Title: John Brown’s Legacy

Grade Level: High School

Objectives:
- Analyze images and documents relating to the abolitionist John Brown.
- Understand how primary images relate to the abolitionist movement.
- Use a creative medium to highlight Brown’s individual contribution to history.

National History Standards:
- Standard 2: Historical Comprehension; Standard 3: Historical Analysis and Interpretation; Era 4:4: The sources and character of cultural, religious, and social reform movements in the antebellum period;

Time: 90 minutes

Background:
On October 16, 1859, radical abolitionist John Brown and a small group of militants seized the federal armory at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, hoping to ignite a slave rebellion. They waited in vain for the uprising they hoped would follow. The next day, U.S. Army officers Robert E. Lee and J. E. B. Stuart brought in a company of marines and stormed the armory’s fire-engine house where Brown had taken cover. They captured him and his band, and killed two of his sons. Brown was hanged, along with six other conspirators. In death he became a martyr for abolitionists. “I am worth inconceivably more to hang,” he said, “than for any other purpose.”

Brown’s execution further polarized a nation already divided over the question of slavery. In the North, it galvanized abolitionists—a small but vocal minority, comprised of Christian reformers, women, free blacks, and fugitive slaves. Appalled that the “land of the free” was the world’s largest slave-holding nation, they advocated federal intervention to rid the nation of a moral evil. Brown’s execution also energized “Free-Soilers,” Northerners who were willing to leave slavery alone in the South but opposed its spread to new territories in the West.

In the South, Brown’s martyrdom further alienated whites. Southerners felt a strong allegiance to their states and region and a shared fear that they were in danger of being dominated by Northern interests. Of the total Southern white population of eight million in 1860, only 384,000 owned slaves, and over 80 percent of these had fewer than twenty. Still, the slave system made the South’s agricultural economy viable and shaped the region’s cultural identity. Southern planters and small farmers alike were committed to keeping the region’s 3.5 million African Americans enslaved.
“I am worth inconceivably more to hang, than for any other purpose.”

— John Brown
Lesson 6

Materials:
- Portrait of John Brown
- Slave family, about 1862
- John Brown going to his death
- John Brown’s rifle and Harpers Ferry pike
- Student Analysis Chart
- Article from Harper’s Weekly
- Materials for student artwork—poster paper, markers, colored pencils

Lesson:

Have students recall some of the major decisions concerning slavery made by the federal government before the Civil War. Consider the implications of these decisions for slavery and anti-slavery factions and list these for the class to see. Distribute to the class images, documents, and objects listed above and have students analyze the primary sources. Then have them answer the following questions (available in the Student Analysis Chart).

Who or what is depicted? How is the source related to the slavery issue? What does the source have to do with Harpers Ferry? What can you learn from the source? Next, have the class discuss the images—how they relate to the slavery issue and how John Brown impacted that issue and prefigured the beginning of the Civil War.
Follow-up Activity:

Have students show John Brown’s legacy and his contribution to history through a creative medium such as: biography, interview, letter, personal journal, performance with script, artwork, poem/song, newspaper article, or presentation. The project must include specific dates, mention of Harpers Ferry and other events leading up to the Civil War, and at least three references to the images and documents analyzed in class. Also, students must gauge Brown’s impact on the abolitionist movement. Extra research in the library or outside class could be incorporated into this assignment. Also, students could work individually, with partners, or in small groups, depending on the activity they wish to pursue and the ease of assigning particular tasks.
**John Brown’s Legacy**

Use images of slavery and of John Brown to answer the following questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objects used at Harpers Ferry</th>
<th>Portrait of John Brown</th>
<th>Picture of slave family</th>
<th>Article from newspaper</th>
<th>Picture of John Brown going to his death</th>
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<td>What form is the source?</td>
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<td>What does the source have to do with Harpers Ferry?</td>
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<td>What else can you learn from the source?</td>
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October 29, 1859

DOMESTIC INTELLIGENCE

EXTRAORDINARY INSURRECTION AT HARPER’S FERRY.

One of the most extraordinary events that ever occurred in our history took place last week at Harper’s Ferry. We shall endeavor to give our readers a connected history of the affair, which, at the present time, has been brought to a close.

THE FIRST ACTIVE MOVEMENT.

The first active movement in the insurrection was made at about half past ten o’clock on Sunday night. William Williamson, the watchman at Harper’s Ferry bridge, while walking across toward the Maryland side, was seized by a number of men, who said he was their prisoner, and must come with them. He recognized Brown and Cook among the men and knowing them, treated the matter as a joke; but enforcing silence, the conducted him to the Armory, which he found already in their possession. The watchman who was to relieve Williamson at midnight found the bridge lights all out, and was immediately seized. Supposing it an attempt at robbery, he broke away, and his pursuers stumbling over him, he escaped.

