The Abolition of Slavery
A History Unit For Fifth Grade

Our curriculum unit is focused on slavery and the abolition of slavery. Our designed curriculum is intended for a 5th grade, Hartford classroom over a 5-day span. We are basing our curriculum off of having 90-minute classes. Our main objective is to teach the students about a historical and pivotal event in history, as well as allowing the students to make personal connections with a historical event. Our unit encompasses a multi-intelligence type of structure, based off of Howard Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences, which will allow for students with differing learning styles to succeed. Our curriculum also intends to create a multicultural environment, based off of James Banks’ theory of multicultural education. Our curriculum unit is designed to allow the students to develop a deeper understanding of history while interpreting it to make connections within their own lives.

As the teachers, we created objectives to be reached in order to establish the most productive and comfortable learning environment. One teaching objective is to create a multi-intelligence environment that will allow different students to excel. This teaching objective revolves around Howard Garner’s theory of multiple intelligences, which aims to address all different types of learners. Incorporating multi-intelligences is important because “each person has his/her own particular
blend or amalgam of intelligences...Individuals are never endowed solely with one intelligence. Rather, all brain-unimpaired people possess all the intelligences, which they blend in various ways in the course of creating something that is meaningful or performing a meaningful role or task. In other words, each student perceives the material differently, and, through incorporating multiple ways of learning, we give each student a chance to absorb the material to make sense of it in their own way.

Another important objective to reach while creating a stable and positive atmosphere is incorporating a multicultural aspect to the curriculum. This objective is based off of James Banks’ idea that states that a multicultural education tries to create equal educational opportunities for all students by changing the curriculum so that it will reflect the perspectives, thoughts, and hopes of the different cultures of the students within the classroom. Because the majority of students in Hartford schools are minorities, 93.8% according to the most recent data, we wanted to create a unit that our students could identify and make personal connections with. Our unit, the abolition of slavery, focuses on the inequalities that minority races face. We wanted to emphasize the depth of integration of multicultural content into the curriculum because, according to James Banks, “students learn best and are more highly motivated when the school curriculum reflects their cultures, experiences, and perspectives.” Through incorporating a historical event that the students can relate to, we hope to avoid the alienation that students of color face due to the disconnect between their culture and curriculum, as history in this

1 Gardner, Theory of Multiple Intelligences
2 Banks, Approaches to Multicultural Curriculum Reform
3 Metro Hartford School District Enrollment 2007-2008
4 243. Banks, Approaches to Multicultural Curriculum Reform
country is often only told from the white perspective. By bridging the gap between the curriculum and their culture, we will be able to concentrate on their experiences, dreams, interests and perspectives. The result of this will be a maximization of their learning capacities.

Within our multi-intelligence and multicultural unit, we have several learning objectives. Through our activities, we hope to achieve these objectives to help the students develop as learners. In our unit, students will be able to analyze the significance of a critical turning point in history. To reach this objective, the students will gain knowledge on the abolition of slavery, including its notoriety of racism and inequality. This will help the students identify the motives of the people of that time and event. This objective reaches the fourth level on Bloom’s Taxonomy, a level that calls for students to compare and contrast among other things\(^5\). Students will also be able to identify and analyze a significant historical event and compare and apply it to their personal experiences. This objective is intended to maximize their interest while developing a deeper understanding of the content through making personal connections. This objective touches the second, involving comprehension and discussion, as well as fourth level of Bloom’s Taxonomy\(^5\). In our unit, students will be able to compare and contrast different cultural perspectives of a historical event. This objective will allow the students to subdivide a historical event through different standpoints, making it possible to view the content from several angles, emphasizing potential growth for the student. Again, this objective reaches the fourth level of Bloom’s Taxonomy. The ability to understand multiple

\(^{5}\) Bloom’s Taxonomy (1956)
viewpoints on something is an important piece of being an active and informed citizen. It is especially important when formulating educated political opinions to participate in our democracy. Another one of our objectives is students will be able to argue and defend various historical perspectives as they relate to a historical event and judge their merits. This objective is purposeful because it will demonstrate the students understanding of the content while giving reason and persuasiveness to defend their knowledge. Being able to defend and argue from different perspectives gives the students the ability to recognize several facts and evidence that were essential throughout the abolition of slavery. This objective reaches the top level of Bloom’s Taxonomy because it requires students to “argue, assess, defend, and judge.” Lastly, students will be able to create solutions and apply them to society. This is objective demonstrates the student’s ability to take what they learned in the class and utilize it to apply it to the real world. This objective reaches the fifth level of Bloom’s Taxonomy, allowing us as educators to touch on all levels of the ladder. These objectives acquire all types of cognitive skills and are intended to help the students develop as learners.

