

Middle School Museum of Slavery Project

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We were able to integrate material from the *Social Science Docket* theme issue on “Slavery and the Northern States (Summer-Fall, 2001) in our classrooms to create a “Museum of Slavery” at Hofstra University, Hempstead, New York, that involved students from three middle schools (Turtle Hook Middle School in Uniondale, New York; James Vernon Middle School in East Norwich, New York; and I.S. 119 in District 24, Queens, New York). The centerpiece of the exhibit was a “Wall of Memory: Memorializing the Pain of Slavery and the Hope for Freedom.” It consisted of over fifty white tee-shirts that had been torn, stained and dabbed with brown and red paint.



The shirts represented both the pain of the slaver’s lash and continuous resistance to bondage. Other exhibits included dioramas of slave life and the slave trade, symbolic representations of the artifacts of slavery, and replicas of slavery documents. Students from Turtle Hook Middle School also presented an African dance and a short play based on Virginia Hamilton’s “The People Could Fly.”

The student populations at the three schools are very different. Students in one school were largely middle-class and overwhelmingly African American, Caribbean and Latino/a. Students in the second school were working-class, white and Latino/a. Students in the third school were white and Asian American and from affluent families. For many, participation in the museum project was their first real interaction with students from other communities.

At the museum, exhibits were displayed on tables or hung up, along with a card that explained what it depicted. After every one had a chance to browse, each student or student team presented their exhibit to the entire group. At the end, students discussed with the group what they had learned from participation in the Museum of Slavery project. Many expressed surprise that students from other communities and ethnic groups had welcomed their involvement.

Each of the teachers approached preparation for the Museum of Slavery differently. While the class studied slavery, students at I.S. 119 in Queens worked outside of class, independently or in small groups, to create a series of 3-dimensional displays. Students at the East Norwich school worked in small teams and as a full class to create their exhibit. At Uniondale, the entire unit on slavery was organized as a package for student teams and the final team projects were made in class and used to assess student learning.



Diorama showing life in a West African village.

Ms. Thompson's Slavery Museum Project Guidelines

Museums can inspire us to think about events that have taken place in the past. They can also invoke feelings and emotions in us about the sometimes harsh and disturbing events that have taken place in history. With this in mind, you are going to help create a "Museum of Slavery."

You will be working in groups to create your museum exhibit. Exhibits must be dioramas, replicas or any other 3-dimensional display (no posters). You are expected to be creative. The assignment requires that most of your work be done at home, therefore you will be allowed to choose your own groups. Groups should be no larger than 3 people. You may work independently, if you prefer. Themes for each group are listed below along with some ideas. Feel free to use a suggestion or think of your own! Include an information card to go along with your exhibit (like those at any museum).

The focus of your projects is slavery. Not just the history of slavery and slave trade that took place in the 17th and 18th centuries, but also the condition of life under slavery, the way those in slavery resisted, and slavery in the world today. You are expected to use your exhibit to further our understanding of human rights and the responsibility of the world to stop slavery and slave-like conditions.



Diorama of the Middle Passage



Diorama of an Underground Railroad safe house

Possible Themes:

1. Slave Trade - By the 1700's a network to trade slaves between Africa and the Americas was well-established. Recreate the conditions people endured on slave ships while in middle passage.
2. Horrors of Slavery - Many slaves who lived in servitude were subjected to harsh and unfair treatment. Create a replica of weapons or tools used to subjugate captives and control slaves.
3. Slave Resistance - Slaves fought against slavery in violent and non-violent ways. Recreate a scene of slave resistance like Harpers Ferry or an escape route taken to freedom such as on the Underground Railroad.
4. Contributions by African-Americans - Many African Americans overcame injustices and went on to make important contributions to the world. Recreate a scene such as Martin Luther King, jr.'s speech in Washington.
5. Monuments to African Americans - There are many monuments either already in existence or being proposed to honor African Americans. Create a model monument celebrating the struggle against slavery.
6. Slavery Today - Many people in the world are much less fortunate than we are and some still live under conditions of slavery. Create a scene representing slavery today.

Ms. Hunte's "Slavery: A Hands-On Inquiry"

Directions: Our goal as a class is to understand why slavery developed in the Americas and the way it affected Africans, European Americans and the history of the United States. Students will be divided into groups of between four and five members. Each team should select four of the following inquiry stations and complete the activities in the packet for each station. This will take between two and three lessons. You will have an additional day to prepare your team's unit project.

Assessment: You will receive a group grade. Each team must complete an "analysis sheet" for each station that you visit. Each analysis sheet is worth a total of 25 points. In addition, each team must create and present to class a diorama or skit based on what you learned about slavery. This will be graded separately and is worth a total of 100 points.

Inquiry Stations:

- **Video Clip:** Students will watch scenes from the movie *Amistad* on the middle passage and read a document "A Slaver Describes the Atlantic Slave Trade." The group will complete an analysis sheet and for their project can write a skit in which enslaved Africans are able to testify against their capturers at a trial.
- **Computer WebQuest:** Students will visit bookmarked web sites with images of plantation life, the middle passage or a slave auction. The group will complete an analysis sheet and can create a diorama depicting one of the scenes.
- **Fine Arts:** Students will examine pictures of traditional and folk art and listen to songs that depict slave life. The group will complete an analysis sheet and for their project can create a diorama based on one of the pieces.
- **Folk Tales:** Students will read folk tales about slavery from Virginia Hamilton's book, "The People Could Fly." The group will complete an analysis sheet for each folk tale and for their project can write a skit based on one of the stories.
- **Primary Sources I and II:** Students will review charts, pictures, diagrams and other documents from the era of slavery. The group will complete an analysis sheet for each document.
- **Constructed Responses:** Students will analyze charts, songs and documents. Groups must complete two of the following: write a "slave song" in a modern style using information from the documents; write a letter to an advocate of slavery challenging their views; draw pictures illustrating the experience of Solomon Northup; write a newspaper article about the discovery and impact of the cotton gin.



Students perform African Dance

Mr. Kurtz's Museum of Slavery Project

Cooperative group size: 3 or 4 students (For this project teams will need to work outside of school so select group members you can easily meet). Each group will choose an activity and select a project coordinator. Your final project will include a report on how effectively you worked together as a group. This report should be signed by each team member.

Project Objectives

- To research and share knowledge about the slave trade and slavery in the United States.
- To have a better understanding of the lives of enslaved people in the United States.
- To learn about both the horrors of slavery and the struggle for freedom.
- To learn about the role played by our local community and New York State in the debate over slavery.

Suggested Project Activities:

- Write a newspaper or television editorial on the issue of slavery.
- Design a giant poster explaining an aspect of the slave trade or slavery.
- Create a three dimensional model or diaorama of a slave auction, slave ship, or a plantation. Include a written description of your exhibit that describes its historical importance.
- Make reproductions of the artifacts of slavery including the tools and weapons of the slave trade. Include a "museum card" describing the tool or weapon and how it was used.
- Collect documents to make an original document-based test.
- Help design and create the "Wall of Memory" with bloody, torn and stained t-shirts.

Materials to be used for Research: Textbooks, reference books, encyclopedias, atlases, library books, the internet.



Materials to be used for creating three dimensional models and reproductions: Be as creative as possible. Make the dioramas as large as possible. Make reproductions look real.