ARREST OF COLONEL WASHINGTON AND OTHERS.

The next appearance of the insurrectionists was at the house of Colonel Lewis Washington, a large farmer and slave-owner, living about four miles from the ferry. A party, headed by Cook, proceeded there, and rousing Colonel Washington, told him he was their prisoner. They also seized all the salves near the house, took a carriage horse, and a large wagon with two horses. When Colonel Washington saw Cook, he immediately recognized him as the man who had called upon him some months previous, to whom he had exhibited some valuable arms in his possession, including an antique sword presented by Frederick the Great to George Washington, and a pair of pistols presented by Lafayette to Washington, both being heir-looms in the family. Before leaving Cook wanted Colonel Washington to engage in a trial of skill at shooting, and exhibited considerable skill as a marksman. When he made the visit on Sunday night he alluded to his previous visit, and the courtesy with which he had been treated, and regretted the necessity which made it his duty to arrest Colonel Washington. He, however, took advantage of the knowledge he had obtained by the former visit to carry off all the valuable collection of arms, which the Colonel did not reobtain till after the final defeat of the insurrection.

From Colonel Washington’s he proceeded with him as a prisoner in the carriage, and twelve of his negroes in the wagon, to the house of Mr. Alstadt, another large farmer, on the same road. Mr. Alstadt and his son, a lad of sixteen, were taken prisoners, and all their negroes within reach forced to join the movement. He then returned to the Armory at the Ferry.

THE STOPPAGE OF THE RAILROD TRAIN.
At the upper end of the town the mail train arrived at the usual hour, when a colored man, who acted as assistant to the baggage-master, was shot, receiving a mortal wound, and the conductor, Mr. Phelps, was threatened with violence if he attempted to proceed with the train. Feeling uncertain as to the condition of affairs, the conductor waited until after daylight before he ventured to proceed, having delayed the train six hours.

Luther Simpson, baggage-master of the mail-train, gives the following particulars: I walked up the bridge; was stopped, but was afterward permitted to go up and see the captain of the insurrectionists; I was taken to the Armory, and saw the captain, whose name is Bill Smith; I was kept prisoner for more than an hour, and saw from five to six hundred negroes, all having arms; there were two or three hundred white men with them; all the houses were closed. I went into a tavern kept by Mr. Chambers; thirty of the inhabitants were collected there with arms. They said most of the inhabitants had left, but they declined, preferring to protect themselves; it was reported that five or six persons had been shot.

Mr. Simpson was escorted back over the bridge by six negroes.

THE STATE OF AFFAIRS AT DAYBREAK.

It was not until the town thoroughly waked up, and found the bridge guarded by armed men, and a guard stationed at all the avenues, that the people saw that they were prisoners. A panic appeared to have immediately ensued, and the number of insurrectionists was at once largely increased. In the mean time a number of workmen, not knowing any thing of what had occurred, entered the Armory. These were imprisoned in the engine-house, which afterward became the chief fortress of the insurgents, and were not released until after the final assault. The workmen were imprisoned in a large building further down the yard.

EARLY CASUALTIES

A colored man, named Hayward, a railroad porter, was shot early in the morning for refusing to join in the movement.

The next man shot was Joseph Burley, a citizen of Perry. He was shot standing in his own door. The insurrectionists by this time, finding a disposition to resist them, had withdrawn nearly all within the Armory grounds, leaving only a guard on the bridge.

About this time, also, Samuel P. Young, Esq., was shot dead. He was coming into town on horseback, carrying a gun, when he was shot from the Armory, receiving a wound of which he died during the day. He was a graduate of West Point, and greatly respected in the neighborhood for his high character and noble qualities.

THE ARRIVAL OF TROOPS, AND FIRST FIGHTING.

At about noon, the Charlestown troops, under command of Colonel Robert W. Bayler, crossed the Susquehanna River some distance up, and marched down the Maryland side to the mouth of the bridge. Firing a colley, they made a gallant dash across the bridge, clearing it of the insurrectionists, who
retreated rapidly down toward the Armory. In this movement of the insurrectionists a man named William Thompson was taken prisoner.

