

# ***Facts and Faith: Biblically Responsible Lessons For Diverse Classrooms***



Crafted by a dedicated team of expert educators and ministers from diverse Christian denominations, these lesson plans by Defense of Democracy are designed to meet Oklahoma Academic Standards and Superintendent Walters' OSDE Instructional Support Guidelines for Teachers directive. Our mission is to promote inclusivity and ensure emotional and physical safety for all students. These rigorous, Bible-based lessons reflect our commitment to historically and scientifically accurate education, fostering shared experiences across all backgrounds.



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# ***Lesson: Biblical Slavery and the Antebellum Impact***

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# Lesson Plan


## Biblical Slavery and the Antebellum Impact



### Summary

1. **Subject(s):** Critical Essay writing involving The Bible and the institution of slavery leading up to the US Civil War 11.3.W.2 11.3.W.3 11.4.W.1 11.4.W.2 11.5.W.1 11.5.W.2 11.5.W.3 11.5.W.4 11.5.W.5 11.5.W.6 11.6.W.2 11.6.W.3 11.6.W.4 11.8.W
2. **Topic or Unit of Study:** English, Language Arts
3. **Grade/Level:** 11<sup>th</sup> Grade
4. **Objective:** Write an informative or critical essay or report on how The Bible was utilized in the discourse reinforcing the institution of slavery leading up to the US Civil War.
5. **Time Allotment:** 3+ Class Periods


 **Pro Educator Tip:** Many people reading this will be familiar with calling enslaved humans “slaves.” During this lesson please try to focus on the language you use as an educator and utilize the phrase “enslaved person” or “enslaved human” to refer to the people who were held in bondage. This distinction is important because saying enslaved person or enslaved human centers the humanity of the individuals we will be discussing and emphasizes that slavery is a condition that was involuntarily imposed onto an individual, rather than being some inherent condition to their existence.

 **Pro Educator Tip:** The provided Biblical text is from the most current version of the [Updated New Revised Standard Version of the Christian Bible](#). of the Christian Bible. Many scholars consider this version to be the most accurate translation. If your learners ask that is why this text was included. It is abbreviated “NRSVue.” Some of your learners may be more familiar with other versions and you can tell them that is great, but for this class, the NRSVue will be the version that you intend to use.

## Implementation

### Learning Context:

Slavery was the principal cause of the US Civil War. This lesson examines the role of The Christian Bible in reinforcing the rhetoric surrounding slavery and its impact on the run-up to the US Civil War.


 **Pro Educator Tip:** This may be a difficult lesson for some of your students, so, having a “vibe check” occasionally to ensure that everyone in class is still doing okay, emotionally, is likely a good idea. It may be important to reinforce that these are historical figures and events. Your objective is to look at the facts surrounding these events. What these people actually said. Don't let your learners speculate too much about what they may or may not have thought or believed outside of the text.

### Procedure:

a. **Anticipatory Set:** To begin this lesson you will let your class know that The Bible was a very influential book in American History. Specifically, for this lesson, let them know that you are going to be examining the role of The Bible in the perpetuation of the institution of slavery and how that led up to the US Civil War.

### Class Period 1:

b. **Direct Instruction:** Tell the class that in the 1830s as per historian Dr. Larry Tise there were 55 Biblical defenses of slavery published. Tell them that as the Civil War approached the rhetoric was just as clear, then read the quotes to the class. After each quote allow for your learners to have 30 seconds or so to reflect on the quote and write down any questions they may have. Then, move on to the next quote. Once you are finished with all of the quotes, again, allow 30-45 seconds for reflections, and then you can take questions. If your learners want to ask “How could The Bible be used to justify slavery?” or a similar question, let them know that you will be covering that in just a moment.

 **Pro Educator Tip:** You have likely covered individuals like Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee, but even someone as influential as John C. Calhoun may be new to them. Also, it is important to note the linguistic shift that has happened. In Lee's quote for example when he mentions “a wise Merciful Providence” he means the Christian God.

