inquiry to create an engaged, democratic citizenry.³ Although advocacy around inquiry abounds, inquiry as a standard teaching practice has remained a murky ideal for many teachers. It is not that teachers oppose teaching through inquiry. Instead, they typically do not know what inquiry looks like or how they can use it to cover the large swaths of content that are often represented in standards documents.⁴

Published in 2013, *The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards* (National Council for the Social Studies) outlines a structure for teaching social studies content through inquiry. Central to the C3 Framework is the Inquiry Arc, a set of interconnected and mutually supportive ideas that frames the ways teachers and their students engage with social studies content. The Inquiry Arc features four dimensions:

- Developing questions and planning inquiries.
- Applying disciplinary concepts and tools.

1 Southern Poverty Law Center, *A Framework for Teaching American Slavery*.

2 Dewey, *Democracy and Education*.

3 Bruner, *The Process*; Hess and Posselt, "How High School Students Experience and Learn," 283-314; Parker, "Their Minds Must Be Improved," 1-6; Schwab, *The Practical*.

4 Grant and Gradwell, *Teaching History with Big Ideas*; Swan & Hofer, "Examining Student-Created Documentaries," 133-75.

- Evaluating sources and using evidence.
- Communicating conclusions and taking action.

Through these dimensions, the C3 Framework articulates a clear process for supporting students to inquire about the past, analyze and argue about its meaning and ultimately apply that knowledge to the challenges that face our world today.

The work of guiding students through the Inquiry Arc is more complex than it may initially seem, so on the heels of the publication of the C3 Framework, we immediately went to work on the Inquiry Design Model. This curricular approach to standards implementation animates content standards and integrates the four dimensions of the C3 Inquiry Arc. Using *A Framework for Teaching American Slavery* as the content anchor, the C3 Framework as the disciplinary skill anchor and the IDM as the structure, we hope to model for teachers an inquiry-based approach to guiding students through the “hard history” of American slavery.

Our hope is that, in doing so, we are able to make inquiry visible for teachers and to demonstrate how inquiry-based curriculum can, in turn, enact standards. In the final section of this article, we return to focus on *A Framework for Teaching American Slavery* and discuss why important topics like slavery are well suited for inquiry-based practice.

Enacting *A Framework for Teaching American Slavery* through the Inquiry Design Model

The Inquiry Design Model (IDM) is a distinctive approach to creating instructional materials that honors teachers’ knowledge and

expertise, avoids over-prescription and focuses on the key elements envisioned in the Inquiry Arc of the C3 Framework. Unique to the IDM is the blueprint™, a one-page presentation of the questions, tasks and sources that define an inquiry.⁵ The blueprint offers a visual snapshot of an entire inquiry such that the individual components *and* the relationship among the components can all be seen at once. Blueprints focus on the following elements necessary to support students as they address a compelling question using disciplinary sources in a thoughtful and informed fashion:

- Standards (anchor the content of the inquiry).
- Compelling questions (frame the inquiry).
- Staging the compelling question tasks (create interest in the inquiry).
- Supporting questions (develop the key content).
- Formative performance tasks (demonstrate emerging understandings).
- Featured sources (provide opportunities to generate curiosity, build knowledge and construct arguments).
- Summative performance tasks (demonstrate evidence-based arguments).
- Summative extensions (offer assessment flexibility).
- Taking informed action exercises (promote opportunities for civic engagement).

We’ll illustrate the IDM structure by unpacking a sample inquiry on emancipation (see Figure 1). In this inquiry, high school students examine a historical debate around the freeing of enslaved people using historical sources and contemporary scholarship. The inquiry is rooted in the content objectives laid out within *A Framework for Teaching American Slavery*, focusing on the following content objective:

17E: The Emancipation Proclamation was the result of several factors: Lincoln’s opposition to slavery, the changing sentiment in the North about the

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The sections of *A Framework for Teaching American Slavery* titled “What key content should my students know?” and “How can I teach this?” are designed to support teachers interested in applying the IDM. Key content can serve to anchor the inquiry. The “How can I teach this?” section, along with the Teaching Hard History text library, guides teachers toward a range of primary and secondary source documents from which they can select their featured sources.

