



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2005 Volume I: Stories around the World in Film and Literature

From Slaves to Soldiers: African Americans and the Civil War

Curriculum Unit 05.01.03
by William J. Garraty

Unit Overview

It is the aim of this unit to allow students to master the basic facts of the Civil War of the United States. In the process of meeting that general goal I want students to encounter some specific issues. The first section of the unit provides students with an understanding of what led up to the civil war. The Peter Batty film *The Divided Union* will be used to provide relevant background information on the Civil War. Students will develop an understanding of the moral arguments around slavery. At least as important are the economic motivations of both pro and anti-slavery factions in the United States. It is important for students to understand the motivations of the anti-slavery forces. Without learning about the economic aspects of slavery students are doomed to a misunderstanding of slavery. The conflict between people who worked for a wage and those who worked because they were slaves must be defined for students. The ability of the South to produce a cash crop without having to pay workers a wage must have placed a strand of fear into the hearts of most Northern industrialist. The concept of slavery as a national policy must have made every worker in the country fear for his or her own job. Considering that the vast majority of workers in the United States at that time were connected to some aspect of agriculture, there must have been a strong dislike for the practice of slavery as a replacement for paid workers. This in itself was a reason to oppose slavery. From an economic standpoint it was in conflict with every Americans right to make money. If that reason was distasteful to some, there was another reason to oppose slavery, one that seemed closer to the hearts of Americans. Slavery was bondage; it was morally wrong. To help drive that point home the literate world needed a closer look at slavery. It came to them by way of Harriet Beecher Stowe.

Students should develop a deep understanding of the slavery issue as it is presented in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* . H.B. Stowe and the film version's producer provide students with an opportunity to see how slavery was presented to the world prior to the Civil War. This story changed the opinions of many around the world with regard to the moral correctness of slavery. Filled with violence toward those who could not defend themselves and the victimization of women from several standpoints, the story opened the world's eyes to the peculiar institution of southern slavery. As we examine the motivation of the North to end slavery, we need to explore the efforts of Northern abolitionists and free African Americans who took up arms and fought for the Union.

Students should connect with the historic efforts of the Massachusetts 54th regiment because it was an African American unit. The film *Glory* provides students with a graphic exposure to war, prejudice, courage

and valor. The film provides students with a view of wealthy New England abolitionists. It further walks the student through the process of transforming free African Americans into Union soldiers. The film creates an understanding for students who may question why these soldiers put up with such disrespect. It touches and inspires students. The film shows African Americans as real heroes of the Civil War. Overall, we want students to remember the Civil War and understand what started it, how it affected the country then, and what the war means to us today.

Objective:

Teaching the Civil War with the film *The Divided Union*

Teaching the Civil War in a broad context facilitates the mastery of concepts focused on the condition of slaves in the South and African American soldiers fighting for the Union. The use of a broad based film such as *The Divided Union* by Peter Batty provides an excellent overview of the war. It addresses the causes of the war, the war in terms of major events, and the re-united Union in a post war era. The film helps to reinforce material covered prior to this unit. It reviews for students how slaves came to the United States as indentured servants much the same way, many poor Europeans did during the same era. The development of southern society as a parallel of European nobility is introduced. This relationship between the southern society and European aristocracy provides students with a link between empire building and westward expansion of slavery as an economic tool. The near outlawing of slavery as a part of the creation of the United States Constitution and the sudden need to retain it as a result of Eli Whitney's cotton gin is also identified for the viewer. This topic provides students with a very good opportunity to learn the stark reality of politics and economics. It also is a great opportunity for discussion.

The film also brings to light the significant differences between the North and the South, such as differences in economies and infrastructures. This film provides the student with solid comparisons that can be transferred to excellent assessment opportunities like essays that compare and contrast specific aspects of the war or simple matching facts to regions, such as defining that economy matches which section of the country.

Teaching about Slavery with the film *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

It is one objective of this unit is to allow students to develop a deep understanding of the slavery issue as it is presented in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. This is an important story because it provided people outside of the American South with an impression of what life was like during the slavery era. Having little or no other clear picture of the daily life of slaves, many Americans formed opinions about the South based on H.B. Stowe's book. I want students to watch the film version of the story and learn that there were a variety of methods used by slave owners to operate plantations using slaves as workers. Much of the South's wealth was derived from the cotton industry and it was slaves who gathered that valuable crop. Students will learn that some plantation slaves were quasi-family members; others were trusted workers and held in close regard by their owners. Students will also learn that on some plantations slaves were held in the worst possible conditions and provided with minimal sustenance often leading to their early death.