## Class Period 1 cont.:

b. **Direct Instruction cont.:** Continue on to covering the passages of The Christian Bible that pro-slavery individuals utilized to ground their positions. Again, read the passages, have your learners write down any questions or observations as you read, and pause for 30 seconds after each passage. Before you read the passage from Genesis tell your learners *“Perhaps the most frequently quoted Bible passage used by pro-slavery advocates to justify slavery was a passage from Genesis. This is a selection from that passage.”* The entire passage deals with some slight adult themes, so, only a portion of it is included here. This is known as “The Curse of Ham,” and it was frequently referenced during that period. Then let your learners know about the Talking Book trope. Tell them *“In his book, The Signifying Monkey, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. writes about the first-hand accounts of formally enslaved persons in the United States describing their experience in bondage and, some of them, in eventual liberation. Gates identifies a common experience among these humans that he names ‘The Talking Book.’ Many of these enslaved persons encountered The Bible for the first time in the hands of their enslavers, and The Talking Book is a reference to the way that their enslavers would talk about The Bible. Their enslavers would say ‘The Bible says I can enslave you,’ ‘The Bible tells me this is something God wants’ or ‘The Bible says this is the way the world is supposed to be.’ Many of these enslaved persons then go on to tell stories of how they got their hands on a Bible themselves. One enslaved person snuck up to a Bible on a ship’s deck, opened it, and put their ear to the pages to hear what The Bible would say to them. He was very disappointed that The Bible did not speak to him and concluded that not only did the whole world hate him, but his God hated him as well. Many others had similar stories as well of listening to the pages only to have them not say anything.*

*And, of course, they don’t say anything. The Bible is a book and books cannot speak. But, Dr. Dale B. Martin has coined ‘The Myth of Textual Agency’ pointing out that claiming that the book is speaking to you is a very convenient excuse. Martin describes this myth as ‘the Bible speaks and our job is to listen.’ And, of course, if The Bible speaks then we cannot be held morally responsible for anything we do with the Bible. We are just doing as we are commanded by our God. But, on the other hand, if we are readers and interpreters of the text and The Bible isn’t speaking, then we are morally responsible for anything we do with the text. So, if you are going to enslave an entire group of people on the basis of their skin color you had **BETTER** talk about the text as if the text is speaking because then, it’s not your fault. The book told you to do it. But if you are reading and interpreting that text and decide on that basis to enslave a bunch of people then that’s on you, Christians.”*

## Class Period 1 cont.:

c. **Guided Practice:** You likely don't have much time left, but, with the time remaining in class have your learners begin working on what they might want for their Thesis Statement the informative/critical essay they will write on this topic. Tell them that their research question is "How was the Bible utilized to shape the discourse and reinforce the institution of slavery in the United States leading up to the Civil War?" They don't need to hand anything in today. (You know your learners. If they are working on this assignment on paper with pencils and you think they will lose them please collect them to ensure that your learners will have them tomorrow.)

## Class Period 2 :

d. **Research:** Depending on what resources you have available, this part of the lesson can go a few different ways. If your district is 1:1 or if you have access to Chromebooks or Computers in your classroom and are comfortable with internet research then there are a plethora of resources on these topics online. This lesson assumes that your learners have been taught good internet research techniques if this is the direction you are going. Alternatively, you can schedule a library day and have your learners obtain the information they need from physical media. Finally, you can coordinate with a librarian in your district to have them pre-select media for your learners to utilize for this project. However your learners do their research, they should utilize five unique sources to write their papers, their papers should be written using a consistent style (APA for example,) and they should include a works cited page. Tell them that your expectation is a standard five-paragraph essay.

## Class Period 3:

e. **Direct Instruction:** There isn't a lot of direct instruction from this point on in this lesson. From here on out your learners are going to be crafting and writing an essay.

f. **Guided Practice:** Today, your learners will spend the first 15 minutes of your class period developing their thesis statements for their essays. This lesson presupposes that your learners already know how to write a thesis statement, outline, and standard five-paragraph essay.

