Chicago Historical Society

HISTORY LAB

AFRICAN AMERICAN LIFE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Meet John and Mary Jones

Grade level: Middle school

Estimated time: Three class periods

Topic: African American life in Illinois 1818–67

Subtopic: John and Mary Jones



John Jones



Mary Jones

Teacher background information

Nineteenth-century abolitionists John and Mary Richardson Jones were two of Chicago's most influential and prominent African American citizens. The beautifully restored portraits of the Joneses and their Certificates of Freedom, which are in the collection of the Chicago Historical Society, offer a unique view into their lives.

This lesson is designed to help students learn about this period in American history by examining primary documents and artifacts related to John and Mary Jones. Before beginning this lesson, students should have a basic understanding of slavery and the abolitionist movement and the geographical knowledge to locate free and slave states.

On Day 3, the lesson introduces students to the Joneses' Certificates of Freedom. Students should understand that as African Americans living in Illinois in the mid-1800s, the Joneses were required by law to carry these documents with them at all times. In addition, it might be helpful to inform students that Madison County is in southwestern Illinois near Missouri. The Certificates of Freedom were issued there because the Joneses settled in Alton, Illinois, upon their arrival in the state in 1841. They moved to Chicago in 1845.

Key concepts
Historical interpretation, slavery, and abolitionism

Key questions
Who were John and Mary Jones? What can individuals and historians learn from examining artifacts? Why do museums use artifacts as a source of history? What can artifacts tell us about history that history books or other written sources cannot?

Goal of this lesson
Students will interpret history by examining primary documents and artifacts related to the lives of Chicago abolitionists John and Mary Jones.

Objective
Students will draw conclusions about individuals and the time period in which they lived based on careful examination of artifacts.

Materials
Master copies of all artifact reproductions and student handouts are provided.

1. Portraits of John and Mary Jones
2. "Analyzing Primary Sources" chart
3. Certificates of Freedom of John and Mary Jones
4. "Biography of John and Mary Jones"
5. "Source Comparison Worksheet"

Procedures
Several days before beginning this lesson, students should be asked to bring a photograph or a belonging that tells something important about them or their family to class. This activity will work best if the photograph or artifact is older, perhaps something that belonged to a parent or grandparent.

Day 1
Divide students into pairs and ask them to exchange their photographs or belongings. Ask students to imagine that they are historians at the Chicago Historical Society at the beginning of the twenty-second century. Tell them to inspect the item in front of them as if it were a rare artifact that has just been discovered. Have students write down their observations on a separate sheet of paper. Ask them to describe the "artifact" and answer the following questions: What is the significance of the artifact? What does it tell you about the individual to whom it belonged? Students should then share their observations with their partner to determine the accuracy of their conclusions. After the students have time to consult with their partner, ask them to share their findings with the entire class.

Tell students that this activity provided an introduction to primary documents and artifacts and their importance to present-day historians. Define and discuss primary sources. Inform students that they will spend the next class examining copies of several artifacts from the nineteenth century. Their task will be to determine what can be learned from artifacts and what relevancy artifacts hold for us today.

Day 2
Divide students into small groups and distribute the portraits of John and Mary Jones and the "Analyzing Primary Sources" chart. Do not provide background information about either the Joneses or their portraits. After examining the portraits, students should complete the painting column of the "Analyzing Primary Sources" chart.

Follow with a class discussion to gauge the students' thoughts and reactions to the paintings. Explore and discuss the Joneses' wealth, their socioeconomic status, and the purpose of commissioning the paintings. Remind students that most people at that time could not afford to commission paintings. Instigate a discussion about why the Chicago Historical Society, or any museum, would find portraits such as these valuable.

Day 3

Have students to find their "Analyzing Primary Sources" worksheet from Day 2. Distribute copies of the Joneses' Certificates of Freedom. Ask students to read the documents and answer the questions in the document column of the worksheet. Discuss their responses as a class.

Note: The Certificates of Freedom contain several words that may be hard for students to understand, including abolition, abolitionism, bond, equality, freedom, indentured servant, mulatto, race, racism, slave, and stripe [lash]. It might be helpful to prepare a list of definitions ahead of time to discuss as a class.

