

## Exploring Culture to Understand the Identities of those Enslaved

### Overview

Students will examine the various cultural aspects of those enslaved, such as the important roles played by family names, food and religion, in shaping their identities. Students will also explore how those same aspects continue to shape our own cultures today.

### Grade

5

### North Carolina Essential Standards for 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Social Studies

- 5.H.2.3- Compare the changing roles of women and minorities on American society from pre-Colonial through Reconstruction.
- 5.C.1.4- Understand how cultural narratives (legends, songs, ballads, games, folk tales and art forms) reflect the lifestyles, beliefs and struggles of diverse ethnic groups.

### Materials

- Culture brainstorm handout, attached
- *Am I Not a Man and Brother*, song lyrics attached
- Slave Recipes, examples attached
- Compose a Song to Teach About Slavery, example rubric attached

### Essential Questions:

- What is the definition of culture?
- What are the various aspects that comprise a person/group's culture?
- How did culture shape the lives of those enslaved and how does it help to shape who we are today?

### Duration

1+ class periods (teachers may choose only particular components of this lesson to use in class, thus the actual class time required will vary)

### Procedure

#### What is Culture?

1. As a warm-up, pass out the attached brainstorm map of the word "culture." Tell students to partner up and consider the word in their pairs, discussing what they think the word means, what the components of culture are, examples of various cultures, etc. Tell students to further brainstorm the words they add to the sheet if possible. For example, if a pair added the word "ceremonies" in a circle, they should then add additional words around that circle noting examples (i.e. weddings, graduation, "Sweet 16", funerals, etc.) After students have had approximately 4 minutes of brainstorming, have them report their thoughts back to the class, noting their answers in a class brainstorm map on the board.
2. Once all components of culture have been solicited, discuss with students how culture can be small enough to define who you are in your immediate family or it can be large enough to define an entire region, Remind students that even though every example of culture that is listed on the board may not be a part of their culture, there are common themes that all cultures have. These cultural "universals" may include education, music, values, family, food and religion. Present students with a definition of the word, such as:

- Culture is a learned way of living shared by a group of people that often includes many of the items listed (language, traditions, holidays, art, food, clothing, etc.)

Further discuss:

- We've discussed the definition of culture, as well as components of culture, but where do you think culture comes from? What determines our "cultural identity?"
  - Do you yourselves relate to any particular culture?
  - It is sometimes hard for young people in America to identify their culture. Why do you think this is?
3. Next, project the attached image of enslaved people and ask students to comment on what they see. In particular, ask students to identify components of the image that they believe relates to or represents the culture of those pictured in some way (i.e., dancing, music, banjo, clothing, etc.)
  4. Tell students that they are going to explore aspects of their own cultures in today's lessons while simultaneously exploring the culture of the people who were enslaved throughout North Carolina's history.
- **Teacher note:** For a lesson specific to exploring students' individual cultures, see Carolina K-12's activity "Who Am I," available in the activity section of the Database of K-12 Resources or by sending a request to [carolinak12@unc.edu](mailto:carolinak12@unc.edu)

#### What's in a Name?

5. Circle the words on the class brainstorm map that pertain to family and write the following statement on the board:
  - The family is the cornerstone of society.
6. Explain to students that some historians believe that our civilization would not survive or even exist without the formation and strong bonds that exist within families. Further discuss:
  - Do you agree or disagree with this statement and why?
  - Can you note any evidence that proves the validity of this statement?
  - How might this concept apply to slavery in the newly formed colonies? Why might familial ties have been important to those enslaved? (Explain to students that family was particularly valuable to those enslaved since a family could be broken up by the cruelty of a master at any moment. Although slave owners considered slaves to be property, slaves strove to hold onto a shared sense of culture, which they often exhibited in their family ties. Tell students that "...although Blacks had few ways to defend the integrity of their familial institutions, they were not passive beings who stoically accepted punishment and benevolence with composure. Instead, they sought to carve out larger areas of freedom in their lives, undermine slaveholders' discipline and develop a community life within the slave quarters." (Crow, Escott and Hatley, 1992)
7. Explain to students that one such way slaves attempted to preserve their family institutions and carve out larger areas of freedom in their lives was through the names they chose for their children. According to many African beliefs and traditions, a child is not a person until named. Tell students, traditionally, more than one name is given in the initial naming ceremony for African children. For instance, seven to nine days after a Yoruban birth, the infant receives three names: a personal name, a praise name, and a name indicating the child's lineage. Thereafter other names are bestowed to celebrate rites of passage and the particular accomplishments of the person named, or names are given by significant others based on their sense of the individual's character and personality (*Kay and Cary, 1995*) Discuss:
  - Why do you think the process of naming children is so important to various African cultures?
  - Why do you think slaves held on to and valued this tradition?