### Class Period 3 cont.:


f. **Guided Practice cont.:** Do not supply your learners with any of these, but if you need some example thesis statements here are some:

- a. The Bible was strategically interpreted by pro-slavery advocates to justify the institution of slavery, using specific passages to argue for the divine sanction of racial hierarchy and servitude.
- b. Religious leaders, Politicians, and slaveholders in the antebellum South employed biblical texts to construct a moral and theological framework that supported and perpetuated the practice of slavery.
- c. The selective use of biblical scripture by pro-slavery factions played a crucial role in shaping public discourse, reinforcing societal norms, and legitimizing the institution of slavery in the United States.
- d. By employing biblical narratives and teachings, proponents of slavery were able to create a religious justification for the practice, which was used to quell abolitionist movements and maintain the status quo.
- e. The Bible served as a powerful tool in the hands of pro-slavery advocates, who used its teachings to craft a narrative that depicted slavery as a divinely ordained institution, thereby influencing public opinion and policy leading up to the Civil War.

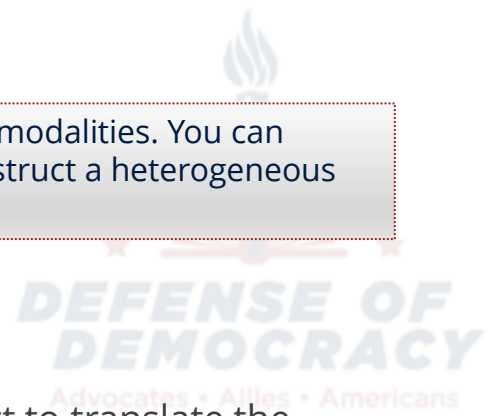
Once most of your learners have thesis statements it is time to move on to outlines. If you have a visual aid of an essay outline this is a great time to use it on your board. Regardless, direct your learners to begin work on their outlines. You will be collecting these at the end of class. Tell them to pay special attention to the works and quotes they collected during the previous day.

g. **Closing:** Much like with research you have a choice here. If you wish for your learners to complete the first drafts of these essays in class that will extend this lesson one more session as they will, likely, need the full class period to work on them. At this point, they should have their introductions written, so, most of your learners should be able to write their three body paragraphs and a conclusion. If any of your learners need extra time, make sure you afford them those opportunities. Otherwise, these drafts can be assigned as homework. The final essay can also, optionally, be completed in class, but the level of revision among your learners may make this difficult to manage as some of your learners will only need 10 minutes or so to revise their essays while others may require nearly the entire class period. Do what works best with your learners, schedule, and district.

## ***Differentiated Instruction***


 **Pro Educator Tip:** Recognize that learners exhibit diverse learning modalities. You can employ a range of pedagogical strategies to effectively engage and instruct a heterogeneous student body by deliberately considering this variability.

- a. Visual Learners
- b. Auditory Learners
- c. Kinesthetic Learners
- d. ESL Students - You will need to work with your district to translate the quotes ahead of time, so, ensure that you give them enough time to do so. The Bible passages have translations available, but the quotes may have to be translated by your district staff.
- e. At-risk Students
- f. Advanced Learners





## Materials & Resources

 **Pro Educator Tip:** Choose supplementary materials that will enhance your lesson (books or videos), YOU KNOW YOUR LEARNERS! Find resources that ENHANCE this lesson and make your instruction an engaging learning experience for all of your learners! Also, ensure that any supplemental materials obtain any necessary clearance from district staff before showing or presenting them to your learners. Your curriculum team works hard preparing and vetting materials.