Distribute the "Biography of John and Mary Jones" to each student for further discussion. Some students might be surprised to learn the actual details of the Joneses' lives.

Break students into pairs or small groups. Distribute the "Source Comparison Worksheet." Ask students to complete the worksheet using all of the primary and secondary sources they have examined. After they have completed the worksheet, hold a class discussion to review their responses.

As a conclusion to this lesson, or for homework, ask students to write a paragraph describing the importance of learning about the Joneses. Students should address the following questions: What made the Joneses' lives notable? Why is it valuable for us to study them more than 150 years later? Why are the Joneses' portraits and Certificates of Freedom valuable pieces of history for the Chicago Historical Society to preserve?

Suggestions for student assessment

The "Analyzing Primary Sources" chart, "Source Comparison Worksheet," and paragraph about the importance of learning about the Jones can be used to assess student learning.

Additional resources

Turner, Glenette Tilley. *The Underground Railroad in Illinois.* Glen Ellen, Illinois: Newman Educational Publishing, 2001.

Jones, John. "The Black Laws of Illinois, and a Few Reasons Why They Should Be Repealed." Chicago: Tribune Book and Job Office, 1864.

Payne, Ethel. "Unearth Tale of 'Forgotten Man.'" *Chicago Defender,* 12 July 1951.

Bridges, Roger D. "The Illinois Black Codes." Illinois Periodicals Online: www.lib.niu.edu/ipo/iht329602.html.

Angle, Paul M. "The Illinois Black Laws." *Chicago History* spring 1967.

McRainey, D. Lynn. *A House Divided: America in the Age of Lincoln: A Teacher's Handbook of Activities and Information.* Chicago Historical Society, 1992.

Extension activities

The portraits of the Joneses and their Certificates of Freedom will raise questions about racial classification. Some students may actually think that the Joneses are white until they examine their Certificates of Freedom, which define them as mulatto. Introduce this topic by having students read *Desiree's Baby*, a short story by Kate Chopin. The story deals with the devastating consequences for a nineteenth-century "white" couple who realize that their baby son is of African descent. The story can lead into a discussion of the meaning of race or the former significance of the "one drop rule."

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 14: Understand political systems, with an emphasis on the United States.

State Goal 16: Understand events, trends, individuals, and movements shaping the history of Illinois, the United States, and other nations.

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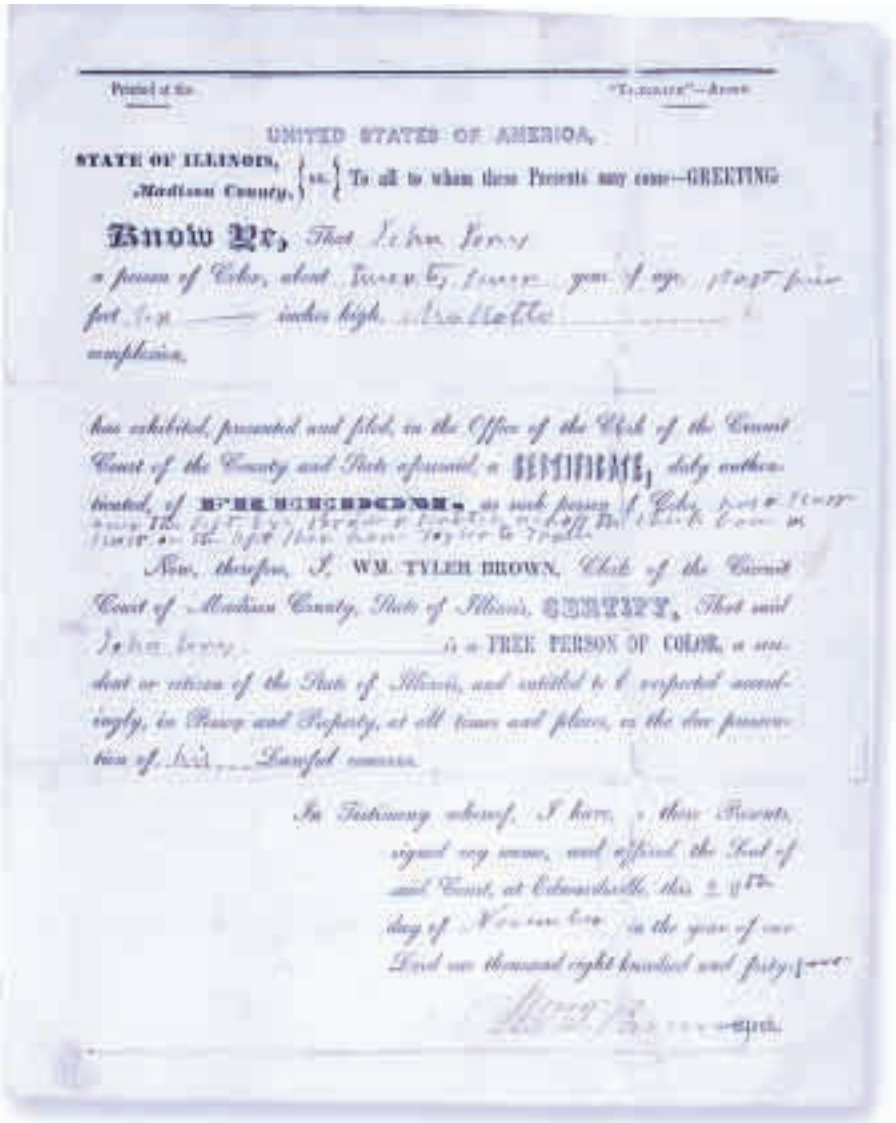




