



Supplemental Lesson Plan: The Freedmen's Colony on Roanoke Island

Following the occupation of Roanoke Island by Union forces in February 1862, the island became a safe haven for thousands of formerly enslaved African Americans. Under the direction of Rev. Horace James, the Superintendent of Blacks in North Carolina, the formerly enslaved were given land and tools to create a self-sustaining colony. The colony existed through the remainder of the war and was decommissioned by 1867. Many of the descendants of the freedmen remain on the island today. In this lesson, students will examine two accounts concerning the Freedmen's Colony on Roanoke Island.

(Drawing courtesy of Outer Banks History Center, Edwin Graves Champney Collection)

Competency Goals

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

NSCSC Social Studies Grade 8: 4.03 and 4.05

Objectives

After classroom discussion, background reading, and examination of primary sources, students will:

- be able to describe the Freedmen's Colony on Roanoke Island.
- be able to discuss northern attempts to educate and assist formerly enslaved African Americans in adapting to their new free status.
- be able to interpret primary sources and draw conclusions about past events.
- be able to write a persuasive essay.

Teacher Planning

Provide the following materials (through internet access or handouts):

Primary Sources

- [Horace James to the Public, 27 June 1863.](#)
- [Sergt. Richard Etheridge and Wm Benson to Genl Howard \[May or June 1865\].](#)
- [Elizabeth James, 7 April 1864.](#)
- [Constitution of the American Missionary Society.](#)

Secondary Sources

- [Map of Important Civil War Battles in North Carolina - Provided by Learn NC.](#)
- [The Roanoke Island Freedmen's Colony - History by Dr. Patricia C. Click.](#)
- [Reading Primary Sources: An Introduction for Students - Article by Kathryn Walbert.](#)
- [Teaching with Primary Sources Analysis Tool - Provided by the Library of Congress \(LOC\).](#)

Time Requirement

This activity can be completed in one class period.

Bell Ringer Activity

Ask students to name things they would need to survive if they left their home, and write down their responses on a chalkboard.

Classroom Activities

1. Have students read Dr. Patricia C. Click's *The Roanoke Island Freedmen's Colony* and Horace James' letter to the public.

2. Review the article and letter with the students, and have them answer the following questions:
 - a. What does James state as the problem the Union forces face in the occupied areas of North Carolina?
 - b. What does he propose as the solution or remedy to the problem?
 - c. What does he state is needed to accomplish this solution?
3. Ask students to name items formerly enslaved African Americans would need to survive away from their homes during the Civil War. Write the students' responses on the chalkboard in a column separate from their first set of responses. Although there will be large differences between 21st century and 19th century needs, the students should be able to identify necessary items for both centuries, including water, food, clothing, money, and shelter.
4. Next, divide the class into two groups. One group will read Elizabeth James' letter and the other group will read Richard Etheridge's and William Benson's letter. To help the students analyze the letters, give them the Primary Source Analysis Tool and the following discussion questions:
 - a. What does the letter tell you about northern sympathies towards the formerly enslaved?
 - b. What does it tell you about the American Missionary Society's sympathies?
 - c. What does the letter tell you about the person who wrote it?

Closure

Once both groups have read their assigned letter, have the class as a whole discuss the differences and similarities between the two letters.

Assessment

Students will design a model Freedmen's Colony on Roanoke Island that includes everything needed to build and sustain the colony, such as a school, church, blacksmith's shop, etc. Along with their model, students will write a persuasive letter to the American Missionary Society detailing what supplies and assets, like educated teachers, are needed to provide for and protect the families on Roanoke Island. Students should utilize the Constitution of the American Missionary Society to help write their letter.