We will begin our curriculum unit on Monday. Before we begin the day’s lesson, the first activity we will do to get the unit started will be a brief writing assignment where students will write about what they know about slavery. At this point, this assignment is intended to get the students thinking about the topic. The specific assignment will be worded as follows: “write a paragraph about what you know about slavery and what comes to mind when you think of it. Include people, concepts, feelings, or attitudes.” We will then lead a class discussion about what the
students know about slavery and the abolition movement building off of the writing assignment. The purpose of this guided discussion is to introduce the unit without standing in front of the class and lecturing. Instead, each student will be encouraged to participate and thus to take the role of an active learner rather than passive. In doing this, we aim to depart from the Skinnerian scripted methods of teaching as a science and take a constructivist approach. Our goal will be to constructively correct inaccuracies the students may believe as well as promoting more in depth thinking through asking follow up questions. After this introductory discussion, we will watch parts of the film, *Unchained Memories: Reading From The Slave Narratives*. We considered having the students watch this film in its entirety, as we believe it has educational value, but upon further consideration, we think it would be more effective to watch pieces to keep student’s attention. In between clips, we will ask students to volunteer their thoughts on what they just watched to make sure that they are paying attention and getting something out of the video. Today’s activities utilize the bottom two levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy, but we will build up higher on the pyramid as the week goes on. The first level is knowledge, which involves defining, listing, and recalling⁵. The students will be asked to do all of these things in the opening writing assignment as well as during our guided discussion. The second level of Bloom’s Taxonomy is understanding, involving comprehension, description, and explanation⁵. The students will reach this level during both the discussion as well as during discussion of the movie. The students will also be given journals to write in as homework. The homework will be for them to reflect on what they learned in class and keep track of questions that they may have.
On the second day of our unit we will begin by introducing the students to historical figures who fought to combat slavery. Among these figures will be Harriet Beecher Stowe, a Hartford native and the author of the groundbreaking and historical significant novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. By introducing the students to these people, we will prepare students for our field trip later in the day to the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center as well as emphasize to the students that individual people have the ability to create change. This idea of individual people having the power to fight for social change and improve their own outlook as well as the outlook of others is something we view to be a critically important lesson to the children of Hartford, where a vast majority of students are low-income minorities. This activity also works in accordance with the Connecticut Social Studies Standards, which state that fifth graders should be able to “explain how specific individuals and their ideas and beliefs influenced U.S. history.” After this brief initial lesson, we will take a field trip to the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center here in Hartford. At the center, we have chosen to participate in the Inspiration To Action school program. This program is directed toward third through fifth grade students and aims to emphasize the ability of individuals to fight for change. We feel that this program will reinforce perfectly the lesson we taught earlier in the day. We aim for students to come away from Tuesday’s lesson feeling empowered that they have the ability to create change to their social and economic situations. Ultimately, if they learn this lesson it will allow them to become leaders in their community, something that is imperative in a healthy democracy.

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6 CT Social Studies Curriculum Framework, 2011
On Wednesday, we will begin the lesson with a short PowerPoint presentation introducing the class to Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad. This will segue into a role-playing game, which will help the students to understand the different motives, interests, hopes, and fears of people on both sides of the slavery debate. The game is set up so that one side of the classroom is the north and one is the south and students must cross from one side to the other. The desks are set up across the classroom, some being safe houses and others sending the players back to the South. By using physical activity, our aim is to engage multiple intelligences, thus allowing all students the opportunity to excel at something. In addition, we feel that a mid-week change of pace will keep students fresh for the rest of our unit.

