



Chicago Historical Society



# WHAT WOULD HANNAH THINK?

**Grade level:** Late elementary through high school

**Estimated time:** Six class periods

**Specific Topic:** Hannah Harris and the documents of freedom

**Subtopic:** Freedom

## Teacher background information

Educator note: To fully understand this lesson, students should have basic knowledge of Colonial history, slavery, and the voting rights movements for women and African Americans. This lesson is meant to follow the lesson, “Meet Hannah the Weaver.”

**T**he concept of freedom varies with individual perspective. In this country, the idea of freedom has at times been exploited, taken for granted, or even trivialized. Most would agree that being in bondage is not freedom. Despite living in a “free” country, do we all have the same rights and opportunities? Are we free if we do not have equality? These questions were a part of the dialogue of conquest, indenture, and slavery in this country and continue to be debated today.

The first Africans to arrive in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619 were indentured servants, not slaves. (As an indentured servant, one served a specified number of years. In contrast, slavery was a lifetime condition.) But in 1661, slavery became law in Virginia, and comprehensive slave codes dictated the treatment of African Americans. Slavery soon became an important part of Colonial economics and an integral component of the fabric of America. As the slave trade

flourished and the enslaved population grew, slaves began to protest and resist. Slaves sought freedom through Colonial legislatures and other methods, including running away and, although uncommon, revolt.

Although enslaved people faced unequal treatment in Colonial society, they joined in the fight for freedom from British rule during the Revolutionary War. A former slave, Crispus Attucks, fought and died in the Boston Massacre of 1770, and African American patriots, representing all thirteen colonies, fought in the revolution.

What does it mean to live “in the land of the free”? This was likely a question asked by Hannah Harris. Hannah was a weaver on Leo, one of Robert Carter’s plantations in Loudoun County in the northern neck of Virginia. Although not much is known about her life, she left a compelling document for historians to study. On August 1, 1791 Carter filed a deed indicating his intention to free his slaves in groups over a twenty-one year period. In 1792, in anticipation of her freedom the following year, Hannah wrote a note to Carter, asking to purchase her loom, and in 1793, Hannah Harris, age 37, was emancipated.



Freedom comes in many forms. Early Colonial history demonstrates the desire of the colonists to be free of the tyranny of England's control. From the time of the writing of the Declaration of Independence, until the present, freedom has needed to be redefined and revised. As we look at passages from the Declaration of Independence (1776), the Northwest Ordinance, (1787), the United States Constitution (1787) and its subsequent amendments, and the Emancipation Proclamation (1863), we will ask: What would Hannah Harris think?

**Key concepts**

Government documents illustrate the changing interpretation and application of freedom and equality in the United States. In addition to slavery, many other issues of freedom, such as voting rights, have come before the nation. Social discussion and debate still occur today on issues involving freedom and equality. Primary and secondary sources assist in the exploration of the evolution of freedom in the United States.

**Key questions**

What would Hannah Harris think about the documents of freedom? What would she say about the founding fathers and their participation in defining American freedom? What do we think about freedom? What more needs to be done to insure freedom in America? Is freedom the same as equality? Why or why not? What role do primary and secondary sources serve in studying history?

**Goals of this lesson**

1. To understand how government documents illustrate the changing notions of freedom and equality in the history of the United States.
2. To understand the importance of written documents in interpreting the past and the impact government documents have on daily life.
3. To understand the politics and social positions of both the founding fathers and Abraham Lincoln concerning freedom and slavery.
4. To reflect on freedom and equality in the United States today.

**Objectives**

1. Students will read excerpts from government documents and demonstrate their comprehension through a written exercise.
2. Students will conduct additional research and summarize their findings in writing and oral presentations.
3. Students will use their knowledge of Hannah Harris to infer her reaction to a variety of government documents.
4. Students will express their own feelings regarding freedom and equality through the completion of a creative writing or art assignment.
5. During research, writing, and creating, students will work in cooperative groups to differentiate between fact and inference and will learn about the importance of point of view and perspective in history.
6. Students will draw on their knowledge of the changing definition of freedom and equality to discuss and express their opinions about the United States today.

**Materials**

Master copies of all student worksheets and handouts are provided.