⁵ Grant, Swan, and Lee, *Inquiry-Based Practice in Social Studies Education*.

necessity of ending slavery as a way to end the war, the valor of the African-American soldiers who fought for freedom and the self-emancipation of hundreds of thousands of enslaved Southerners who had already fled to Union lines.

In the sections that follow, we unpack the three defining elements of inquiry—questions, tasks and sources.⁶ We highlight the compelling and supporting *questions* that frame and organize this inquiry; the formative and summative assessment *tasks* that provide opportunities for students to demonstrate and apply their understandings; and the disciplinary *sources* that allow students to practice disciplinary thinking and reasoning.

Questions

As Socrates demonstrated, questions matter. In Plato’s *Protagoras*, Socrates claims, “my way toward truth is to ask the right questions.”⁷ Answers are important, but a well-framed question can excite the mind and give real and genuine meaning to the study of any social issue. The C3 Inquiry Arc and the IDM feature compelling questions as a way to drive social studies inquiry.

In crafting compelling questions, the key is hitting the sweet spot between being intellectually rigorous and being personally relevant to students. Intellectually rigorous questions reflect an enduring issue, concern or debate in social studies and speak to the big ideas of history and the social sciences. For example, the compelling question—Does it matter who ended slavery?—asks students to grapple with historical significance and causality generally and the end of slavery specifically. Historians continue to tease out the profound complexity and the chains of action and reaction that caused this turning point in U.S. history. In this inquiry, students enter the ongoing historical discussion by investigating the laws

Figure 1: The *Emancipation Blueprint*


High School Emancipation Inquiry

Does it Matter Who Ended Slavery?


Framework for Teaching American Slavery and White Supremacy	Summary Objective 17, Key Content E: The Emancipation Proclamation was the result of several factors: Lincoln’s opposition to slavery, the changing sentiment in the North about the necessity of ending slavery as a way to end the war, the valor of the African-American soldiers who fought for freedom and the self-emancipation of hundreds of thousands of enslaved Southerners who had already fled to Union lines.
Staging the Question	Read and discuss excerpts from <i>The Washington Post</i> article “On Emancipation Day in D.C., Two Memorials Tell Very Different Stories” and view images of the Emancipation Memorial and the African American Civil War Memorial.

Supporting Question 1	Supporting Question 2	Supporting Question 3
What legal steps ended slavery?	What arguments do historians make about who ended slavery?	What are the implications of the debate over who ended slavery?
Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task
Create an annotated timeline that describes legal steps taken between 1861 and 1865 to end slavery.	Construct a T-chart that contrasts arguments that Lincoln freed enslaved people with arguments that enslaved people freed themselves.	Develop an evidence-based claim that explains the implications of the debate over who ended slavery.
Featured Sources	Featured Sources	Featured Sources
Source A: Excerpts from the Confiscation Acts (1861-1862) Source B: Excerpts from the Emancipation Proclamation (1863) Source C: The Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (1865)	Source A: James M. McPherson’s essay “Who Freed the Slaves?” (1995) Source B: Ira Berlin’s essay “Who Freed the Slaves? Emancipation and Its Meaning in American Life” (1996)	Source A: “Who Freed the Slaves?” by James M. McPherson (1995) Source B: “Who Freed the Slaves? Emancipation and Its Meaning in American Life” by Ira Berlin (1996)

Summative Performance Task	ARGUMENT Does it matter who ended slavery? Construct an argument (e.g., detailed outline, poster or essay) that addresses the compelling question using specific claims and relevant evidence from historical sources while acknowledging competing views. EXTENSION Examine the story of emancipation told by a history textbook and propose revisions.
Taking Informed Action	UNDERSTAND Watch the film <i>Lincoln</i> . ASSESS Using evidence generated from the inquiry as support, discuss the extent to which the film accurately depicts the end of slavery. ACT Write a review of the film and post it to www.IMDb.com .

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that emancipated certain enslaved people over time as well as the arguments contemporary historians have made about who was responsible for freeing enslaved people.

Within the question “Does it matter who ended slavery?” the student-friendly elements

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This IDM is drawn from the key content expansion of *A Framework for Teaching American Slavery* Summary Objective 17: Students will examine the evolving Union policies concerning slavery and African-American military service and understand that the free black and enslaved communities affected the Civil War.