On Thursday, we will begin the lesson by discussing what the students know about racial inequalities in this country both historically as well as in present day. They will then discuss their own experiences with racial discrimination. We based this off of Jeff Duncan Andrade’s theory of education, which states that teaching racial oppression is the best way to end racial oppression. We will then divide the students up into smaller groups to continue this discussion on a more personal level. The goal is that students will be more comfortable sharing their knowledge and experiences in smaller groups. While in these groups, they will be asked to focus on drawing parallels between the inequalities and prejudices associated with slavery to their own life experiences. This also goes along with Andrade’s theory, which says that teachers should strive to connect curriculum to student’s lives and

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7 Andrade, Teaching Critical Analysis of Racial Oppression
experiences in order to engage them as active learners. The small group approach is based on the academic theory of John Dewey who believed that “purposeful activity in social settings (is) the key to genuine learning.” Applying knowledge to one’s own life reaches the analysis level of Bloom's taxonomy because they are comparing and contrasting to draw connections. In these small groups, the students have the ability to learn from other learners and build knowledge collectively. Based on the CT standards, as fifth graders the students are expected to be able to “engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions.” Thursday’s activities are meant to create a multicultural learning environment, which is one of our main objectives in this unit. At the end of the class, we will assign students to the roles that they will play in the debate on Friday. They will have some time at the end of this class to prepare and then they will be assigned to finish preparation as homework.

On Friday, we will be holding a mock debate over whether to abolish slavery or not. Students will have been assigned to argue on behalf of slave owners, slaves, or anti-slavery northerners. A handful of students will be assigned to judge the debate. We feel that role-playing will force students to understand the various perspectives on the subject and help them understand why it was so controversial. This will help us to achieve a number of our stated objectives such as being able to argue and defend various perspectives on a historical event. By having the students argue various viewpoints and judge the validity and importance of those arguments, the students will reach the top level of Bloom’s taxonomy: evaluation. Again, this activity is designed so that the students will be taking a highly active role in their

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8 Perspectives of Learning, Chapter 6
learning and will be able to learn from each other. Following the debate, we will have the students write a letter to the president, as if they were in America prior to the 13th amendment, from the perspective of the role that they were assigned for the debate. The writing assignment will be worded as follows: “Staying in the role to which you have been assigned, write a letter to President Abraham Lincoln outlining your arguments for either ending slavery or allowing it to continue.” While explaining the assignment, we will provide a sample letter to the class via a projector on the board and read it aloud so that they know what is expected from them. Once they begin writing, we will turn the projector off so that they are not tempted to copy the example. This assignment works in accordance with the CT academic standards, which state that students should be able to “describe views and feelings of people in the past.” This assignment will conclude our unit.

In order to evaluate the learning of the students over the course of this unit, we will compare writing assignments from the first day and the last day as well as factoring in their class participation. Due to the fact that we are seeking to have the students be very active learners, we will calculate grades based fifty-fifty off of the writing prompts and participation. Each student’s classroom participation will be graded each in accordance to the attached rubric then the scores will be averaged at the end of the week to calculate their participation grades for the unit (A). On the writing assignments, we will be looking for them to display improved overall knowledge of the subject as well as the ability to articulate and argue a viewpoint that they may or may not agree with. The original assignment will be graded based on clarity of writing, as we do not want to punish students for a lack of prior
knowledge. On the letter assignment, we will be looking for bits of information from the lessons and/or personal anecdotes, as well as grading based on persuasiveness and clarity of the argument. The grading rubric is attached in the appendix (B).
Participation Chart (Check Applicable Box)

-1- Did not participate
-2- Participated very little
-3- Participated occasionally
-4- Participated frequently
-5- Very active in discussions
## Writing Assignment Rubric

1) Student displayed proper grammar and sentence structure

   1 2 3 4 5  
   (5 is highest)

2) Student displayed proper spelling

   1 2 3 4 5

3) Letter was well organized

   1 2 3 4 5

4) Examples used aided argument (were persuasive)

   1 2 3 4 5

5) Student demonstrated concepts or examples from class discussions

   1 2 3 4 5

★Bonus★ - Student completed journal for homework

   0 1 2

Total - __________

Average - __________