1. Selected passages from the Declaration of Independence, the Northwest Ordinance, the U.S. Constitution and various Amendments, and the Emancipation Proclamation (seven separate worksheets with vocabulary words) and a "Document Analysis Directions" handout
2. Photograph of the women's suffrage "Ballot box, 1912"
3. Dictionaries (one per small group)
4. Reliable age-appropriate research materials (see Additional Resources for suggestions)
5. Internet access (optional)
6. Basic school supplies: pens, pencils, writing paper, poster paper, crayons, and markers

**Procedures****Day 1**

Write the following list on the chalkboard:

Declaration of Independence, Northwest Ordinance, U.S. Constitution and Amendments, and the Emancipation Proclamation. Ask students what they know about these documents and have a brief classroom discussion identifying each one in general terms. Recap Hannah Harris's story or, if you did not complete the "Meet Hannah the Weaver" lesson, introduce your students to Hannah.

Break students into seven small groups. This lesson includes seven student worksheets, which examine excerpts from different documents of freedom. Give one worksheet and one "Document Analysis Directions" handout to each group. Each group will also need a dictionary. The seven topics are:

1. The Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776
2. The Northwest Ordinance, July 13, 1787,
3. The Constitution of the United States, September 17, 1787
4. Constitutional Amendment 1, the first ten amendments to the Constitution were ratified on December 15, 1791, and form what is known as the "Bill of Rights"
5. The Emancipation Proclamation, January 1, 1863
6. Constitutional Amendment 13, passed by Congress January 31, 1865, and ratified December 6, 1865
7. Constitutional Amendment 19, passed by Congress June 4, 1919, and ratified August 18, 1920. Note: This group should also receive the photograph of the 1912 ballot box.

Give students time to complete the following: read their excerpt, look up the vocabulary words (and any other words they do not know) and write down the definitions, and answer the questions in the Day 1 column of their worksheet. Instruct the groups to work cooperatively and discuss their interpretations. At the end of class, collect the partially completed worksheets.

**Day 2**

Educator note: During Day 2, students are asked to explore their document in-depth by conducting research. To reduce in-class time, you may want to assign the research as homework on Day 1.

Organize students into the seven working groups from Day 1 and return the partially completed worksheets. Ask students to further explore their document by conducting research. Students should use textbooks, research materials, and the Internet (if available) to discover the importance of their quotation and the documents in which it appears. Students should also research leaders associated with their document, such as Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, James Madison, Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, or Jane Addams. Give students the time and resources needed to complete the task.

After they finish their research, students should complete the "Day 2" column on their worksheet. They will answer the same questions from Day 1, but this time their answers should be more informed.

Ask each group to give a brief oral report. Each group should read their excerpt aloud and summarize their findings. Collect the completed worksheets.

**Day 3**

Organize students into the seven working groups and return the completed worksheets. Inform students that they are going to dramatize Hannah Harris's reaction to their document. Students should use both their historical knowledge and imagination to create their dramatization (or brief skit). Remind students to make informed inferences about how Hannah might feel. (If students have completed the first lesson of this unit, "Meet Hannah the Weaver," then this experience should build on their previous improvisational activity.) Inform students that they will perform their dramatization the following day.

Allow the groups time to write and rehearse their dramatization. Skits can follow any format, or you can establish guidelines. For example:

1. All students will recite the quotation in a chorus.
2. One student, acting the part of Hannah, will react to the quote and respond to it by asking questions of the chorus.

- Individual members of the chorus will respond to Hannah's questions.
- Hannah will end the piece by stating her opinion of the document.

**Day 4**

Ask each group to present their dramatization to the entire class.

**Day 5**

Hold a class discussion about the evolution of freedom and equality in the United States. Structure the discussion by following the seven documents of freedom. Ask students: What are areas where greater freedom and equality still need to be achieved? Make a list on the chalkboard.

Remind students that Hannah Harris was a weaver. Skilled weavers can make beautiful and complex patterns and designs in cloth. Students will have the chance to record their personal feelings about freedom and equality in one of two ways:

- Using basic art supplies, students can design their own "Freedom Fabric" pattern (a picture on paper) for Hannah to weave.
- Students can write a poem about freedom. The poem must be titled, "I Believe Freedom is . . . and is not . . ."

Explain to students that they can choose either option. This assignment is intended to be a personal and creative expression, but the final product should draw on the history they have learned over the last four class periods.

**Day 6**

Ask students to return to their original groups and share their creations. Display the students' weaving patterns and poems in your classroom.