Name: _____ Date: _____

ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES

PAINTINGS		DOCUMENTS	
Questions	**Answers**	**Questions**	**Answers**
Describe the paintings.		Are these documents personal or official? What information supports your choice?	
What was the social class of the individuals in the paintings? Support your answer with evidence.		Who owned the documents originally?	
When do you think the paintings were created?		When were the documents created?	
Why do you think they were created?		What was the purpose of the documents?	
What other observations do you have about the paintings?		What other observations do you have about the documents?	



UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

STATE OF ILLINOIS, Madison County, } ss. } To all to whom these Presents may come—GREETING

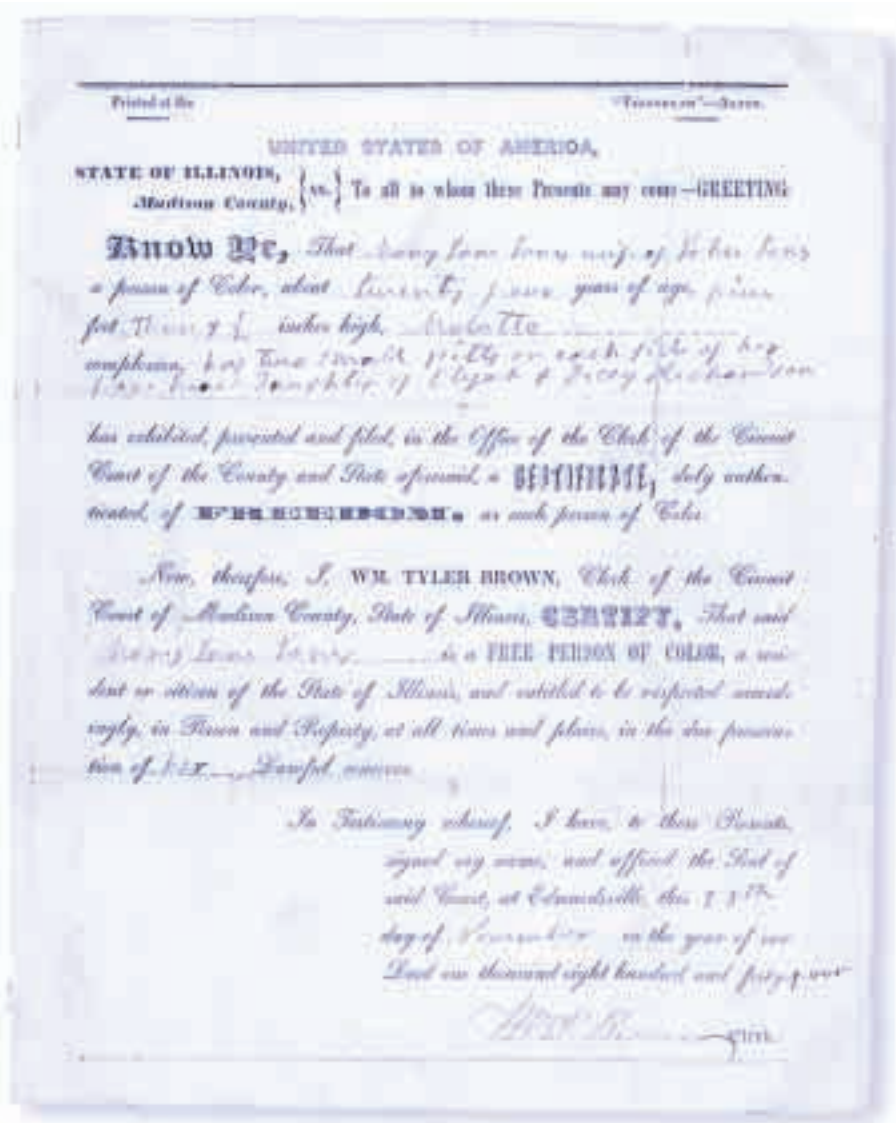
Know Ye, That John Jones
a person of Color, about Twenty four years of age, five
feet Six inches high, Mulatto
complexion,