The use of film is important in this unit because it allows students to develop a visual reference for the actual slave condition. Students will see the variety of positions slaves held. Some worked as house servants, others as drivers, while the majority worked as field hands. Although the central drama is between slaves and landowners, the film shows conflict between groups of slaves too. Students will see the animosity that developed between field hands and house servants.

To better view films and understand their power, students will learn the concept of MISE-EN-SCENE, what appears in the frame of the film shot. The objective of introducing students to the concept of mise-en-scene is to foster the ability to look at a film with a discerning eye. We want our students to ask several kinds of questions as they watch the film. Such as why did the director have Simone, the evil slave's owner fall into a mud puddle, when he is struck by Christopher, Tom's former owner's son. Students should be willing to ask themselves questions such as why was there such a difference in the clothes that some slaves wore in the film as opposed to those that others wore. Students will develop a deeper understanding of the intent of the filmmaker as he attempts to bring the viewer along through the film. Students might even think to themselves " oh I see where he is going with this".

We want students to develop a visual reference to the environment, both physical and cultural, during the slave era as depicted by H. B. Stowe and the film director. The southern society was presented as grand and wealthy in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* , It was well educated and sophisticated also. As students move through this unit they will also see how the director of the film *Glory* depicts white northern abolitionist's as they meet with the likes of Frederick Douglas in stately Boston parlors. With visual images such as these, we can ask students to answer higher order questions, comparing and contrasting the Southern society to that of the Northern Abolitionist society.

Teaching about African American soldiers with the film *Glory*

Our next objective for students is to learn about the historic efforts of the Massachusetts 54th regiment. It is a film about an all African American Union Army regiment during the Civil War. Most significantly we want students to remember that African Americans were involved in the Civil War and that they fought to end slavery because it meant that all African Americans would have freedom.

Why Northerners went to war with the South can be answered in several ways depending on whom you ask. For African Americans fighting in that war we know that it was to gain freedom from slavery. Others in the Union were attempting to preserve an economic model that supported the use of paid workers as a labor force. Workers getting paid a wage for their efforts then used those wages to buy things that other workers made, and in turn were paid wages for that production. Had slavery become the pillar of the American economic system, wealth would have been limited to a very small minority, thus creating another Europe that our forefathers had fled from one hundred years earlier.

The film *Glory* provides students with the opportunity to learn that there were a variety of reasons why African Americans joined the Union Army. Those who did join units like the Massachusetts 54th regiment did so, in most cases to end slavery. Those soldiers came from different backgrounds so slavery had different ramifications for them. Some were well-educated men from the north. Others were escaping the hard conditions they were living under on plantations. Some slaves had spent their entire life working day in and day out in the fields with little or no hope of improving their condition. Others were run away slaves with not much else to hope for aside from a new beginning after the war.

The film also provides some stunning realities for students. The demeaning expectations of some white officers about the ability of soldiers assigned to the 54th are brought to light. Many saw these men as simple children who were unable to perform in the same way as traditional white soldiers because of a lower mental capacity. Some officers simply did not believe they were equal to whites as men.

The use of the film *Glory* helps students to understand that while the south used African Americans as slaves,

Northern whites in many cases did not see them as an important part of the war effort. This concept helps students understand the apprehension the North had in arming African Americans. Teachers using this film would do well to develop good answers to the questions raised by students asking why northerners resisted using African Americans in the Union Army. The answers lay deeper than that of, suspect ability.

What is important is that students connect African Americans with the Civil War effort. This film documents those who encouraged as well as those who prevented African American participation, fearing the transformation of a war to preserve the Union into a war to end slavery. Students will then be able to develop a thesis focused on the question; why would someone want to free the slaves?

Strategies:

Teaching the goals we have set.

I believe that starting with the broad overview of the Civil War helps students understand and formulate ideas and opinions about the other issues in the unit. Slavery as it is depicted in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and African American soldiers fighting with the Union Army's Massachusetts 54th regiment can be better understood if we start with *The Divided Union*. To a varying degree student have knowledge of the Civil War from some sources already.

One way to help students get ready to learn is by drawing on what they already know about a subject. The KWL pre-reading strategy is a great way to stimulate students prior to the actual assignment. What we are doing in this unit is taking the KWL pre-reading strategy and replacing the reading with film viewing. We are teaching with film so we are now asking students: what do you know? "What do you want to know," and "what have you learned as a result of watching this film?"

Students can also be provided with individual KWL sheets:

WHAT I **KNOW** ABOUT THE TOPIC

In this part of the lesson I ask students to list all of the things that come to mind when we talk about a given topic. I would ask them questions such as: what do we know about the causes of the American Civil War? I would then ask a student to list on the board all the ideas that students offered.

