
SECTION II

Abolitionism in Black and White (1831-1840)

Lesson 7

Abolitionism in Black and White

Grade Level: Elementary School

Objectives:

Students will

- Understand the diversity that existed among the men and women who opposed slavery.
- Discover the tactics and strategies that abolitionists used by matching them with primary sources.

Time: One 50-minute class period

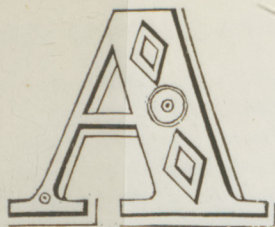
Materials:

- Worksheet 1: Abolitionism in Black and White

Background:

During gradual emancipation (1799-1827), free black communities in cities such as Brooklyn fought for their rights by creating independent churches, schools, and societies at a time when political and legal inequality was widespread. In the early 1830s, a group of black and white activists from cities such as Philadelphia, Boston, New York, and Brooklyn came together calling for an immediate end to slavery in the United States and demanded political and legal equality for African Americans. The abolitionists were ordinary men and women, black and white, who made their living as educators, businessmen and women, church leaders, journalists, and writers. On December 4, 1833, male abolitionists formed the American Anti-Slavery Society in Philadelphia. The national headquarters was based in Manhattan. They were able to spread their message quickly as a number of local auxiliary societies, and later female auxiliaries, were established throughout the North.

The abolitionists represented one of the earliest groups in the nation's history to work cooperatively across a racial divide towards a common purpose that was motivated by religious and political impulses. Many considered slavery a sin which therefore needed to be removed. Although the abolitionists, men and women, black and white, were not always friends, they were deeply committed to their political work. They were met with violence and hatred from large sections of society who considered them a radical and dangerous minority. Undeterred, the abolitionists in Brooklyn and beyond achieved their agenda in a number of different ways.

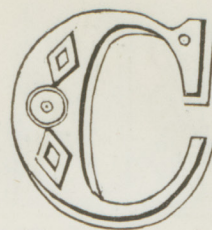


A is an Abolitionist—
A man who wants to free
The wretched slave—and give to all
An equal liberty.

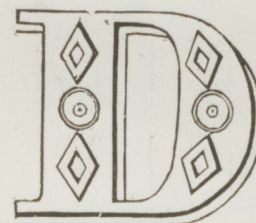


B is a Brother with a skin
Of somewhat darker hue,
But in our Heavenly Father's sight,
He is as dear as you.

5



C is the Cotton-field, to which
This injured brother's driven,
When, as the white man's slave, he toils
From early morn till even.



D is the Driver, cold and stern,
Who follows, whip in hand,
To punish those who dare to rest,
Or disobey command.

The Anti-Slavery Alphabet, Courtesy of The Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP), General Collection, Hannah Townsend.

“Although our sympathies as Anti-Slavery men are necessarily enlisted on behalf of the enslaved in every part of the world, we are nevertheless compelled to confine our operations to a less extensive sphere, in which our efforts will be more certainly available. It is in Brooklyn where we are called upon to act...”

—First Annual Report of the Brooklyn Anti-Slavery Society,
Adopted March 16, 1810

LESSON PROCEDURES

1. Write the word “abolitionist” on the board. Ask students to define what it means. Guide the students in understanding that an abolitionist is a person who believed that slavery was wrong and worked to end it.

2. Ask students if they can name any abolitionists from United States history and describe how they worked to end slavery. What risks did they face? How do students think other people responded to their efforts?

3. Explain to students that ordinary people from all walks of life came together to oppose slavery through their radical words and actions. Many of them risked their own safety by assisting men, women, and children escape the horrors of slavery.

4. Tell students that by the 1830s, abolitionists called for the immediate end to slavery and promoted political and legal equality for blacks. Explain that some abolitionists opposed slavery on religious grounds, while others opposed slavery for constitutional reasons. Remind students that the work of abolitionists built upon the anti-slavery activism that was led by Northern free black communities, including black Brooklynites.

5. Distribute **Worksheet 1: Abolitionism in Black and White**. Ask students to describe what an abolitionist looked like. Discuss the differences in appearances, dress, color/race, and gender. Help the students understand that those who opposed slavery were men and women, rich and poor, black and white.

6. Write the following list of strategies that abolitionists used in order to oppose slavery:

- Writing pamphlets and books
- Publishing newspapers
- Organizing abolitionists societies/groups
- Lecturing and preaching in churches
- Helping enslaved people escape to freedom
- Organizing parades and rallies
- Providing education, money, and land for free Africans

7. Place students in small groups and ask them to imagine that they are conducting a meeting of an abolition society. The goal for the meeting is to review and discuss strategies that the society will use to oppose slavery. Each group should select the strategies they think will be most effective and how they will employ them. Have groups share their strategic plans.

8. Hold a class discussion about how each strategy would help abolitionists advance the cause of ending slavery. Which strategy might be the most effective? What are the skills required to engage in each strategy? What are the challenges and risks involved?

Linking Past and Present

- Discuss with students that, even today, activists come from all walks of life. Stress that everyday people can make small changes that have rippling effects. Have students brainstorm the issues that concern them today. What steps can they take to affect change? What opportunities and resources are available to them that did not exist for abolitionists in the 1830s?