Lesson Plan: Death or Liberty

Primary Sources:

Testimony in the trial of Gabriel, 1800
Proclamation by Governor John Floyd, 17 September 1831
Song, Sung by Mr. Brown on being removed from the box, 1849

Understanding Goal:

With freedom comes great sacrifice.

Investigative Question:

What would you do to secure your freedom? Is there any price too steep?

Standards Addressed:

Virginia Standards of Learning:

USI.8 The student will demonstrate knowledge of westward expansion and reform in America from 1801 to 1861 by

d) identifying the main ideas of the abolitionist and suffrage movements.

USI.9 The student will demonstrate knowledge of the causes, major events, and effects of the Civil War by

f) describing the effects of war from the perspectives of Union and Confederate soldiers (including black soldiers), women, and slaves.

CE.1 The student will develop the social studies skills citizenship requires, including the ability to

a) examine and interpret primary and secondary source documents;
d) distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information;
e) review information for accuracy, separating fact from opinion;
f) identify a problem and recommend solutions;
g) select and defend positions in writing, discussion, and debate.

VUS.1 The student will demonstrate skills for historical and geographical analysis and responsible citizenship, including the ability to

(h) interpret the significance of excerpts from famous speeches and other documents.

VUS.6 The student will demonstrate knowledge of the major events during the first half of the nineteenth century by

a) describing the cultural, economic, and political issues that divided the nation, including slavery, the abolitionist and women's suffrage movements, and the role of the states in the Union.

National History Standards

Era 4 – 2d (Grades 5–12) Identify the various ways in which African Americans resisted the conditions of their enslavement and analyze the consequences of violent uprisings.

Overview:

This lesson will help students examine their own definitions of freedom and the extent to which they would go to protect it by examining primary sources illustrating the personal journeys of three enslaved people.

Length of Activity:

One class, or 60 minutes of a block class

Materials Needed:

(Copies for all)

- Testimony in the trial of Gabriel, 1800
- Proclamation by Governor John Floyd, 17 September 1831
- Song, Sung by Mr. Brown on being removed from the box, 1849
- "My Freedoms and Our Freedoms" brainstorm sheets
- Written Document Analysis sheet
- Venn Diagram sheet

Teacher Actions:

The teacher may want to read the background information on both Gabriel and Nat Turner found on the Library of Virginia's Virginia Memory Web site: http://www.lva.virginia.gov/exhibits/DeathLiberty/index.htm. You can read more about Henry "Box" Brown at the following site: http://www.virginiamemory.com/online_classroom/lesson_plans/henry_box_brown_escapes_slavery

1. Preactivity bell ringer: On a piece of paper have students define the word "freedom" and have them describe how being an American influences their definition. Would they feel the same if they were from Iraq? Or Uganda? Or North Korea? (This last question may be more appropriate for an older class or for more advanced classes, since knowledge of world events would be helpful.)
2. Discuss this question as a class. As students reveal their definitions, write key terms and phrases on the board. As a class, create a definition of freedom, and then project or write the Webster definition of freedom. How do they compare?

   > **"1:** the quality or state of being free: as **a :** the absence of necessity, coercion, or constraint in choice or action **b:** liberation from slavery or restraint or from the power of another **:** independence **c:** the quality or state of being exempt or released usually from something onerous
   > **2 a:** a political right **b:** franchise, privilege"
3. Have the students brainstorm on the "My Freedoms" sheet what freedoms are important to them. They will divide their freedoms into what freedoms are important to them as children, as students, and as Americans.
4. Divide the students into six groups. Give each group ONE "Our Freedoms" sheet for them to record the top three freedoms agreed on by the group.
5. Hand out copies of the primary sources, so that each source will go to two groups. You may hand out copies of the original documents, the transcriptions, or both depending on how familiar your students are with primary sources, and on time constraints.

6. Review with the students what has been discussed about Gabriel, Nat Turner and Henry "Box" Brown using the "jigsaw" technique. Hand out copies of the NARA Written Document Analysis worksheet (http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/written_document_analysis_worksheet.pdf). Have each student in the group complete the sheet as they discuss the source. You may want to use only the first page of the Nat Turner source as it is considerably longer than the others. Each group will become "experts" on their document.
7. After they have completed their documents, have the students in each group count off from 1 to 5 (or 4 or 6 depending on the size of your class), then regroup them so that all the Ones are in one group, all the Twos are in another group, etc. In their new groups, have them complete the Venn diagram comparing the three men and their search for freedom.
8. On the board (standard black board, white board, or SmartBoard) draw or project the Venn diagram and have a representative from each group add information to the diagram.
9. Once the diagram is complete, discuss the results. Ask the students which ones of the three men were successful? What made them successful? If you have not already covered this in class, discuss the results of Gabriel's and Nat Turner's actions–how in Virginia legislation was passed to further restrict the lives of both enslaved and freed blacks. With this in mind, should Gabriel and Nat Turner have attempted their revolts? Why or why not?
10. All three men faced possible death in their fight for freedom, two of them were executed. These are not great odds, what freedoms would they (the students) be willing to die (fight) for?