WHAT I **WANT TO KNOW** ABOUT THE TOPIC

Based on the identification of the topic and the listing of what students already know about the Civil War, I can ask students what they are curious about in regard to the war. They can put this interest into question form and list them on a sheet of paper. After the film they can answer their own question and perhaps use them in the " what I learned" section of the strategy.

WHAT I HAVE **LEARNED** ABOUT THE TOPIC

When students have finished viewing the film or film section they will then answer any questions that they may have listed in the "What I want to know section" student can all offer specific information they gain from the film with their peers as part of a class discussion.

For example, the first section of the unit provides students with an understanding of what led up to the civil war. We want students to develop an understanding of the moral arguments around slavery. At least as

important are the economic motivations of both pro and anti-slavery factions in the United States. The video series *The Divided Union* provides a very good explanation of how the United States progressed into civil war. Each major event the film documents will be shown in short clips. The film will be stopped and students will discuss the point brought out in the film. They will then jot down these points. At the end of each clip students will list what they have **LEARNED**. Sounds simple doesn't it.

Classroom Activities

Any teacher who has shown a film knows that students tend to shut down when the lights go out. So how do we overcome that problem? We use film study sheets. There are a variety of film study sheets available and teachers should certainly modify them to fit their needs. These sheets should be a handy reference tool for the student. Each sheet should provide the student with some specific information about the film such as the film title, the year it was made, the general topic it focuses on, the producer/ director and actors if appropriate. The sheet should also provide students with some assistance with a *THINGS TO NOTICE* area. Here the teacher can provide the students with points of interest they should be on the look out for. We would want students to look for such things as uniform descriptions, field hospital conditions, and geographical elements. Located on the film note sheets a section will ask students to note sequence of events, significant characters in the film and their roles. Most important for notes is the summary of what takes place in the film or film clip.

The film note sheet provides students with a useful tool to refer to when the class has a discussion about the various aspects of the film. In this unit the students will use the film note sheets for each clip they view. The KWL pre-viewing strategy and the Film Notes should be used for each section of each film. The film clips should not be any longer than 20 minutes.

A format for the use of film to teach can be as simple as the following

Initiating the KWL strategy

- 1) Ask students what they know about the topic. The teacher should list those ideas on the board and student should list them on their KWL work sheets.
- 2) Ask students what they would like to know more about the topic. Both teacher and students should also list these questions.
- 3) Provide each student with a film study sheet.
- 4) Show a 20-minute film clip. Some films such as *Divided Union* have segments and it may be easier to NOT interrupt the flow of the film for the sake of keeping a set time schedule.
- 5) After the short clip has been viewed, allow students to offer responses to your questions. Questions should follow the Bloom's Taxonomy, which provides a guide to help create useful questions that are thought provoking and not just yes or no style. I would like to acknowledge Benjamin Bloom and the classification system for intellectual behavior. Bloom's taxonomy provides educators with a graduated system to develop critical thinking skills in students. Basing question that will be used to evaluate student learning around the taxonomy provides a solid standard for educators. Below is description of the taxonomy taken from Benjamin Bloom's book *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*.

Bloom's Taxonomy

(image available in print form)

In 1956, Benjamin Bloom headed a group of educational psychologists who developed a classification of levels of intellectual behavior important in learning. Bloom found that over 95 % of the test questions students encounter require them to think only at the lowest possible level...the recall of information.

Bloom identified six levels within the cognitive domain, from the simple recall or recognition of facts, as the lowest level, through increasingly more complex and abstract mental levels, to the highest order, which is classified as evaluation. Verb examples that represent intellectual activity on each level are listed here.

1. **Knowledge** : arrange, define, duplicate, label, list, memorize, name, order, recognize, relate, recall, repeat, and reproduce state.

2. **Comprehension** : classify, describe, discuss, explain, express, identify, indicate, locate, recognize, report, restate, review, select, translate,

3. **Application** : apply, choose, demonstrate, dramatize, employ, illustrate, interpret, operate, practice, schedule, sketch, solve, use, and write.

4. **Analysis** : analyze, appraise, calculate, categorize, compare, contrast, criticize, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, and test.

5. **Synthesis** : arrange, assemble, collect, compose, construct, create, design, develop, formulate, manage, organize, plan, prepare, propose, set up, write.

6. **Evaluation** : appraise, argue, assess, attach, choose compare, defend estimate, judge, predict, rate, core, select, support, value, evaluate.