**Suggestions for student assessment**

Small group assignments, including worksheets and dramatizations, can be assessed. Design both individual and group rubrics to assess cooperative projects. Share rubrics with students in advance of assignments. Individual work, including the freedom fabric designs and poems, may also be assessed.

**Extension Activities**

- Based on the class-generated list about freedom today, ask students to write their own amendments to the Constitution.
- Have students research other Constitutional Amendments, including the Twenty-fourth Amendment, on voting rights (poll tax), ratified in 1964, or the Twenty-sixth Amendment, which lowered the voting age to eighteen, ratified in 1971. Other research topics could include the Civil Rights Movement and milestone Supreme Court cases, such as *Brown v. Board of Education*.
- During a one-week period, ask students to collect news articles relating to issues of freedom and equality. The articles can be from newspapers, magazines, or appropriate on-line sources. Students should read the articles and complete a written reaction to the topic. Students can present their reactions as oral reports.

**Additional resources**

Bennett, Lerone, Jr. *Before the Mayflower: a History of Black America*. Chicago: Johnson Publishing, 1962; Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1984.

Douglass, Frederick. *My Bondage and My Freedom*. 1855; reprint, New York: Washington Square Press, 2003.

Franklin, John Hope. *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*. 8th edition. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000.

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. "Introduction." *The Classic Slave Narratives*. Edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: New American Library, Mentor Books, 1987.

Keckley, Elizabeth. *Behind the Scenes, or, Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House*. New York: G. W. Carlton, 1868. Reprint, New York: Oxford University Press, Inc, 1988.

*Unchained Memories: Readings from the Slave Narratives*. Boston, Massachusetts: Bulfinch Press, 2002.

Washington, Booker T. *Up From Slavery*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1901. Reprint, New York: New American Library, Signet classic, 2000.

Wells, Ida B. *Crusade for Justice: the Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*. Edited by Alfreda M. Duster. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970.

### Resources written specifically for young people

Myers, Walter Dean. *Now is Your Time! The African-American Struggle for Freedom*. New York: Harper Collins, 1991.

Potts, Jody. *Adventure Tales of America: An Illustrated History of the United States: 1492–1877*. Vol. 2. Dallas: Signal Media Corporation, 2000.

Travis, Cathy. *Constitution Translated for Kids*. Dayton, Ohio: Oakwood Publishing, 2002.

### Web resource

U.S. National Archives and Records Administration  
www.archives.gov

### This lesson fulfills the following Illinois Learning Standards:

#### English Language Arts

- State Goal 1: Read with understanding and fluency,
- State Goal 3: Write to communicate for a variety of purposes.
- State Goal 4: Listen and speak effectively in a variety of situations.
- State Goal 5: Use the language arts to acquire, assess, and communicate information.

#### Social Science

- State Goal 16: Understand events, trends, individuals, and movements shaping the history of Illinois, the United States, and other Nations.
- State Goal 18: Understand social systems, with an emphasis on the United States.

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**DOCUMENT ANALYSIS DIRECTIONS**

**Day 1:** Read the excerpt and discuss its meaning. Use a dictionary to look up the words in the vocabulary list and write out their definitions. Remember to look up any other words you do not understand, even if they are not on the vocabulary list. Then respond to the questions, writing your answers in the Day 1 column. Use additional paper if necessary.

**Day 2:** Conduct research to learn more about your document. Locate a copy of the entire document to read. Try to learn about people connected to this document. Discuss how other people may have reacted to it. At the conclusion of your research, respond to the questions below, this time writing your answers in the Day 2 column. Use additional paper if necessary.  
 What new information have you discovered?  
 How have your ideas and opinions changed?

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Day 1: Before Research</b>	<b>Day 2: After Research</b>
1. What does this excerpt mean?	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
2. To whom does the excerpt apply?	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
3. Why was this document written?	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
4. What would Hannah Harris think about this document?	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

**DOCUMENT ANALYSIS: DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE**

**Excerpt from the Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776**

*“We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”*

**Vocabulary List**

1. endowed \_\_\_\_\_

2. inalienable \_\_\_\_\_

3. liberty \_\_\_\_\_

4. pursuit \_\_\_\_\_

Another Question to Discuss: How do we interpret the phrase “all men are created equal” differently today than in 1776?