6 Grant, Swan, and Lee.

7 Vlastos, *Plato’s Protagoras*.

of the question quickly emerge. First, the question pulls on a thread that all students care about: purpose. At the very heart of this question is something students wonder about as they approach any subject in school: What is the purpose of this lesson? Why do I have to know this? Does it even matter? Instead of assuming purpose or significance, the question puts students in charge of those fundamental questions by asking them to wrestle with something they might be already thinking: Does it matter? Second, the question is free of jargon and is written in a student-accessible way. Students should be able to hold compelling questions in their heads in ways that are illuminating rather than merely decorative.

in this inquiry asks students to evaluate emancipation, thus Supporting Question #1 focuses on emancipation as a legal concept and series of actions. Historians' arguments about emancipation as put forth in Supporting Question #2 provide the grounding for students to consider the issue of purpose suggested in the compelling question. The issue of whether it mattered who was responsible for freeing enslaved people is ripe for speculation; hence, Supporting Question #3 asks about the implications of the debate. The compelling and supporting questions work in tandem to provide the architecture for the inquiry; they highlight the ideas and issues with which teachers and students can engage. There is no one right compelling question for a topic, nor is there only one way to construct and

sequence supporting questions. The question "Does it matter who ended slavery?" has been vetted and found to be compelling by a range of teachers and academics, but that is not to say that others might not develop equally engaging questions on the same topic. The supporting question sequence in this inquiry could also be rear-

ranged, substituted or augmented into a whole new series.

The IDM blueprints require teacher expertise and individual craft to fully come to life. To underscore this point, all IDM inquiries available on c3teachers.org are available in both PDF and Microsoft Word documents so that teachers can adapt and improve the inquiries for their particular classroom contexts.

Tasks

In the IDM blueprint, a variety of performance tasks provide students with experiences for learning and teachers with opportunities to evaluate what students know and are able to do. Assessments serve instructional as well as evaluative purposes, so the IDM features both formative and summative performance tasks as well as extension activities and taking informed action opportunities.

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This IDM speaks directly to one of the 10 Key Concepts that shape *A Framework for Teaching American Slavery*. Key Concept 5: Enslaved people resisted the efforts of their enslavers to reduce them to commodities in both overt and covert ways.

With a compelling question framing an inquiry, supporting questions act to sustain it. Supporting questions flesh out the compelling question by organizing and sequencing the main ideas. Supporting questions follow a question logic representing what experts know about the compelling question as it is engaged over the inquiry experience. For example, in the Emancipation inquiry, the supporting questions sequence this way:

- **Supporting Question 1:** What legal steps were taken to end slavery?
- **Supporting Question 2:** What arguments do historians make about who ended slavery?
- **Supporting Question 3:** What are the implications of the debate over who ended slavery?

Each supporting question builds on the previous one, filling in the intellectual space opened by the compelling question. The compelling question

Based on the C3 Inquiry Arc, IDM begins with a compelling question (Dimension 1) that is consistently answered in the form of an evidence-based argument (Dimension 4). In this way, students' summative products are *convergent*—that is, the investigation results in the construction of an evidence-based argument that answers the compelling question. Opportunities for *divergent* thinking surface through the extension activities and taking informed action exercises.

Students can express their arguments creatively through the extension activities and taking informed action exercises. The heart of each inquiry, however, rests between two points—the compelling question and the argument. What comes in between (e.g., supporting questions, formative performance tasks and sources) is designed to prepare students to move constructively between the compelling question and the summative argument. In the *Emancipation* inquiry, for example, the summative performance task begins with the compelling question followed by the phrase “construct an argument.” The verb *construct* was purposefully chosen to indicate that not all arguments must take the form of an essay.

Making and supporting a strong argument is challenging, as students must engage with content and skills throughout an inquiry. The formative performance tasks within the inquiry are designed as content and skill *exercises* intended to move students toward success in constructing a coherent, evidenced-based argument. These tasks do not include all of what students might need to know and do, but they do include the major content and skills that provide a foundation for their arguments. In this way, teachers avoid “gotcha” assessments—tasks that catch students off guard or without the proper preparation for success on the summative performance task.

