

Slave resistance

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Lesson Aim: To understand how slaves resisted in many different ways.

There were many ways in which slaves resisted, this could be either violently, legally and passively. Each way was unique.

Legal - The Dred Scott Case

Dred Scott was a slave sold to an army surgeon. During his time with the surgeon he travelled to many parts of the United States. After his master's death he asked the court to make him free. He thought that since he had travelled to areas not in favour of slavery then (or that weren't states) he should be a free man, because slavery did not exist in that area.

The local state court agreed with him but the supreme court of the state did not. It went to the highest court in the land, the United States Supreme Court.

It was tense as nine judges decided his fate. It went against him. They said that first of all he could not ask for freedom in a court because he was not a citizen - he was a slave (in other words he should not have been there!!).

The court then made it clear that slaves were property in the same way that a cupboard was. Linked with this was the principle that a slave was 3/5ths of a white person.

Dredd Scott could be taken anywhere where slavery was not banned and it was okay. This helped split the country in two.

Task.

1. Explain why Dred Scott thought he was a freeman and not a slave.
2. What was the outcome of the trial?

3. Design the front page for a newspaper in either the north or south about the Dred Scott Case.
 - You'll need a title e.g. Boston Herald (north) or Virginian Chronicle (south)
 - Next a headline - something catchy that makes the reader look. Remember the north was against slavery and the south was in favour of it.
 - When you are writing in the main body of text, explaining the story you need to interpret it as if you were a southerner or northerner. You don't need to write more than a few sentences.
 - Perhaps draw a picture of Dred at the trial, in front of nine judges.

Rebellion - The violent way.

This was the most violent way to resist a master. The most bloodiest of the rebellions was by a man called Nat Turner. On 21st August 1831, he led eighty of his fellow slaves in a revolt against the slave owners. It did not last very long, barely two days before it was crushed. However they killed over 50 white people. This was the scariest type of rebellion for white people, to have those who were inferior to attack them and kill them.

Nat and sixteen of his followers were executed for their crimes.

Tasks

Imagine you are a white plantation owner in the south. Write a letter about the rebellion of Nat Turner. Think what your reaction would be on hearing it. Remember you'll need to write down what happened, not just what you feel.

Runaway or worse...(passive)

One of the final options to resist was to runaway but this was impractical. Many slaves had little knowledge of the area outside the plantation therefore getting across country was a real problem. Secondly, a black person on their own in the south was very suspicious, therefore getting food, shelter, clothing and travelling was very hard. If that was not enough there was what might happen to you or your family. If you got caught punishment would be severe, if you got away your family might get punished instead. It was a no win situation.

Many slaves passively resisted (in other words did it without the white people knowing). Some urinated in the food (or worse). Others used the tools in the fields so hard that they broke (and you wouldn't punish a slave for working hard would you???). Many white people said black people were lazy but in fact they were resisting by doing the minimum.

Task.

Look at each method of resistance and identify the positive aspects of it and then the negative ones. This can be done by splitting the page in to two columns (one good points and one bad points) and writing about each method.