

## **ANALYZING EXCERPTS FROM MOSES ROPER'S SLAVE NARRATIVE AND SPEECHES: HOW DID SLAVERY THREATEN DEFINING AMERICAN INSTITUTIONS?**

A LANGUAGE ARTS LESSON PLAN  
GRADES 6-8

### **Overview**

Moses Roper was born into slavery in 1815 in Caswell County, North Carolina. He was sold away from his mother as a young boy. As a teenager, he repeatedly tried to escape from various enslavers and as a consequence he frequently received severe physical punishment. After at least 15 failed escape attempts, he finally made it to New York, a free state. In the North, he learned slave catchers were on his trail. Fearing recapture, he secured passage on a ship to Great Britain in 1835 at the age of 20. In London, he became acquainted with abolitionists who helped him to get a basic education and to learn to read and write. He began his career as an antislavery lecturer during breaks from his studies. Roper's *Narrative of the Adventures and Escape of Moses Roper from American Slavery* was published in London in 1837 and in America the following year. It was a best seller on both sides of the Atlantic. He gave thousands of antislavery and antiracist lectures in Great Britain, Canada and the United States during his lifetime. In this lesson, students closely read and analyze excerpts from Roper's slave narrative and also from his speeches. These writings exemplify, using Roper's experiences in bondage, how the institution of slavery undermined these four defining American institutions: Christianity, Marriage and the Family, Representative Democracy, and Capitalism. Students read an excerpt in small groups and answer questions about it afterwards. Then each small group reads its excerpt to the whole class and leads the class in a discussion of questions after the excerpt.

### **Learning Objectives**

Upon completion of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Recall who Moses Roper was and some of his key experiences resisting his enslavement and as an anti-slavery activist.
- List four defining American institutions that slavery undermined or "perverted" and explain *how* and *why* these institutions were negatively affected by slavery.
- Given samples from Roper's writings and speeches, describe how they show that slavery was antithetical to one or more of the defining American institutions.

### **Guiding Questions**

Why is it important that the laws and practices in American society support America's defining institutions? Why is it important that citizens speak up and resist when America's core principles and defining institutions are being undermined/perverted? Do racism and white supremacy (legacies of slavery) affect the defining institutions today? If so, how? ( Cite evidence.)

### **Suggested Time**

Two class periods.

## Preparing to Teach the Lesson

1. Review these Teacher Tools and Student Handouts:
2. – Teacher Tool 1 & Student Handout 1: Biography of Moses Roper  
– Teacher Tool 2: Teaching Notes for Teaching the Five Defining American Institutions  
– Student Handout 2: Excerpts from Moses Roper's Writings  
– Student Handout 3: Glossary
3. Read "Introduction to North American Slave Narratives" by Dr. William L. Andrews at <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/intro.html>. Be prepared to explain slave narratives and their significance.
4. Review *Narrative of the Adventures and Escape of Moses Roper from American Slavery* at <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/roper/roper.html>. Warning: Be aware that the narrative contains descriptions of physical violence and torture.

## Teaching the Lesson (Suggested Steps)

1. Referring to Teacher Tool 1 (Roper's Bio), review Moses Roper's life. Emphasize he used his words as weapons to fight slavery.
2. Referring to Teacher Tool 2 on the five defining American institutions, present a short lecture on this topic. Explain how the fifth institution, Slavery, contradicts/perverts the other four.
3. Divide the class into small groups of 4-5. Distribute copies of Student Handout 2: Excerpts From Roper's anti-slavery Writings and Speeches to each small group and also distribute Student Handout 3: Glossary (defines difficult words in Handout 2).
4. Assign each small group one excerpt to read, to discuss as a small group and then to present to the whole group. Ask each small group to designate a group leader.
5. Each small group is told to read their assigned excerpt. One or more persons may read it aloud. Then the group responds to the questions after the excerpt and discusses them.
6. Explain that each group needs to elect a leader whose job is to make assignments for presenting the excerpt to the whole group. The assignments are for: who reads the excerpt to the whole class (one, two, or more in the small group may do the reading); who (one or more) poses the questions about the excerpt to the whole group and leads a discussion of the question with the whole group.
7. During the small group presentations to the whole group, the teacher's role is to clarify subject matter and answer questions.

## Extension

Ask students to select one of the four Institutions (Christianity, Capitalism, Representative Democracy, and Marriage and the Family) and respond to this question in a short 2-page essay: *Is this defining American Institution affected by slavery's legacy of racism and white supremacy in the 21st century? If so, how?*

Students should do research using newspapers, journals, magazines, books and websites to find

evidence to support their position. They may also use examples from their own life experiences, but they *must* include at least three pieces of evidence from primary and secondary sources.

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