Formative performance tasks are framed by the supporting questions within an inquiry. In this way, the formative performance tasks and

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Teaching Tolerance has developed several IDMs aligned with *A Framework for Teaching American Slavery*. These IDMs, designed by elementary, middle and high school educators, serve as models for how the framework and the IDM method can be applied in classrooms.

the supporting questions have a similar relationship to that of the compelling question and the summative argument. The formative performance tasks also increase in complexity so students can develop and practice the skills of making evidence-based claims.

In the *Emancipation* inquiry, these formative performance tasks provide opportunities to develop the knowledge (e.g., an understanding of the legal context that ended slavery) and practice the skills (e.g., reading sources and supporting claims with evidence) necessary to construct a coherent, evidenced-based argument. The formative tasks sequence in the following way:

- Create an annotated timeline that describes legal steps taken from 1861 to 1865 to end slavery.
- Construct a T-chart that contrasts arguments that Lincoln freed enslaved people with arguments that enslaved people freed themselves.
- Develop an evidence-based claim that explains the implications of the debate over who ended slavery.

Students rightly disdain busy work. Formative performance tasks are purposeful exercises designed to support student growth and success as they engage the summative argument task.

Reflecting the purpose and structure of the summative and formative performance tasks, summative extension exercises offer alternatives through which students may express their arguments. In keeping with the C3 Inquiry Arc, extension exercises ask students to present adaptations of their arguments with a range of audiences and in a variety of venues outside of the classroom. Unlike the summative argument, extension activities are divergent in that the products vary from inquiry to inquiry. For

example, in the *Emancipation* inquiry, students have the opportunity to propose revisions to a history textbook based on their arguments. In the other inquiries, adaptations range from writing letters to the editor or engaging in a classroom debate to participating in perspective-taking exercises.

Another kind of extension exercise is taking informed action. These experiences offer students opportunities to civically engage with the content of an inquiry. Informed action can

inquiry as support, discuss the extent to which the film accurately depicts the end of slavery.

- **Acting:** Write a review of the film and post it to www.IMDB.com.

Taking informed action is included in every blueprint, but we acknowledge that teachers may not be able to enact the sequence due to time constraints. Reflecting this condition, taking informed action is embedded into the formative and summative performance tasks for some inquiries in order to ease the time burden on teachers and to make civic opportunities more seamless.

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The creators of the Teaching Hard History IDMs included a range of extension tasks for their inquiries. Elementary school students studying the relationship between sugar and slavery are asked to write a letter to a 19th-century congressman encouraging a sugar boycott. Middle school students studying Uncle Tom's Cabin create videos answering the question "Can Words Lead to War?" Other activities include creating a timeline of your community's history with slavery, participating in a structured academic controversy or creating a political cartoon.

take a wide range of forms (e.g., discussions, debates and presentations) and can occur in a variety of contexts both inside and outside of the classroom. Key to any action, however, is the idea that it is informed. The IDM stages taking informed action activities such that students build their knowledge and understanding of an issue before engaging in any type of social action. In the *understand* stage, students demonstrate that they can think about the issues behind the inquiry in a new setting or context. The *assess* stage asks students to consider alternative perspectives, scenarios or options as they begin to define a possible set of actions. And the *act* stage is where students decide if and how they will put into effect the results of their planning.

In the *Emancipation* inquiry, taking informed action is expressed as three steps at the conclusion of the inquiry:

- **Understanding:** Watch the film *Lincoln*.
- **Assessing:** Using evidence generated from the

Sources

Sources complete the IDM model. With compelling and supporting questions in place and formative and summative performance tasks situated to enact student learning about the content in those questions, sources provide the substance and the content for an inquiry. But sources in IDM only provide access to content. Unlike a textbook or a teacher lecture, disciplinary sources require that students dig into the materials, applying analytical skills to construct the content and understanding needed to move the inquiry forward.

In an inquiry, sources have three purposes:

- To spark and sustain student curiosity in an inquiry.
- To build students' disciplinary (content and conceptual) knowledge and skills.
- To enable students to construct arguments with evidence.

Used in this way, sources correspond with parts of the IDM blueprint: staging the compelling question, formative performance tasks, summative performance tasks and additional tasks (e.g., extensions and taking informed action exercises).