**DOCUMENT ANALYSIS: THE NORTHWEST ORDINANCE**

**Excerpt from the Northwest Ordinance, July 13, 1787**

*“Art. 6. There shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude in the said territory.”*

**Vocabulary List**

1. ordinance \_\_\_\_\_
2. territory \_\_\_\_\_
3. slavery \_\_\_\_\_
4. involuntary \_\_\_\_\_
5. servitude \_\_\_\_\_

Other Questions to Discuss: What was the purpose of this ordinance?  
Why was the topic of slavery part of the document?



**DOCUMENT ANALYSIS: THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES**

**Excerpt from the Constitution of the United States, September 17, 1787**

*“We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this constitution for the United States of America”*

Article IV. Section 2.

*“The Citizens of each State shall be entitled to all Privileges and Immunities of Citizens in the several States.”*

**Vocabulary List**

1. union \_\_\_\_\_
2. justice \_\_\_\_\_
3. domestic \_\_\_\_\_
4. tranquility \_\_\_\_\_
5. welfare \_\_\_\_\_
6. liberty \_\_\_\_\_
7. posterity \_\_\_\_\_
8. ordain \_\_\_\_\_

Other Questions to Discuss: How was the Constitution created?  
Who were “We the People” and “Citizens” in 1787? Who are they today?

**DOCUMENT ANALYSIS: FIRST AMENDMENT TO THE U.S. CONSTITUTION**

Note: The first ten amendments to the Constitution are called the “Bill of Rights.”

**Excerpt from the Bill of Rights, ratified December 15, 1791**

First Amendment

*“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”*

**Vocabulary List**

- 1. respect \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. prohibit \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. exercise \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. abridge \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. petition \_\_\_\_\_
- 6. redress \_\_\_\_\_
- 7. grievances \_\_\_\_\_

Other Questions to Discuss: Why was the Bill of Rights necessary? Why is the First Amendment important?

**DOCUMENT ANALYSIS: EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION**

**Excerpt from the Emancipation Proclamation, January 1, 1863**

*“That on the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free.”*

**Vocabulary List**

1. slaves \_\_\_\_\_
2. designated \_\_\_\_\_
3. rebellion \_\_\_\_\_
4. thenceforward \_\_\_\_\_

Other Questions to Discuss: Who was actually being freed? Who was excluded?

**DOCUMENT ANALYSIS: THIRTEENTH AMENDMENT TO THE U.S. CONSTITUTION**

**Excerpt from the Thirteenth Amendment, passed by Congress on January 31, 1865,  
and ratified on December 6, 1865**

Section 1

*“Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.”*

**Vocabulary List**

1. involuntary \_\_\_\_\_
2. servitude \_\_\_\_\_
3. duly \_\_\_\_\_
4. convicted \_\_\_\_\_
5. subject \_\_\_\_\_
6. jurisdiction \_\_\_\_\_

Another Question to Discuss: The Emancipation Proclamation was issued by President Lincoln in 1863, so why was this amendment necessary?

