



## Supplemental Lesson Plan: The Life and Times of Harriet Jacobs

Harriet Jacobs, born enslaved in Edenton, North Carolina, escaped north at the age of 29, gaining her full and legal freedom ten years later. While living the life of a fugitive slave, Jacobs became an anti-slavery activist and an abolitionist author. By the time of the Civil War, as a free African American woman, Jacobs served as a relief worker dedicated to assisting the newly freed people of her southern homeland. This lesson will examine the remarkable life of Harriet Jacobs' through her autobiography, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.

*Harriet Jacobs in 1894*  
From: *Harriet Jacobs-A Life* by  
Jean Fagan Yellin

### Competency Goals

This lesson can be used in partial fulfillment of the following:

NCSCOS Social Studies Grade 8: 4.03; 4.04

NCSCOS English/Language Arts Grade 8: 1.02c; 1.03 a; 2.01a-h; 3.01; 4.01

### Objectives

After classroom discussion, historical background reading and examining the selections written by Harriet Jacobs, students should be able to:

- summarize the life experiences of Harriet Jacobs.
- analyze the impact of Jacobs' writing.
- list some of the hardships faced by slaves, fugitive slaves and freedmen in the antebellum and post-war periods.
- understand and describe the Maritime Underground Railroad.

## Teacher Planning

Provide the following materials either through web access to the Educational Unit or through handouts downloaded via the web site.

**Site Narrative** – Escape to Freedom: The Life of Harriet Jacobs  
**Access to Internet**  
**Glossary** of terms found in the primary source

## Time Requirement

The reading of the slave narratives may take several days. Teachers can adapt this lesson to fit the time limits of their class.

## Bell Ringer Activity

Before the lesson begins, have students write their definition of slavery. Have them include a sentence or two on what they think are the most difficult circumstance an enslaved person would face.

## Teacher Input

- A. **Teachers should preview the slave narratives prior to making assignments to students. Teachers will need to explain to the students that some of the subject matter and language used in the slave narratives might be difficult or disturbing.**
- B. Students will need access to websites listed in the lesson.

## Classroom Activities: Guided Practice

1. Have students read the brief biography of Harriet Jacobs at <http://www.harrietjacobs.org/bio.html> and/or <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jacobs/bio.html>
2. Divide the class into groups and assign each group a selected chapter from *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* to read. The text is available online at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jacobs/jacobs.html>.

Have each group summarize its selection for the class.

3. Project the image of the front page of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* for the class to see or provide as a handout. Discuss this image and have students answer the following questions.
  - a. Why do you think Harriet Jacobs did not name herself as the author? In the preface by the author, Jacobs signs the name Linda Brent. Why did she not use her real name and why did she change all the names of the individuals in the narrative?
  - b. Why did she state "Written by Herself"? Why is this important?
  - c. For what audience was this book written?
  - d. What does it mean for a book to be "Published for the Author"?
  
4. After Harriet ran away from Dr. Norcom's plantation, Norcom advertised a reward for her return. Project, or make available as a handout, the runaway ad that Dr. Norcom placed in the *American Beacon* newspaper of Norfolk, Virginia in June, 1835 regarding Jacobs. Have students research on-line to read other runaway slave ads. Suggested websites include: LearnNC lesson plans at [http://www.learnnc.org/lp/media/uploads/2008/06/slave\\_ads\\_1837.pdf](http://www.learnnc.org/lp/media/uploads/2008/06/slave_ads_1837.pdf) and Afriquest <http://afriquest.com/index.php?filename=doc.php&id=20>  
Have the students answer the following questions either in classroom discussion or individually on paper:
  - a. How does Norcom describe Harriet?
  - b. What skills does he say that she has?
  - c. What does he say is her reason for running away?
  - d. Where does he think she may be?
  - e. How much reward is he offering for her capture and return?
  - f. What does the amount say about the value he placed on her?
  
5. Have students read the information on the Maritime Underground Railroad found at The Historical Marker Database (<http://www.hmdb.org/marker.asp?marker=34770>)

Project, or have as a handout, the "Caution!!!" broadside provided in this lesson. Have students answer the following questions either in classroom discussion or individually on paper:

- a. This poster or broadside was created in response to what law?
- b. Who created this poster?
- c. Who had been deputized to help the slave catchers? Why had the decision been made to do this?

- d. What attitude is demonstrated by this poster?
- e. What is the main difficulty in using this poster and others like it as a means of communicating to runaway slaves?

### **Classroom Activities: Independent Practice**

1. Have students read the slave narrative of William Henry Singleton of Craven County, North Carolina as homework. Text found at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/singleton/singleton.html#sing7>
2. Have students write an essay comparing and contrasting the experiences of Harriet Jacobs and William Henry Singleton.

### **Closure**

Have students look back at their initial definition of slavery and the most difficult circumstance they felt an enslaved person would face. Ask them to discuss how their concept of slavery has changed after reading the slave narratives.

### **Assessment**

Have students write an essay about the portion of the Harriet Jacobs story that was most compelling for them. Have students share their stories with the class.

### **For Further Study**

<http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/2717?ref=search> : a lesson plan on the genre of slave narratives.

<http://www.sog.unc.edu/programs/civiced/resources/docs/slaverunaways.pdf> : a lesson on runaway slaves in NC

### **Selected websites that may be useful:**

<http://www.harrietjacobs.org/index.html> Biography and historical information on Harriet Jacobs

<http://digilib.nypl.org/dynaweb/digs/wwm97255> Online version of *Incidents*

<http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-civilwar/4691> LearnNC Digital Textbook about Louisa Jacobs, Freedmen's School

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jacobs/bio.html> Brief biography of Harriet Jacobs

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jacobs/support4.html> 1864 letter from Harriet and Louisa Jacobs

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jacobs/support11.html> Request from son of owner for help in getting a job with the Freedmen's Bureau

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p2944.html> PBS Underground Railroad

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/texts.html> North American Slave Narratives – Documenting the American South

<http://afriquest.com/index.php?filename=doc.php&id=20> Fayetteville runaway ad (Joshua)

<http://afriquest.com/index.php?filename=doc.php&id=18> Newbern runaway ad (Charles Emery)

<http://afriquest.com/index.php?filename=doc.php&id=19> NC runaway ad (Kirt)

[http://www.learnnc.org/lp/media/uploads/2008/05/analysis\\_handout.doc](http://www.learnnc.org/lp/media/uploads/2008/05/analysis_handout.doc) LearnNC primary sources analysis worksheet