The first role of sources is to spark curiosity in students as they initiate and sustain an inquiry. The IDM suggests that sources can play an important role in helping students become interested in knowing more about an inquiry topic.

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The Teaching Hard History Text Library includes nearly 100 documents drawn from the history of American slavery that you might use as sources in your IDM. The sources include analysis, such as excerpts from essays or monographs by contemporary historians; legal documents, such as deeds of sale or transcriptions of laws; manuscript images of letters, broadsides or newspaper articles; excerpts of creative writing, such as poetry or novels; diary entries and narratives; images, such as woodcuts, prints and drawings; and more.

Each blueprint includes a space to craft a brief exercise to spark student curiosity through activities called *Staging the Compelling Question*. In the *Emancipation* inquiry, students are asked to read an article excerpted from *The Washington Post* and to react to images of the Emancipation Memorial and the African American Civil War Memorial (see Figures 2 and 3).

After reading the article and examining the monument images, teachers can facilitate discussion about the process of emancipation, the way historians and citizens interpret events such as emancipation and the ongoing nature of these historical conversations. Using the ideas generated from the class discussion, teachers can introduce the compelling question “Does it matter who ended slavery?” and set the stage for the inquiry.

The second use of sources is to help students build their content and conceptual knowledge and their practice with disciplinary skills (e.g., historical thinking or geographic reasoning). The C3 Framework encourages shifting instructional practice away from a didactic, teacher-focused approach to one in which content serves a more active role and where students purposefully integrate disciplinary knowledge and disciplinary skills.⁸ IDM inquiries put this idea into practice through the formative and summative performance tasks.

The quotation below is a source for the first formative performance task in the *Emancipation* inquiry. The 13th Amendment (1865) provides an important foundation for

the key content in the inquiry. Namely, it marks the legal abolishment of slavery in the United States:

Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

This amendment and the other sources for this task (excerpts from the Confiscation Acts and the Emancipation Proclamation) can be used to establish the legal timeline of emancipation. In this way, they help students complete the first formative task, creating an annotated timeline that describes legal steps taken from 1861 to 1865 to end slavery.

The summative performance task in the IDM calls on students to construct and support arguments, and sources play a big role in that process. Throughout an inquiry, students examine sources through the sequence of formative performance tasks. Doing so allows students to develop the knowledge they need to build

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One idea teachers may want to consider is including sources beyond images and text. Each summary objective in *A Framework for Teaching American Slavery* is followed by a “How can I teach this?” section which directs teachers to a range of resources, including databases, films and audio clips that might prove useful sources for sparking student interest.

⁸ Swan, Lee, and Grant, *C3 Instructional Shifts*.



Figure 2. Thomas Ball, *Emancipation Memorial*, 1876; statue celebrating the emancipation of African Americans, Washington, D.C.



Figure 3. Ed Hamilton, *African American Civil War Memorial* (also known as the *Spirit of Freedom*), 1998; statue honoring the service of African Americans during the Civil War, Washington, D.C.

arguments through evidence-based claims.

Each of the sources in this inquiry holds the potential to contribute to the arguments students might make. For example, noted Civil War historian James McPherson examines the agency of enslaved people to free themselves in his essay “Who Freed the Slaves?”:

The traditional answer to the question posed by the title of this paper is: Abraham Lincoln freed the slaves. In recent years, though, this answer has been challenged as another example of elitist history, of focusing only on the actions of great white males and ignoring the actions of the overwhelming majority of the people, who also make history. If we were to ask our question of professional historians today, the reply would, I think, be quite different. As Robert Engs put it: “THE SLAVES FREED THEMSELVES.” They saw the Civil War as a potential war for abolition well before

*Lincoln did. By voting with their feet for freedom—by escaping from their masters to Union military camps in the South—they forced the issue of emancipation on the Lincoln administration.”*⁹

Expressing a different perspective, Ira Berlin expands on McPherson’s ideas, arguing that enslaved people were the primary force behind their emancipation:

Lincoln’s proclamation, as its critics have noted, freed not a single slave who was not already entitled to freedom under legislation passed by Congress the previous year. It applied only to the slaves in territories then beyond the reach of federal authority. ... Indeed, as an engine of emancipation, the Proclamation went no further than the Second Confiscation Act of July 1862, which freed all slaves who entered Union lines professing that their owners

were disloyal, as well as those slaves who fell under federal control as Union troops occupied Confederate territory. ... Even Lincoln recognized the limitations of his ill-defined wartime authority, and, as his commitment to emancipation grew firmer in 1863 and 1864, he pressed for passage of a constitutional amendment to affirm slavery's destruction.¹⁰

Students can use ideas from the McPherson and Berlin essays, combined with other sources in the inquiry, as evidence to make and support claims proposing who freed enslaved people and outlining the implications of the historical debate of who ended slavery.