Film Notes

Film Title _____

Year _____

Producer/ director _____

Things to Notice

Theme of film

Film or clip summary

Lesson plans

Lesson Plan #1

U.S. History

Pre-Civil War

Date: 0/0/00

Topic: The Divided Union

Time Frame: 45 minutes

Class: grade 10

Instructional Goals:

Goal #1

To provide students with an understanding of the events that led up to the Civil War of the United States. To create a connection between the importation of African slaves to the United States and the development of Southern Society.

Ct. History Standards:

Historical Thinking

Understand World History

Historical Themes

Applying History

NCSS Standards (circle)

1) Culture;

Social Studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity.

2) Time, Continuity, Change:

Social Studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ways human beings view themselves in and over time.

3) People, Places, Environment

Social Studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of people, places and environments.

4) Individual development and identity

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of individual development and identity.

Learning objectives:

1). To identify the historically significant movements of African Slaves into the United States

2 To create an understanding of the Southern Society

Materials:

Film *The Divided Union*

KWL Study Guide

Film Study Sheets for *The Divided Union*

Initiation:

The KWL strategy for film asks students to list what they Know about the first Africans to come to the United States.

Methods:

1) Students will list what they know about the first Africans to come to the United States and Southern Society on their KWL sheets.

2) Students will list what they want to know about these first Africans that arrived in the U.S. and Southern Society.

3) Students will watch a 20-minute film clip from *The Divided Union* and complete the film study sheet as they view the film.

4) Students will list what they have learned on their KWL sheets.

5) Students will respond to teacher directed question

A. How did Africans come to the United States in the early 1600s?

- B. Why did Plantation owners move from a system of indentured servants to slavery?
- C. Compare southern society to the parallel cultural setting in Europe.

Lesson Closure:

Students will be asked to express how they would feel about moving to a new land in an effort to get a good job and then find out it was not what they had expected.

Home Work

Students imagine that they have moved away to a foreign country to take a job as an indentured servant. Upon arrival they are told they are now slaves and sold to a plantation owner. Students will write a short description of what happened to them during this process.

Lesson Plan #2

U.S. History

Uncle Tom's Cabin

Date: 0/0/00

Topic: Uncle Tom's Cabin

Time Frame: 45 minutes

Class: grade 10

Instructional Goals:

Goal #1 To provide students with an understanding of slavery as depicted by Harriet Beecher Stowe.

To provide students with a visual image of the southern plantations and the activities that took place there on a daily basis.

Ct. History Standards:

Historical Thinking

Understand World History

Historical Themes

Applying History

NCSS Standards (circle)

1) Culture;

Social Studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity.

2) Time, Continuity, Change:

Social Studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ways human beings view themselves in and over time.

3) People, Places, Environment

Social Studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of people, places and environments.

4) Individual development and identity

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of individual development and identity.

Learning objectives:

1). Students will learn that there were different life styles for African American slaves depending on what plantation they were living on.

2) Students will learn that slaves had a variety of jobs on plantations such as worker, driver and house servant.

Materials:

Film. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

KWL Study work sheets

Film Study Sheets

Paper, Pencils

Initiation:

The teacher will produce a set of shackles used by a local police department to secure prisoners. The teacher will allow each student to examine the shackles and then explain to them that shackles were also placed on slaves.

Methods:

1) Using the KWL film strategy students will be asked to list what they know about the life of slaves on southern plantations

- 2) Students will be asked to list what they would like to know about the life of slaves on plantations.
- 3) Students will view a 20-minute clip from the film *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and complete the film study sheets.
- 4) Students will list on their KWL sheets what they have learned from the film clip.
- 5) The teacher will generate a discussion focused on the relationship between Tom and the plantation owner's son Christopher. The teacher will ask if it was possible that a slave could have good feeling for a child that is the owner's son.

Lesson Closure:

Students will select a scene from the film and write a short description of what takes place

Home Work;

Students will use the scene they found of interest and create a drawing that depicts what they saw. This art project contributes interdisciplinary assessment.

Lesson Plan #3

U.S. History

African American Soldiers

Date: 0/0/00

Topic: The Film *Glory*

Time Frame: 45 minutes

Class: grade 10

Instructional Goals:

Goal #1 Students will develop an understanding of the role African Americans played in the Civil War. They will come to understand the great personal sacrifices that these soldiers made and learn why they made them.

Ct. History Standards:

Historical Thinking

Understand World History

Historical Themes

Applying History

NCSS Standards (circle)

Curriculum Unit 05.01.03

1) Culture;

Social Studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity.

2) Time, Continuity, Change:

Social Studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ways human beings view themselves in and over time.