- a. **Instructional Materials:** see the included text.
- b. **Suggested Resources:**
  - [The Great Stain: Witnessing American Slavery](#) by Noel Rae
  - [The Talking Book: African Americans and the Bible](#) by Allen Dwight Callahan
  - [The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism](#) by Henry Louis Gates Jr.
  - [Bible Defence of Slavery: Or, The Origin, History, and Fortunes of the Negro Race](#) by Josiah Priest circa 1852 ★
  - [God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War](#) by George C. Rable
  - [The Civil War as a Theological Crisis](#) by Mark A. Noll
  - [A House Divided: The Antebellum Slavery Debates in America, 1776-1865](#)  
Video Series:
    - [Crash Course Black American History](#) - While not directly addressing the role of Christianity, this series provides an in-depth look at the slave trade leading up to the US Civil War.
    - [A Summary of Callahan's The Talking Book](#) by Dr. Aaron Higashi
    - Dr. Aaron Higashi talking about "[The Talking Book](#)" trope in reference to The Bible

★ This is a primary source from immediately before the Civil War.



## Text

### Pro-Slavery Quotes:

"Slavery was established by decree of Almighty God... It is sanctioned in the Bible, in both Testaments, from Genesis to Revelation... it has existed in all ages, has been found among the people of the highest civilization, and in nations of the highest proficiency in the arts." - Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy

"The right of holding slaves is clearly established in the Holy Scriptures, both by precept and example." - Reverend John Furman a notable Southern Baptist minister from South Carolina

"There is not one verse in The Bible inhibiting slavery, but many regulating it. It is not then, we conclude, immoral." - Reverend Alexander Campbell a notable Church of Christ minister from West Virginia

"The providence of God commits the destiny of the slave to our keeping; and we cannot desert our trust without rebellion against His authority... In ruling our slaves we would not only rule them by the written statutes, but by the Bible and by the love of God." - Benjamin Morgan Palmer a notable Southern Presbyterian minister from Louisiana

"I hold that in the present state of civilization, where two races of different origin, and distinguished by color and other physical differences, as well as intellectual, are brought together, the relation now existing in the slaveholding states between the two is, instead of an evil, a good—a positive good. It has... grown up, from its infancy, under the fostering care of our government, and has gradually developed itself into a form of civilization as marked by the Bible as it is by the progress of time." - John C. Calhoun U.S. Senator from South Carolina



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## **Text**

### Pro-Slavery Quotes cont.:

"As long as that [slave] class is wicked and impenitent, the spirit of slavery will be the spirit of the gospel. The relation between the master and the slave is ordained by God, and our duty is to keep the slave in his place, and to treat him kindly, but to see that he remains a slave." - James Henley Thornwell  
Southern Presbyterian Minister from South Carolina

"The Bible teaches that all men are not equal, and that slavery, subordination to the superior race, is a necessary part of the moral order of the world." - George Fitzhugh American social theorist who wrote the book "Sociology for the South, or, the Failure of Free Society" 5 years before the Civil War started.



## **Text**

### **Bible Passages utilized to justify slavery:**

#### **Exodus 21:2-6**

2 “When you buy a male Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, but in the seventh, he shall go out a free person, without debt. 3 If he comes in single, he shall go out single; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. 4 If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife, and her children shall be her master’s, and he shall go out alone. 5 But if the slave declares, ‘I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out a free person,’ 6 then his master shall bring him before God. He shall be brought to the door or the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl, and he shall serve him for life.

#### **Leviticus 25:44-46**

44 As for the male and female slaves whom you may have, it is from the nations around you that you may acquire male and female slaves. 45 You may also acquire them from among the aliens residing with you and from their families who are with you who have been born in your land; they may be your property. 46 You may keep them as a possession for your children after you, for them to inherit as property. These you may treat as slaves, but as for your fellow Israelites, no one shall rule over the other with harshness.

#### **Exodus 21:20-21**

20 “When a slaveowner strikes a male or female slave with a rod and the slave dies immediately, the owner shall be punished. 21 But if the slave survives a day or two, there is no punishment, for the slave is the owner’s property.

#### **Genesis 9: 24-27**

24 When Noah awoke ..., 25 he said, “Cursed be Canaan; lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers.” 26 He also said, “Blessed by the Lord my God be Shem and let Canaan be his slave. 27 May God make space for Japheth, and let him live in the tents of Shem, and let Canaan be his slave.”

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