The Shepherdstown troops next arrived, marching down the Shenandoah side, and joining the Charlestown forces at the bridge. A desultory exchange of shots followed, one of which struck Mr. Fountain Beckham, Mayor of the town, and agent of the railroad company, entering his breast and passing entirely through his body. The ball was a large elongated slug, and made a dreadful wound. Mr. Beckham died almost immediately. He was without fire-arms, and was exposed for only a moment while approaching a water-station. His assailant, one of Brown’s sons, was shot almost immediately, but managed to get back to the engine-house, where his body was found next day. The murder of Mr. Beckham greatly excited the populace, who immediately raised a cry to bring out the prisoner, Thompson. He was brought out on the bridge, and there shot down. He fell into the water, and some appearance of life still remaining, he was riddled with balls.

RESRUCE OF THE WORKMEN BY THE MARTINSBURG BOYS.

While this was going on the Martinsburg levies arrived at the upper end of the town, and entering the Armory grounds by the rear, made an attack from that side. This force was largely composed of railroad employés, gathered from the tonnage trains at Martinsburg, and their attack was generally spoken of as showing the greatest amount of fighting pluck exhibited during the day. Dashing on, firing and cheering, and gallantly led by Captain Alburtis, they carried on the building in which the Armory men were imprisoned, and released the whole of them.

They were, however, but poorly armed, some with pistols and others with shot-guns; and when they came within range of the engine-house, where the élite of the insurrectionists were gathered, and were exposed to the rapid and dexterous use of Sharp’s rifles, they were forced to fall back, suffering pretty severely. Conductor Evans Dorsey, of Baltimore, was killed instantly, and Conductor George Richardson received a wound from which he died during the day. Several others were wounded, among them a son of Dr. Hammond, of Martinsburg.

LATER CASUALTIES.

A guerrilla warfare was maintained during the rest of the day, resulting in the killing of two of the insurrectionists and the wounding of a third. One crawled out through a culvert leading into the Potomac, and attempted to cross to the Maryland side, whether with the view of escaping, or conveying information to Cook, is not known.

He was shot while crossing the river, and fell dead on the rocks. An adventurous lad waded out and secured his Sharp’s rifle. The body was afterward stripped of a part of its clothing. In one of his pockets was found a captain’s commission, drawn up in full form, and declaring that the bearer, Captain Lehman, held that commission under Major-General Brown. A light mulatto was shot just outside the Armory gate. The ball went through the throat, tearing away the principal arteries, and killing him instantly. His name is not known, but he is one of the free negroes who came with Brown. His body was
left in the street until noon yesterday, exposed to every indignity that could be heaped upon it by the excited populace.

At this time a tall, powerful man, named Evens Stephens, came out from the Armory, conducting some prisoners, it was said. He was twice shot—once in the side, once in the breast. He was then captured and taken to a tavern, and after the insurrection was quelled was turned over to the United States authorities in a dying condition. During the afternoon a sharp little affair took place on the Shenandoah side of the town. The insurrectionists had also seized the halls of the rifle works, and a party of their assailants found their way in through a mill-race, and dislodged them.

In this rencontre, it was said, three insurrectionists were killed, but we found but one dead body, that of a negro, on that side of the town. Night by this time had set in, and operations ceased. Guards were placed around the Armory, and every precaution taken to prevent escapes.

THE NIGHT SCENE.

At 11 o’clock the Monday night train, with Baltimore military and marines, arrived at Sandy Hook, where they waited for the arrival of Colonel Lee, deputized by the War Department to take the command. The night passed without any serious alarms, but not without excitement. The marines were marched over immediately after their arrival, when Colonel Lee stationed them within the Armory grounds, so as to completed surround the engine house. Occasionally shots were fired by country volunteers, but what for was not ascertained. There was only one return fire from the insurgents.

NEGOTIATIONS NEXT MORNING.

Early next morning a door was opened in the building occupied by the insurgents, and one of the men came out with a flag of truce, and delivered what was supposed to be terms of capitulation. The continued preparations for assault showed they were not accepted. Shortly after 7 o’clock, Lieutenant E. B. Stuart, of the 1st Cavalry, who was acting as aid for Colonel Lee, advanced to parley with the besieged, Samuel Strider, Esq., an old and respectable citizen, bearing a flag of truce. They were received at the door by Captain Cook. Lieutenant Stuart demanded an unconditional surrender, only promising them protection from immediate violence and a trial by law. Captain Brown refused all terms but those previously demanded, which were substantially, “That they should be permitted to march out with their men and arms, taking their prisoners with them; that they should proceed unpursued to the second toll-gate, when they would free their prisoners; the solders would then be permitted to pursue them, and they would fight if they could not escape.” Of course, this was refused, and Lieutenant Stuart pressed upon Brown his desperate position, and urged a surrender. The expostulation, though beyond ear-shot, was evidently very earnest, and the coolness of the Lieutenant, and the courage of his aged flag-bearer won warm praise. At this moment the interest of the scene was most intense. The volunteers were arranged all around the building, cutting off an escape in every direction. The marines, divided in two squads, were ready for a dash at the door.