Rarely will a source, as created, be perfectly suited for use in an inquiry. After all, these sources were not created with the inquiry in mind or, for that matter, with high school students as their intended audience. Thus, sources more often than not need to be adapted to suit the needs of students and the inquiry. Although sources such as artwork and photographs may be used as-is in an inquiry, many sources require adaptation in one of three ways:

- **Excerpting** involves using a portion of the source for the inquiry. Care should be taken to preserve information in the source that students may need to know about the creator and context of the source.
- **Modifying** involves inserting definitions or changing the language of a text. Modifying texts increases the accessibility of sources.
- **Annotating** involves adding short descriptions or explanations. Annotations allow teachers to set a background context for sources.

Examples of two of these three approaches to adapting sources are evident in the *Emancipation* inquiry.

- **Excerpting:** Text passages from McPherson's

and Berlin's writing are all carefully selected passages from longer sources.

- **Annotating:** The images of the monuments include annotations.

Arguing that changing sources does more harm than good, some observers object to altering sources. It is a valid concern, yet teachers should keep in mind the purpose of the source in the inquiry and ask themselves whether they are using the source for the source's sake or to accomplish their learning goal. Rarely will teachers use a source solely for the sake of using it in its original form.

Bringing it all together

Taking inquiry as its origin point, a compelling question serves to initiate an inquiry. A summative performance task, where students address that question, serves to pull the inquiry together. The beginning and end points are important, but no more so than the elements—supporting questions, formative performance tasks and sources—that comprise the middle of the IDM.

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Most of the resources in the Teaching Hard History Text Library are either relatively short or have been excerpted from longer sources. All sources are searchable by grade level, and sources include introductory annotations which teachers may choose to include for students.

Readers should note that the IDM reflects a specific, conscious decision not to produce fully developed and comprehensive curriculum units or modules. Teachers should find considerable guidance within each inquiry around the key components of instructional design: questions, tasks and sources. What they will not find is a complete and prescriptive set of lesson plans. Experience suggests that teachers teach best the material that they mold around

9 McPherson, "Who Freed the Slaves?" 35.

10 Berlin, "Who Freed the Slaves?" 41.

the contexts in which they teach and their particular students' needs. Rather than scripts reflecting generic teaching and learning situations, the IDM encourages teachers to draw on their own wealth of teaching experience as they add activities, lessons, sources and tasks that transform the inquiries into their own, individual pedagogical plans.

The Role of Inquiry in Understanding American Slavery

Inquiry is a powerful antidote for the didactic instruction that far too often finds its way into social studies classrooms.¹¹ The C3 Framework and *A Framework for Teaching American Slavery* offer new ways to think about inquiry and long established content and instructional practices. While inquiry can lead the way, it plays a particularly important role in combination with challenging content such as slavery. When learning about slavery, we ask much of students. The complexity of slavery requires careful study. As *A Framework for Teaching American Slavery* points out:

*Slavery and the slave trade were central to the development and growth of the economy across British North America and, later, the United States.*¹²

Understanding the far-reaching and overlapping effects of slavery and white supremacy demands deep engagement on the part of students, a type of engagement that inquiry is well suited to support.

The irreducible evil of slavery, matched by the realization that “enslaved people resisted the efforts of their enslavers to reduce them to commodities,” may be hard for students to understand. It’s equally hard to believe that slavery and white supremacy could have been such a fundamental part of the American experience and perhaps even more difficult for students to comprehend the long shadow of slavery and white supremacy on the present.