has exhibited, presented and filed, in the Office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court of the County and State aforesaid a CERTIFICATE, duly authenticated, of HIS EMANCIPATION, as such person of Color

Now, therefore, I, WM. TYLER BROWN, Clerk of the Circuit Court of Madison County, State of Illinois, CERTIFY, That said John Jones is a FREE PERSON OF COLOR, a resident or citizen of the State of Illinois, and entitled to be respected accordingly, in Person and Property, at all times and places, to the due preservation of his lawful exercise.

In Testimony whereof, I have to these Presents signed my name, and affixed the Seal of said Court, at Edwardsville, this 2 5th day of November in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and forty four

Clerk.



UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

STATE OF ILLINOIS, Madison County, } ss. } To all to whom these Presents may come—GREETING

Know Ye, That Mary Jones Jones wife of John Jones
a person of Color, about Twenty four years of age, five
feet Three & ½ inches high, Mulatto
complexion, has Two small Scars on each side of her
Nose and Daughter of Edgar & Polly Richardson

has exhibited, presented and filed, in the Office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court of the County and State aforesaid a CERTIFICATE, duly authenticated, of HER EMANCIPATION, as such person of Color

Now, therefore, I, WM. TYLER BROWN, Clerk of the Circuit Court of Madison County, State of Illinois, CERTIFY, That said Mary Jones Jones is a FREE PERSON OF COLOR, a resident or citizen of the State of Illinois, and entitled to be respected accordingly, in Person and Property, at all times and places, in the due preservation of her lawful exercise.

In Testimony whereof, I have to these Presents signed my name, and affixed the Seal of said Court, at Edwardsville, this 1 5th day of November in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and forty four

Clerk.

John Jones's Certificate of Freedom

Mary Jones's Certificate of Freedom

BIOGRAPHY OF JOHN AND MARY JONES



John Jones



Mary Jones

John Jones and his wife Mary Richardson Jones were two of Chicago's most famous and influential African American citizens during the nineteenth century. The Joneses dedicated their lives to the fight for justice and equality in Illinois and the United States.

John Jones was born in Greene County, North Carolina, in 1816 or 1817. The exact date of his birth is unknown. By all accounts, John was born to a free mixed race woman and a man of German descent. He eventually fled to Memphis, Tennessee, because his mother feared that his father would enslave him. In Memphis, John worked as an apprentice to a tailor and met Mary Richardson, the daughter of a free African American blacksmith. Mary and her family eventually moved to Alton, Illinois. John moved to Alton in 1844, and the couple married. As required under the Illinois Black Codes, the Joneses posted their $1,000 bond and filed for and received their Certificates of Freedom.