3) People, Places, Environment

Social Studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of people, places and environments.

4) Individual development and identity

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of individual development and identity.

Learning objectives:

1) Student should learn that African Americans fought for the Union Army during the Civil War.

2) Students should learn that the creation of an African American Army unit was strongly supported by the Abolitionist of Massachusetts.

Materials:

Film. *Glory*

KWL Film Preview Strategy sheets

Film Notes

Initiation:

The teacher will walk around the room displaying a photo of a rifle carried by soldiers during the civil war. The teacher will explain the complex process of loading and reloading the weapon. The teacher will stress the fact that reloading under fire took great courage.

Methods:

1) Students will list what they know about African American soldiers on their KWL Strategy Sheets

2) Students will list what they would like to know about the soldiers of the Massachusetts 54th regiment.

3) Student will view a 20-minute film clip of the movie *Glory* . And take notes on their film notes sheets.

4) Students will list what they have learned on their KWL sheets.

Lesson Closure: The teacher will generate a short discussion on the idea of an all African American fighting unit in the civil war.

Home Work;

Students will go to <http://www.civilwarhome.com/shawbio.htm> to read a short biography of Robert Gould Shaw and the Massachusetts 54th Regiment. Student will write a short biography about Shaw for home work.

Reading List for Teachers

Reading in the Dark: Using Film as a tool in the English Classroom. John Golden, Urbana Il. Press 2001

Uncle Tom's Cabin, Harriet Beecher Stowe, J.P.Jewett 1852

The Life of Josiah Henson: Formerly a Slave, Josiah Henson, National Council of Teachers of English .

The Black Phalanx: A History of the Negro Soldiers of the United States in the Wars of 1775-1812, 1861-'65. Joseph Wilson, Hartford, CT: American Publishing Company, 1890. (Copyright 1968 by Arno Press, Inc., and reprinted by Ayer Company Publishers, Inc., 1992.)

A Grand Army of Black Men: Letters from African American Soldiers in the Union Army, 1861-1865. Redkey, Edwin S., New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

The Negro in the Civil War. Quarles, Benjamin ,New York: Da Capo Press, 1953.

The Negro's Civil War: How American Blacks Felt and Acted During the War for the Union. McPherson, James M New York: Ballatine Books, 1982.

Black Writers and the Amercian Civil War: Black Involvement and Participation in the War Between the States. Long, Richard A., ed. Secaucus, NJ. The Blue and Grey Press, 1988.

American Nation: A History of the United States to 1877(Study Guide) John Garraty, Addison-Wesley, 2002

The Twentieth Maine (Paper) B.J. Pullen, American Society for Training and Development 1980

All for the Union: The Civil War Diary and Letters of Elisha Hunt Rhodes Rhodes, Elisha Hunt

Blue-Eyed Child of Fortune: The Civil War Letters of Robert Gould Shaw Shaw, Robert Gould, University of Georgia, 1999

Taxonomy of Educational Objectives. Bloom, Benjamin. Published by Allyn and Bacon, Boston, MA.

Student reading list

North by Night: A Story of the Underground Railroad, Delacorte. Ayres, Katherine

Black, Blue and Gray: African Americans in the Civil War, Haskins, Jim and James Haskins. Simon and Schuster (Juv), 1998.

Slavery Time: When I was Chillun, Hurmence, Belinda. Putnam Publishing Group, 1998.

Forty Acres and Maybe a Mule, Atheneum. Robinet, Harriette Gillem.

Clara Barton: Civil War Nurse Whitelaw, Nancy. (Historical American Biographies), Enslow Publishers, Inc. 1997.

Uncle Tom's Cabin, or Life Among the Lowly ,Harriet Beecher Stowe

Black Troops, White Commanders, and Freedmen during the Civil War Howard C. Westward. Southern Illinois Press,1992

History of Black Americans: From the compromise of 1850 to the end of the Civil War, Philip s. Foner ,Greenwood Press, 1983

Films Sources

Uncle Tom's Cabin , 1987 Stan Latham, director, writing credits Harriet Beecher Stowe

John Gay(Film)

Glory 1989, Edward Zwick, Director, Writing credits Robert Gould Shaw (letters) Lincoln Kirstein Novel

The Divided Union, 1987 written and directed by Peter Batty

Materials to Purchase

Uncle Tom's Cabin , 1987 Stan Latham, director, writing credits Harriet Beecher Stowe

John Gay(Film)

Glory 1989, Edward Zwick, Director, Writing credits Robert Gould Shaw (letters) Lincoln Kirstein Novel

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