THE BUILDING STORMED.
Finally, Lieutenant Stuart, having exhausted all argument with the determined Captain Brown, walked slowly from the door.

Immediately the signal for attack was given, and the marines, headed by Colonel Harris and Lieutenant Green, advanced in two lines on each side of the door. Two powerful fellows sprung between the lines, and with heavy sledge-hammers attempted to batter down the door.

The door swung and swayed, but appeared to be secured with a rope, the spring of which deadened the effect of the blows. Failing thus, they took hold of a ladder, some forty feet long, and advancing at a run, brought it with tremendous effect against the door. At the second blow it gave way, one leaf falling inward in a slanting position. The marines immediately advanced to the breach, Major Russell and Lieutenant Green leading. A marine in the front fell.

The firing from the interior was rapid and sharp. They fired with deliberate aim, and for a moment the resistance was serious, and desperate enough to excite the spectators into something like a pitch of frenzy. The next moment the marines poured in, the firing ceased, and the work was done; while cheers rang from every side, the general feeling being that the marines had done their part admirably.

**APPEARANCE OF THE PRISONERS.**

When the insurgents were brought out, some dead and others wounded, they were greeted with execrations, and only the precautions that had been taken saved them from immediate execution. The crowd, nearly every man of which carried a fun, swayed with tumultuous excitement, and cries of “Shoot them! shoot them!” rang from every side. The appearance of the liberated prisoners, all of whom, through the steadiness of the marines, escaped injury, changed the current of feeling, and prolonged cheers took the place of howls and execrations.

In the assault private Ruffert of the Marines received a ball in the stomach, and was believed to be fatally wounded. Another received a slight flesh wound.

The lawn in front of the engine-house after the assault presented a dreadful sight. Lying on it were two bodies of men killed on the previous day, and found inside the house; three wounded men, one of them just at the last gasp of life, and two others groaning in pain. One of the dead was Brown’s son. Oteway, the wounded man, and his son Watson, were lying on the grass, the father presenting a gory spectacle. He had a severe bayonet wound in his side, and his face and hair were clotted with blood.

**BROWN’S EXAMINATION.**

A short time after Captain Brown was brought out he revived and talked earnestly to those about him, defending his course and avowing that he had done only what was right. He replied to questions substantially as follows; “Are you Captain Brown, of Kansas?” “I am sometimes called so.” “Are you Ossawatamie Brown?” “I tried to do my duty there.” “What was your present object?” “To free the slaves from bondage.” “Were any other persons but those with you now connected with the movement?” “No.” “Did you expect aid from the North?” “No; there was no one connected with the movement but those who came with me.” “Did you expect to kill people in order to carry your point?” “I
did not wish to do so, but you force us to it.” Various questions of this kind were put to Captain Brown, which he answered clearly and freely, with seeming anxiety to vindicate himself.

He urged that he had the town at his mercy; that he could have burned it and murdered the inhabitants, but did not; he had treated the prisoners with courtesy, and complained that he was hunted down like a beast. He spoke of the killing of his son, which he alleged was done while bearing a flag of truce, and seemed very anxious for the safety of his wounded son. His conversation bore the impression of the conviction that whatever he had done to free slaves was right, and that in the warfare in which he was engaged he was entitled to be treated with all the respect of a prisoner of war.

CAPTURE OF ARMS.

During Tuesday morning, one of Washington’s negroes came in and reported that Captain Cook was on the mountain, only three miles off; about the same time some shots were said to have been fired from the Maryland hills, and a rapid fusillade was returned from Harper’s Ferry. The Independent Grays, of Baltimore, immediately started on a scouting expedition, and in two hours returned with two wagons loaded with arms and ammunition, found at Captain Brown’s house.

The arms consisted of boxes filled with Sharp’s rifles, pistols, etc., all bearing the stamp of the Massachusetts Manufacturing Company, Chicopee, Mass. There were also found a quantity of United States ammunition, a large number of spears, sharp iron bowie-knives fixed upon poles, a terrible looking weapon, intended for the use of the negroes, with spades, pickaxes, shovels, and every thing else that might be needed: thus proving that the expedition was well provided for, that a large party of men were expected to be armed, and that abundant means had been provided to pay all expenses.

How all these supplies were got up to this farm without attracting observation is very strange. They are supposed to have been brought through Pennsylvania. They Grays pursued Cook so fast that they secured a part of his arms, but with his perfect knowledge of localities he was enabled to evade them.

TREATMENT OF BROWN’S PRISONERS.