- Why do you think the slave masters often renamed slaves and resisted African slaves naming their children?
8. Relay to students how often times, by cruel calculation or by the inability to pronounce African names, slave owners would often “anglicize” African names, changing them for their own convenience. Write the names Bena, Benda and Kwabena on the board, and ask students to predict how slave holders may have simplified these rich names. (These could all have become Ben.) Write Amma, Ame or Ami on the board and again ask for student interpretation. (These could have easily been changed to Amy.) Tell students that despite these changes, African slaves continued to pronounce their names correctly amongst themselves and refused to abandon their naming traditions. In fact, many traditional names, whether signifying an event in a person’s life or a generational name, carried over not only through the years of slavery, but into present African American culture as well.
  9. Tell students that they will be exploring their own names, possibly gaining insight to their own personal history and exploring how naming is part of larger cultural traditions. Ask students to spend a few minutes writing down whatever they know about their own names on a sheet of paper. Share questions such as the following to help them get started, explaining that they will be sharing their thoughts with classmates:
    - How did you get your name? Do you know who named you?
    - Were you named after anyone? (a famous person, a family member, etc.)
    - Does your name have cultural or familial significance?
    - Do you like your name? Why or why not?
    - In what ways (if any) do you identify with your name?
    - Do you have a nickname or a middle name? What does this name mean to you?
    - Do you have a story about your name (funny, sentimental, etc.)?
  6. Once students have had ample time to think, go over expectations for respectful sharing (i.e. look at the person speaking, smile at them, don’t giggle or gossip, make positive comments afterwards, etc.), divide students into small groups, and instruct them to share for 1-2 minutes each about their name and what it means to them.
    - **Note:** It is quite possible that some of your students may not know the origin of their name or who named them due to various scenarios. It is important teachers are sensitive to the backgrounds of all students and explain that if they do not know of any significance of their name, it is alright. They should just think about what their name means to them, if they identify with it or not and why, etc.
  7. After groups are finished, ask students to debrief what they learned about one another:
    - What kinds of things did you learn about one another’s names and backgrounds? (encourage students to be specific; for example, “I learned that Erin is named after her grandmother, who she loves a lot...”)
    - Did you find that you had any thing in common with anyone in your group, regarding your feelings towards your name, family, culture, etc.? Explain.
    - Why do you think names are important to so many people?
    - What do names tell us about people?
    - How might names be part of a person’s history?
    - How might a name allow groups to maintain their culture?
    - Why can it be so bothersome when someone is teased over their name, or “called out of their name?”
    - How do you imagine those enslaved would have felt when called alternate names by slave owners?
    - Why did slaves prioritize maintaining their names?

### Is This All I Have to Eat?

10. Again, return to the class brainstorm compilation and using an alternate color of marker, circle words that involve food. Ask students to discuss what role they think food plays in one's culture. Next, project (or pass out) the following lyrics for students to examine.

What yo' gwine do when de meat give out?  
What yo' gwine do when da meat give out?  
Set in de corner wid my lips pooched out!  
Lawsy!  
What yo' gwine do when de meat come in?  
What yo' gwine do when da meat come in?  
Set in de corner wid a greasy chin!  
Lawsy!                    *(Source: Slave narrative of Lucinda Davis)*

Discuss:

- What do you think the song may be about and why?
  - What is the tone of this song?
  - What factors do you think influenced this song?
  - What does the language say about the author?
  - What role does food play in your life? Do you value having meals with family members and/or friends? Explain.
  - Are there particular dishes that you relate to your culture (i.e traditional meals that are eaten on holidays)?
11. Tell students that another part of enslaved life that had a big impact on their culture was the type of food that they ate. Most slaves had weekly rations of meat, herring and maize that were usually given at the start of the week and that were generally very inadequate. Enslaved people typically ate these rations two times a day; lunch at noon and a late supper after finishing the last task for the day. When considering the type of food and small amount provided, coupled with the laboring work slaves were forced to do, it is evident why sickness and malnutrition often resulted.
12. Tell students that since the above rations generally would not provide enough subsistence for slaves to survive the cruel and harsh working conditions they endured, some convinced their slave owners to let them hunt, fish, raise hogs and poultry, and grow a garden on their own time. Slaves grew such vegetables as rice, corn, okra and potatoes. Many grew vegetables and fruits that were native to Africa and have since become a staple of southern cooking.
13. Ask students if they can name other foods that may have been transported to America during the slave trade. (Answers may include sorghum, coffee, sesame, rice, yams) Some slaves also resorted to one of the most common forms of resistance to slavery: stealing the food needed for survival from plantation owners, even though this came with a heavy penalty if caught (usually death). Sometimes slaves were given the leftover or discarded parts of meat that slave owners deemed unacceptable which included pig feet, hog jowls, ham hocks, pig ears and the ever popular chitterlings. Slave chefs made eating these foods palatable by adding vegetables and spices such as salt (which was easily obtainable by slaves) and they soon became not only a means for survival but also a part of African American culture. (However, such foods come at high costs that are still being paid today. Animal organs are high in cholesterol and fat, and with the addition of excessive salt for flavoring, high blood pressure and heart disease developed into medical conditions that have passed down through generations of African American families.)