In 1845, the couple and their infant daughter arrived in Chicago. John eventually opened a tailor shop on Clark Street between Randolph and Lake Streets. Through hard work and industriousness, he became one of the wealthiest African American men in the United States. His activities, however, were hardly limited to the business world. John became a noted civic leader, writer, orator, and philanthropist. He helped found the Olivet Baptist Church, Chicago's second oldest church, which later became one of the most prominent Baptist congregations in the country. He also donated land at the corner of Plymouth Court and Harrison Street to the city of Chicago for a school, which was later named in his honor.

At a time when African Americans were enslaved in the South and lived in an intensely segregated North, John became one of the leading abolitionists in Illinois. He spent a considerable amount of time and money fighting for abolition and the repeal of the Illinois Black Codes. In 1847, he wrote a series of articles for the *Western Citizen*, an abolitionist newspaper, defending the rights of blacks and urging the repeal of the Illinois Black Codes. In 1864, he published a pamphlet, titled, "The Black Laws of Illinois and a Few Reasons Why They Should be Repealed." With the help of his persistent efforts, the state finally repealed the laws later that same year.

Among their close friends and associates, John and Mary Jones counted Frederick Douglass, Wendell Phillips, Allan Pinkerton, Charles Dyer, and John Brown. Their home, located at 116 Edinah Street (now Plymouth Court), served as part of the Underground Railroad. According to the Joneses' daughter Lavinia Jones Lee, her father "was responsible for sending hundreds of fugitives to Canada."

In 1871, John Jones was elected Cook County Commissioner and became one of the first African Americans in Illinois to be elected to a county office. He died on May 21, 1879, and is buried in Chicago's Graceland Cemetery.

Unfortunately the life of Mary Richardson Jones is not as well documented as that of her husband. According to their family papers, Mary worked closely with her husband in the fight for abolition and the repeal of the Illinois Black Codes. Mary was active in the Women's Suffrage Movement and was friends with some of the famous women of the time, including Susan B. Anthony. After her husband's death, Mary continued to be a social activist and contributed both time and money to many charities and causes.

Name(s): _____ Date: _____

SOURCE COMPARISON WORKSHEET

1. The Certificates of Freedom declare that the Joneses are "Free Persons of Color." Why was it essential that the Joneses carry their Certificates of Freedom with them at all times?

_____

_____

_____

2. Why did a Certificate of Freedom name the age, height, and complexion of the owner of the certificate? Why was this important?

_____

_____

_____

3. Why did Illinois, a free state, require African American citizens to carry Certificates of Freedom?

_____

_____

_____

4. Why did the Joneses think it was important to have their portraits painted?

_____

_____

_____

5. The paintings of the Joneses were separated for many years until a descendant of the Joneses gave the painting of Mary Jones to the Chicago Historical Society. Do you think the paintings have more power individually or together? Why?

_____

_____

_____

6. What is the significance of examining the Certificates of Freedom and the paintings as a set? Together what do they tell us that separately they cannot?

_____

_____

_____

7. What conclusions did you reach from your examination of the paintings and the Certificates of Freedom that were confirmed in the biography? What information was not confirmed in the biography?

_____

_____

_____

8. Together primary sources, such as the Certificates of Freedom and the paintings, and secondary sources, such as the biography, help give us a complete picture of the Joneses. Describe the importance of both primary and secondary sources.

_____

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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.

Name:_____ E-mail:_____

School:_____ Grade you teach: _____

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

Name of unit you are evaluating (check one):

- ☐ America's Documents of Freedom
- ☐ African American Life in the Nineteenth Century
- ☐ The Civil War: Up Close and Personal
- ☐ Chicago's World's Fairs
- ☐ Face-to-Face with the Great Depression
- ☐ America and Protest

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? _____

_____

_____

_____

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

_____

_____

_____

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

_____

_____

_____

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

_____

_____

_____

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

_____

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_____

_____

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Thank you for your time. Please send the completed form to:
Chicago Historical Society, Clark Street at North Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, 60614-6071,
Attn: History Programs **Fax: 312-266-2077**

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