**DOCUMENT ANALYSIS: NINETEENTH AMENDMENT TO THE U.S. CONSTITUTION**

**Excerpt from the Nineteenth Amendment, passed by Congress on June 4, 1919, and ratified on August 18, 1920.**

*“The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex [gender].”*

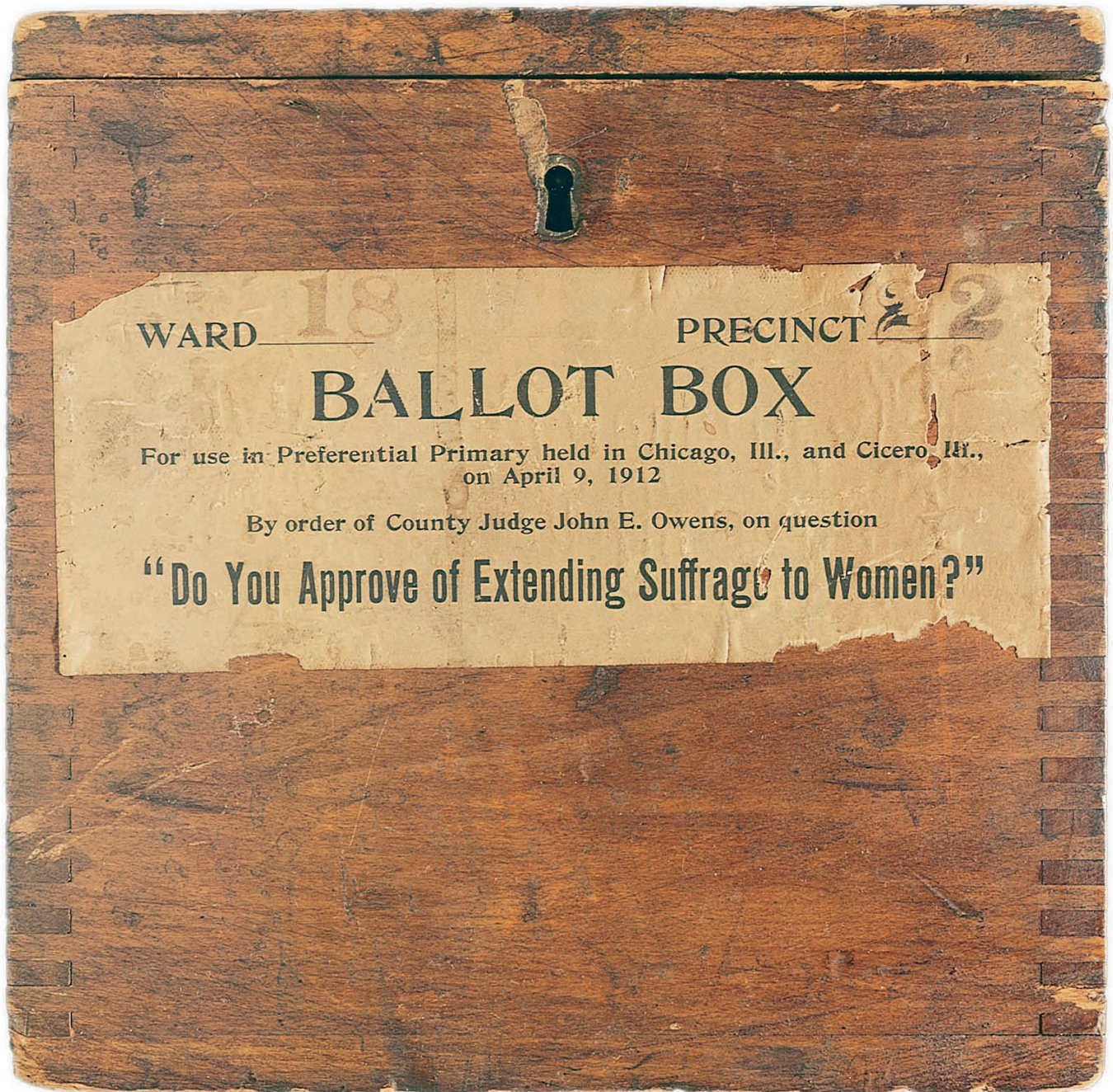
**Vocabulary List**

1. citizen \_\_\_\_\_

2. abridged \_\_\_\_\_

3. gender \_\_\_\_\_

Other Questions to Discuss: To whom does this amendment apply? What does this say about the link people made between voting and gender in 1920? View the image of the ballot box from 1912. What does this tell you about the process of extending the right to vote to women? Are men and women voters viewed differently from one another today? Explain your answer.



*Ballot box, 1912 (wood)*

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# HISTORY LAB | FEEDBACK FORM

**Please give us your feedback!** After reviewing and using this *History Lab* lesson, please send us your feedback. Your ideas and honest assessment will ensure that these lessons keep improving and will provide us with useful insight for future teacher fellows. To fill out this form online or discover additional *History Lab* activities, visit the educators section of the Chicago Historical Society's website at [www.chicagohistory.org](http://www.chicagohistory.org).

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade you teach: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you a CHS member? (circle one):            yes            no

Name of unit you are evaluating \_\_\_\_\_

Name of lesson you are evaluating: \_\_\_\_\_

1. On a scale of one to five (with five being the best) rate this lesson in terms of the quality of the student learning experience it provides (circle one):

5                                  4                                  3                                  2                                  1

2. What were the strengths of this lesson? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. What aspects of this lesson needed additional fine-tuning? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. What advice, tips, or suggestions would you give to future users of this lesson? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. Where does this lesson fit in your course of study (scope, sequence, unit)? \_\_\_\_\_

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6. If applicable, how did the use of primary sources impact student learning? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Thank you for your time. Please send the completed form to:**

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Attn: History Programs **Fax: 312-266-2077**