- **Optional Activity:** Have students research various food staples and/or dishes that slaves would have consumed. Students can present their findings by drawing a picture of the food and writing a descriptive paragraph, or by actually cooking a dish that would have been consumed by slaves. (See the attached “Slave Recipe” examples.)

### Sing a Song of Freedom

14. Return to the class compilation brainstorm on culture and this time draw focus to the words that involve religion and music. Tell students that religion was another important aspect of slave culture. When first brought to America, African slaves continued to practice traditional religions such as Islam, which some white clergymen labeled as full of “superstition and idolatry.” Ignorance of African religions often led slave holders to label African slaves as “heathens and infidels,” when in truth they were practicing a religion just as familiar to them as Christianity was to whites. Religion became a complex area in regards to slavery. As assimilation became more and more prevalent, many Christian leaders felt it was their Christian duty to instruct slaves in the ways of Christianity. Early on in colonial North Carolina, Quakers were advocating for baptizing those enslaved. However, slave owners initially refused. To baptize a slave meant to admit they were human, and not actually property, did it not? Naturally, many slaves also resisted converting to any religion other than their own. However, as Christianity began to take hold within the slave community, slaves used it as a form of resistance and survival, assuming the religion on their own terms. Likewise, many slave owners caught on and tried to use Christianity as a way of preaching to slaves that their status was naturally “determined by God” and that they should be appeased with their enslavement. Discuss:
- Why do you think African slaves initially resisted the teachings of Christianity?
  - Why do you think white slave owners did not want the clergy to teach slaves about Christianity?
  - What benefits might have resulted from slaves learning about Christianity?
15. For enslaved people who did convert to Christianity, songs with Christianity themes (spirituals) became popular with them. For that matter, music in general was in many ways was a life line for those enslaved. Take a few minutes to discuss music in general with the class:
- For those of you who like listening to, or even playing music, what is it that you enjoy about it?
  - What impact can music have on you (emotionally, intellectually, inspirationally, etc.)
  - In what ways might music be helpful?
  - In what ways might music have been helpful to those enslaved?
  - What connection does religion and music have?
16. Explain to students that folk spirituals are songs created by enslaved people that used elements of African music, such as clapping, drumming, repetition of lyrics, and call-and-response, to express their religion and their experiences as slaves. Such spirituals generally focused around themes of freedom and salvation, representing the desire of those enslaved to be free from their cruel and oppressive slave masters and they sought the spiritual salvation that Christianity spoke of. Singing and writing spirituals became a way for slaves to express their feelings about what they were going through and what they felt should happen according to Christian principles. Religious songs also helped slaves pass the time while working, lifted their spirits and solidified their strength.
17. Display or handout the attached spiritual, *Am I Not A Man And Brother*, to the class. Alternatively, play examples of spirituals and provide the lyrics for review; samples are available at <http://ctl.du.edu/spirituals/Freedom/slavery.cfm> **moved to:** <https://wayback.archive-it.org/7728/20160809205044/http://www.spiritualsproject.org/sweetchariot/Performing/index.php>. Remind students that songs are usually an expression of what the author is feeling or going through at the time, thus many spirituals contain themes of seeking salvation and freedom. Discuss:
- What first strikes you about this song, or stands out?

- (If playing examples...) How does the song make you feel? What is the tone or emotion present in the music and person singing?
- What is the overall theme of this song?
- Who is the target audience of this song? What makes you think this?
- Where do you imagine this song was sung? Visualize the scene in your mind and describe it. (Students can be instructed to write this down on paper as a creative writing assignment as well.)
- What do you think this song meant to those enslaved when they sang it? What impact might it have had?
- Does this song and/or the themes, emotions, feelings, etc. it invokes connect to any present day songs? Explain.