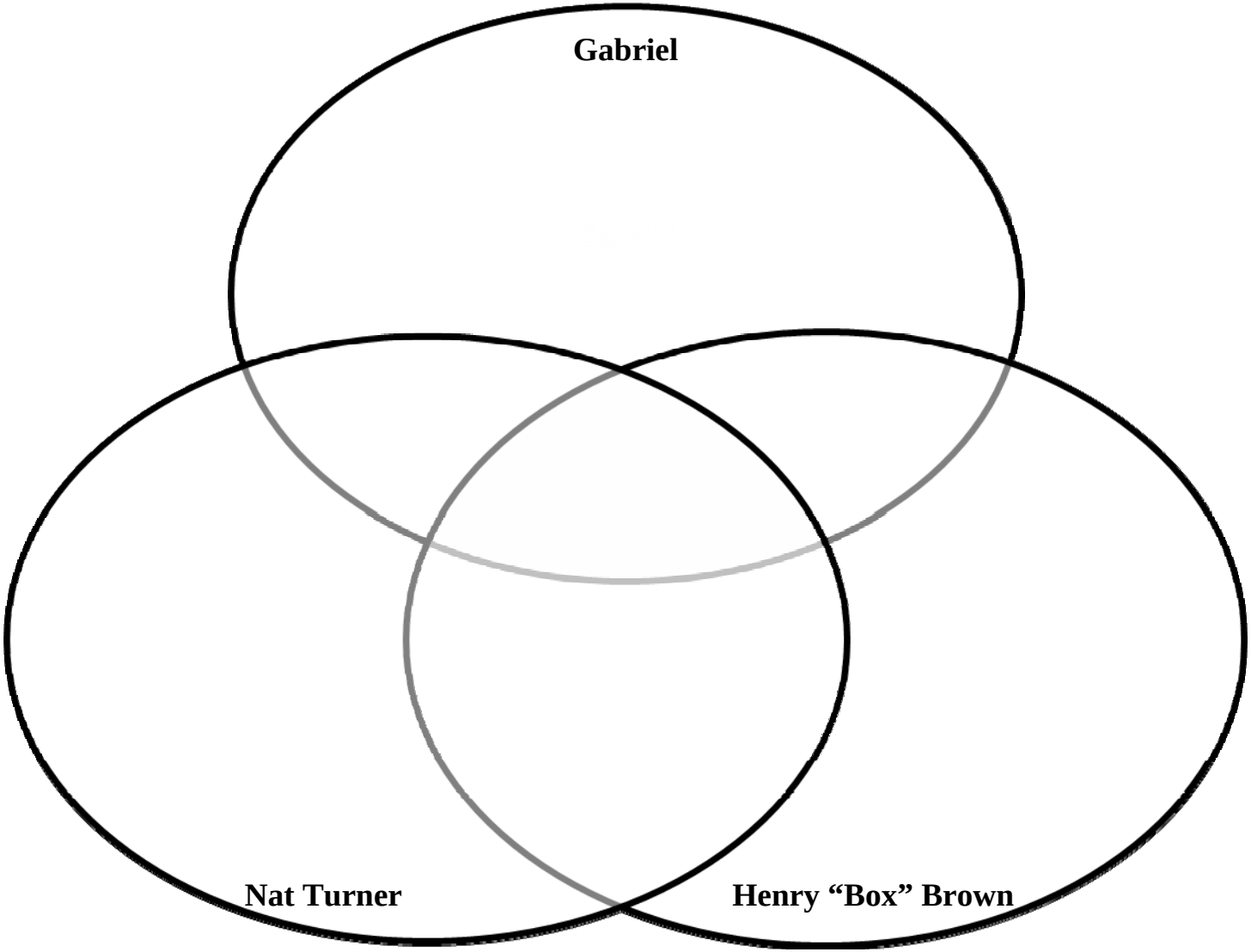
Analysis:

Have someone in one of the Henry "Box" Brown groups read the song. Explain that song has always been a good way spread ideas and encourage protest against injustice. For homework (or in class if the lesson went quickly) have the students select the freedom or freedoms that are most important to them, and have them write a poem, song, or rap to promote their belief. Post the poems and songs in the classroom, and if time permits, have a few students read or sing theirs.

My Freedoms as a …

Young Person	Student	American

Our Freedoms as …

Young People	Students	Americans

Gabriel, Nat Turner and Henry "Box" Brown were all enslaved African Americans who sought their freedom. What did they have in common? What was different about them? Compare their methods and results.