Inquiry provides structure for students to make sense of it all. When confused, we ask questions, and when students ask questions, we are obliged to help them find answers by “wrestling with the conditions of the problem.”¹³

IDM, with its focus on questions, tasks and sources, provides a structure for this natural desire to inquire. Questions emerge when students are perplexed, tasks help students take on the complexity of the problem in bite-size pieces, and sources spark students’ interests and open avenues to deepen knowledge of content. When we use inquiry to help students understand slavery and white supremacy, we are drawing on what is best about social studies. Our capacity to take on the most challenging of topics—topics such as slavery and white supremacy—makes us better as learners, teachers and citizens.

11 Loewen, *Teaching What Really Happened*.

12 Southern Poverty Law Center, *A Framework for Teaching American Slavery*, 6.

13 Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 188.

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Teaching Hard History

A FRAMEWORK FOR TEACHING AMERICAN SLAVERY

Welcome to *A Framework for Teaching American Slavery*.^{*} The team of historians and social studies experts who worked on this project are passionate about its importance and pleased to share this document outlining the components of the framework and advice for how to use them.

Our goal is to inspire a widespread commitment to robust and effective teaching about American slavery in K–12 classrooms. This history is fundamental to understanding our nation’s past and its present. Based on our research and a review of the materials currently available to educators, however, we’ve come to the conclusion that the topic is being taught without adequate breadth or depth. As a result, students are unable to draw connections between historical events and the concurrent struggles for racial equality or to contextualize how the world they inhabit was shaped by the institution of slavery and its ideological progeny, white supremacy.

A Framework for Teaching American Slavery was created to fill this void. We have designed this resource for teachers with the hope that it can be used at every level of instruction to influence the development of lessons, curricula and even textbooks.

1 The framework begins with 10 “**Key Concepts**,” important ideas that students need to truly understand if they are to grasp the historical significance of slavery. The Key Concepts also serve as tools educators can use to structure their teaching.

2 These ideas are expanded in the chronological scope and sequence, which breaks the framework into five eras to provide a blueprint

for integrating American slavery across the entire span of pre-1877 American history. Each era is designated with a section title and with dates so teachers can skip to a particular time period or consult the framework continuously as they move through their courses.

3 Each era also contains “**Summary Objectives**,” broad student learning outcomes related to the era. There are 22 Summary Objectives in this document; all are mapped to the Key Concepts.

4 Beneath each Summary Objective, the framework includes two sections providing additional support for teaching that objective. Because the literature on American slavery is vast and we don’t expect all teachers to be content experts, we’ve included a section titled “**What else should my students know?**” This section provides key content at a more granular level.

5 The last section of each Summary Objective is called “**How can I teach this?**” This section provides information about critical resources that can help educators plan lessons for each objective. Many of these resources, and scores of other primary and secondary sources, are available for download in the Teaching Hard History Text Library.

Available through the Teaching Tolerance website, tolerance.org, the Teaching Hard History Text Library provides educators with free access to a large collection of primary and secondary sources they can use as they implement the framework in their curriculum and their classrooms. The library is searchable

^{*} “American” is used instead of “United States” because we will address colonial North American experience in those lands that will become the United States.

Pre-Colonial and Colonial Era | to 1763

1

3

4

2

5

SUMMARY OBJECTIVE 1

Students will recognize that slavery existed around the world prior to the European settlement of North America.

MAPS TO KEY CONCEPT 1

What else should my students know?

1.A Before the 15th century, most enslaved people were not Africans. Even the plantation system itself did not begin with African labor: Until the 1450s, European sugar planters in the Mediterranean imported enslaved laborers from parts of Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

1.B Slavery was widespread in larger African kingdoms (the Kongo and Asante, for example). It was quite limited in smaller societies in regions like the Upper Guinea Coast.

1.C In many African societies, people became enslaved when they were captured during war. The status of enslaved people changed as they learned the customs and integrated into their captors' community. Slavery was not always intergenerational; the children of enslaved parents were not necessarily enslaved.

1.D Slavery was a part of some Native American societies before European settlement. In some Native American societies, slavery could be socially alienating. But others had a built-in flexibility about slavery; so enslaved people could integrate into their societies and even become people of power and influence.

1.E European colonists in North America bought, sold and enslaved Native Americans. Some white colonists engaged in wars for the explicit purpose of acquiring Native Americans

to enslave; some colonists financed or otherwise encouraged Native American allies to engage in wars with other Native Americans for the purpose of acquiring Native Americans to enslave. In South Carolina, English enslavement of Native Americans was so pervasive and lucrative that it financed the rise of American rice plantations.