### **Compose a Song to Teach About Slavery**

18. As a culminating activity, tell students that they are going to compose a song that addresses the topic of slavery in some way. Either individually or in partners, students should work together to create a song with at least 16 original lines that would teach the listener something about slavery, such as: the historical facts regarding slavery, cultural and human aspects of those enslaved, emotions experienced by those enslaved, day to day work and lives of slaves, etc.) Encourage students to be creative in their lyrics, but also realistic to the topic. Teachers should determine what types of song composition are allowed (i.e. whether or not songs need to rhyme; whether any type of music is permissible – from rap to a ballad; whether students should work in a particular rhythm scheme or try and rhyme their lyrics; whether students can use the tune of an existing song to put their original lyrics to; will students be responsible for performing their songs; etc.) Teachers should edit the attached rubric to reflect their expectations.

### **Resources**

- Crow, Jeffrey J., Escott, Paul D., & Hatley, Flora J. (1992) *A History of African Americans in North Carolina*
- Kay, Marvin L. Michael & Cary, Lorin Lee. (1995) *Slavery in North Carolina: 1748-1775*



## **AM I NOT A MAN AND BROTHER?**

Am I not a man and brother?  
Ought I not, then, to be free?  
Sell me not to one another,  
Take not thus my liberty.  
Christ our Saviour, Christ our Saviour,  
Died for me as well as thee.

Am I not a man and brother?  
Have I not a soul to save?  
Oh, do not my spirit smother,  
Making me a wretched slave;  
God of mercy, God of mercy,  
Let me fill a freeman's grave!  
Yes, thou art a man and brother,  
Though thou long has groaned a slave,  
Bound with cruel cords and tether  
From the cradle to the grave!  
Yet the Saviour, yet the Saviour,  
Bled and died all souls to save.

Yes, thou art a man and brother,  
Though we long have told thee nay;  
And are bound to aid each other,  
All along our pilgrim way  
Come and welcome, come and welcome,  
Join with us to praise and pray!



## Slave Recipes

After working long days in the fields, a simple yet hearty soup like Okra Soup was often prepared by enslaved women for supper.

### **OKRA SOUP**

4 cups Cold Water  
4 cups Okra, finely cut  
4 cups Tomato Pulp  
Wiley's Greens Seasoning

Add Lawry's seasoning salt or some other type of seasoning to water and allow to come to a boil. Add Okra and Tomato mixture. Simmer on medium for 1 hour or until thick. Serve in bowl over rice or corn.

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Apple Pot Pie was a popular desert. Desserts were a common feature on Sunday's during the summer months when fruits were plentiful. The pleasing aroma of cooked apples often-filled slave cabins and campsites in the late summer and early fall when apples were in abundance.

### **Apple Pot Pie**

6 Baking Apples - peeled, cored and cut into small pieces  
4 cups Flour  
10 Tablespoons of Butter  
2 packages Apple Pie Spice  
1 cup Sugar  
Cold Water

In large bowl, make dough of flour, 7 TB of butter, salt and enough water to form dough. Roll thin on floured cutting board and cut into two-inch squares. Place apples in separate bowl and sprinkle with Wiley's Apple Pie Spice and sugar on each apple layer. In a large pot or Dutch oven alternate layers of dough squares and sprinkled apples. Bottom layer in pot should be apples followed by dough squares on top. The top layer should be dough squares. Place remaining butter (3 TB) dotted on dough layer on top. Fill pot (dutch oven) half filled with water. Cover and cook on medium until apples are done.

**Teacher Note:** Point out to students that while these were recipes that would have been prepared during slavery, the ingredients available during the 1800s would have been different in some cases. (For example, enslaved people wouldn't have been able to pop in a store to purchase "apple pie spice.")

**Compose a Song to Teach About Slavery – Example Rubric**

	<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Points Possible/ Points Earned</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Quality of work</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— well prepared and presented</li> <li>— song title, lyrics, and cover sheet included</li> <li>— no spelling or mechanics errors are evident</li> <li>— evidence of time and effort exists</li> </ul>		
<b>Content of song</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— expresses understanding of slavery</li> <li>— creatively teaches about aspects of slavery</li> <li>— includes facts and interpretation regarding this historical period</li> </ul>		
<b>Presentation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— effort was evident</li> <li>— lyrics could be understood</li> <li>— students took presentation seriously</li> <li>— when serving as an audience member for other presentations, student was respectful &amp; encouraging</li> </ul>		