

Myths & Facts: Slavery in the Colonial North

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Myths & Facts

An interactive introductory lesson to slavery in the North

Objective:

To introduce students to the concept of Northern slavery, not as an anomaly, but as integral to our history and to our economy.

Materials:

Myth Cards (half sheets of cardstock with statements about slavery in the North)

Massachusetts Bodies of Liberty Section 91 (Law Institutionalizing Slavery):

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1q1on9Mp70LTJQivVdCS5PPYNVKvao1bFHgGugd8Hpmc/edit>

Materials For Possible Extensions:

Excerpts from Northern Profits from Slavery :

http://www.americancenturies.mass.edu/classroom/afam/exchange_profits.html

Joanne Pope Melish Background - Slavery in Colonial New England:

<http://1704.deerfield.history.museum/popups/background.do?shortName=expSlavery>

Steps for Teaching the Lesson:

1. Explain to students that we are going to talk about slavery, as we can't study colonial history without understanding how it was a central part of colonial life.
2. Introduce Myth/Facts activity by pointing out to students that there are cards placed around the room. Each card has a statement written on it, though some are true and some are false. They will be working in pairs and each pair will rotate around the room, read a statement and discuss whether they think it is true or false. When they have decided if a statement is true or false, they will tape a true or false card on the wall next to the statement. They will have 3 minutes to visit each station, discuss the statement and make their decisions.
3. After students have rotated through each card (about 20 minutes total), have two pairs join up so you now have groups of four. In these small groups, they will discuss one or two of the statements (~ 5 additional minutes)
4. Then pull names out of a hat and have that person's group share their ideas about one of the statements - is it true or false? How did you reach this conclusion?
5. Pass out the excerpt from the law institutionalizing slavery in Massachusetts in 1641:
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1q1on9Mp70LTJQivVdCS5PPYNVKvao1bFHgGugd8Hpmc/edit>
Give students time in their groups to try to read and understand it, then discuss.
6. As a group, brainstorm questions students would like to learn about slavery in the North.

Statements for myth/facts cards:

- The first enslaved people in New England came from West Africa.
- There were enslaved people living in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, but none in Vermont.
- New England was the center of the Atlantic Slave trade in the colonies.
- Massachusetts made a lot of rum which was then traded for slaves.
- Slaves in New England worked on farms, worked in homes, worked as blacksmiths and barrel makers, made rum and built stone walls.

- New England enslaved people sometimes were whipped, burned and hanged.
- People enslaved in Boston lived in the same house as their masters.
- Ministers could not enslave people because it was against their religious beliefs.

Extensions:

For the next class, set up stations with various objects related to slavery in the North:

Sugar Cane

Rum

Molasses

Stones

Mortar and Pestle

Rope

Colonial Newspapers

Ask students again to rotate and to identify each object and to try to identify each one's connection to slavery.

Read about Slavery in the colonial North and the extent to which it impacted all areas of our economy:

http://www.americancenturies.mass.edu/classroom/afam/exchange_profits.html

For another lesson, students will read Joanne Pope Melish's article on slavery in the North. As this is a long article, we will do this as a jigsaw:

<http://1704.deerfield.history.museum/popups/background.do?shortName=expSlavery>

I will also use the Magic Lens activity on the American Centuries Website so that the fifth and sixth graders can read primary source documents relating to enslaved people in Massachusetts:

http://www.americancenturies.mass.edu/activities/magic_lens/index.html

Finally, I hope to develop a Walk through Boston - from Long Wharf to the North End, stopping to talk about the African Americans that one would meet along the way.