How can I teach this?

The BBC program *Story of Africa* and its accompanying website allow users to search for information about slavery and the slave trade in Africa. t-t.site/story-africa

"Indian Slavery in the Americas" by Alan Galloway is a short essay on the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History website, available to K-12 teachers with a free account. It is accessible as a reading assignment for upper-level students or can be used as teacher preparation. t-t.site/indian-slavery

SUMMARY OBJECTIVE 2

Students will be able to describe the slave trade from Africa to the Americas.

MAPS TO KEY CONCEPTS 1, 2, 4, 6, 8 & 10

What else should my students know?

2.A In the 1400s, Portugal was the earliest participant in the transatlantic slave trade. It was followed by other European nations.

2.B Western Hemispheric destinations of captive Africans included South America, the Caribbean and North America.

2.C European slave traders participated in



KEY CONCEPTS

1. Slavery, which was practiced by Europeans prior to their arrival in the Americas, was important to all of the colonial powers and existed in all of the European North American colonies.

2. Slavery and the slave trade were central to the development and growth of the economy across British North America and, later, the United States.

3. Protections for slavery were enshrined in the founding documents; lawmakers dominated the federal government, Supreme Court and Senate from 1787 through 1860.

4. "Slavery was an institution of power," designed to create profit for the enslavers and break the will of the enslaved and was a relentless quest for profit obscured by racism.

5. Enslaved people resisted the efforts of their enslavers to reduce them to commodified in both revolutionary and everyday ways.

6. The experience of slavery varied depending on time, location, race, labor performed, size of enslaving and everyday ways.

7. Slavery was the central cause of the Civil War.

8. Slavery shaped the fundamental beliefs of Americans about race and whiteness, and white supremacy was both a product and legacy of slavery.

9. Enslaved and free people of African descent had a profound impact on American culture, producing leaders and literary, artistic and folk traditions that continue to influence the nation.

10. By knowing how to read and interpret the sources that tell the story of American slavery, we gain insight into some of what enslaving and enslaved Americans endured to create, thought and defend.

and fundamentally changed the existing slave trade in Africa. The demand for enslaved people in the European colonies of the Western Hemisphere greatly expanded the African slave trade beyond its traditional wartime context.

2.D Europeans believed that dark skin color (which they hyperbolically described as "black"), lack of Christianity and different styles of dress were evidence that Africans were less civilized.

2.E The Middle Passage was the voyage of enslaved people from the west coast of Africa to the Americas. Enslaved people endured traumatic conditions on slavers' ships, including cramped quarters, meager rations and physical and sexual assault.

How can I teach this?

The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database maps the destinations of ships of the Middle Passage and allows users to search slave trade voyages

based on data including (but not limited to) origin, destination or date. t-t.site/slave-voyages

"Stowage on the Slave Ship Brookes, 1788" represents 18th-century guidelines for transporting enslaved people during the Middle Passage. Abolitionists used this image to convey the horrifying conditions enslaved people suffered while being forcibly transported from Africa to the Americas.

Portuguese chronicler Gomes Eannes de Azurara compiled accounts of the slave trade circa 1450. His description of the division of captives demonstrates the prejudices of the Europeans and the horrors of the slave trade.

Excerpts from slave John Newton's journal describe the terrors of the Middle Passage, including disease, suicide attempts and sexual assault. He also discusses the ways enslaved people resisted their captors, including plans for violent rebellion.

by topic, author or grade level, and each text includes an introduction and reading questions for students.

Any national effort to improve our teaching about the American enslavement of Africans must make clear connections between slavery and the major events of American history. It must provide nuanced primary and secondary sources that educators and students can rely on to further meaningful inquiry and dialogue. It must also acknowledge the causal connection between American slavery and white supremacy, an ideology that disrupts inter-group relationships and undermines justice in our country even today. It is our hope that the Key Concepts, Summary Objectives and additional teaching resources presented in

A Framework for Teaching American Slavery accomplish these goals and—in doing so—significantly raise the quality of our K–12 history instruction and of our national dialogue about race, racism and racial reconciliation.

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