

Relevant Unit Objectives

Module 2: Resistance and Self-Determination

This lesson addresses the following Essential Questions:

- What constituted an act of resistance of African Americans against the institution of slavery?
- Are some acts of resistance more effective than others?
- In what ways do our personal experiences shape our choices and actions?

Objectives of the Lesson

Aim

Can intellectual leaders and the spread of their ideas be considered acts of resistance against slavery?

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Define the concepts of oppression and resistance.
- Describe a portrait of James McCune Smith and discuss whether the image matches their image of a resistor.
- Identify actions from the life of James McCune Smith's life that can be considered acts of resistance.
- Connect a person's education to their ability to be independent and to resist oppression.
- Identify and respond to contemporary acts of oppression and resistance.

Introduction

Brainstorming different ways of resistance to oppression

On a separate sheet of paper, have the students answer the following questions:

- What ways can people use to resist slavery?
- What does a resistor look like? Why?
- What does a resistor act like? Why?
- What is an example of an act of resistance?
- How is slavery an example of oppression?

Instructional Procedures

Step One: Discussion about resistance

The teacher then leads students in a brief discussion about the initial brainstorming activity. As students share their ideas, the teacher should divide student responses into physical acts of resistance and non-physical acts of resistance. To facilitate this discussion, teachers might encourage students to get into pairs and share their ideas with one other student before sharing their ideas with the entire class.

Discussion questions should also include the following:

- Is an act of resistance always physical?
- Is an act of resistance always violent?

Step Two: Portrait of James McCune Smith

Image of James McCune Smith:

<http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/dgkeysearchdetail.cfm?trg=1&strucID=578015&imageID=1229418&word=Smith%2C%20James%20McCune%2C%20%2D%2D%201813%2D1865&s=3¬word=&d=&c=&f=2&lWord=&lField=&sScope=&sLevel=&sLabel=&total=3&num=0&imgs=12&pNum=&pos=3>

Show students an image of James McCune Smith. As students examine the portrait, have them answer the following questions:

- Describe the portrait in detail.
- What is this person's profession?
- Based on the portrait, does this person seem like someone who would resist slavery? Why or why not?

Step Three: Introducing James McCune Smith

The teacher provides background information about James McCune Smith. This may be done as a summary of the main points listed below, as a worksheet, as a PowerPoint presentation, mini-lecture, or other appropriate strategy.

In 1824, the aged Revolutionary War hero General Lafayette returned to America for a tour of the nation he had helped to forge. While in New York he asked to visit the African Free School. James McCune Smith was chosen to write and deliver the welcoming address. Smith was 11 years old.

Smith was a brilliant student who wanted to become a doctor. But there were no licensed black doctors in America then, so he was apprenticed to a blacksmith instead. As Smith worked the blacksmith's bellows with one hand, he held a Latin grammar in the other and continued to study. But when he applied to Columbia College (called Kings College then) he was turned down. So instead he went to one of the world's top medical schools in Great Britain. In five years he earned three degrees and graduated at the top of his class.

Upon his return to New York he opened a pharmacy at 93 West Broadway in 1837. Here he served both white and black patients in the front of the store. In the back, he met with fellow activists and conspired to end slavery in the South, to win the vote for blacks in New York, and to educate black youth. Together with abolitionists such as Frederick Douglass, Gerrit Smith, and John Brown, he helped found the Radical Abolitionist Party. As the son of a self-emancipated mother, his pharmacy was a place where many escaping slaves found help. James McCune Smith worked for economic and social justice until his death in 1865, just a few weeks after passage of the Thirteenth Amendment.

Additional background information is also available on the New York Divided website:

<http://nydivided.org/VirtualExhibit/T2/G4/G4ReadMore.php>

Step Four: Analyzing James McCune Smith's life

After students learn about James McCune Smith's life, they should respond to the questions listed in Handout 1, the James McCune Smith Question Sheet.

Step Five (optional): Reading a selection from James McCune Smith's writing

Printable excerpt of James McCune Smith letter to Horace Greeley.

<http://books.google.com/books?id=NrsUEN6X5E8C&pg=PA430&lpg=PA430&dq=%22figures+cannot+be+charged+with+fanaticism%22&source=web&ots=hqyStNQd1Y&sig=8LeKQzatamy-464Mt5CqGx9JB5Q#PPA430,M1>

Students read the first few paragraphs of a letter from James McCune Smith to Horace Greeley (teachers can shorten the letter as necessary). Students then complete Handout 2, the Double Entry Journal for Analyzing James McCune Smith's Letter to Horace Greeley. The double-entry journal focuses on passages that demonstrate McCune Smith's acts of resistance against slavery.

Step Six: Discussion

Teachers then lead a class discussion about James McCune Smith's acts of resistance against slavery.

1. In what ways does James McCune Smith resist slavery?
2. Do you think that McCune Smith's intellectual leadership and writing were effective means of resisting slavery in the United States? Why or why not?
3. Do you think that McCune Smith's level of education helped him to resist slavery? Why or why not?
4. Do you think that acquiring an education is valuable for yourself? Why or why not?
5. Can education help a person see and respond better to examples of oppression in contemporary society? Can it help a person devise more effective forms of resistance?

Conclusion

Students write a letter to the editor of their local newspaper about a contemporary example of oppression and some ideas for resistance.

Here are the instructions to the students:

Imagine that you are writing a letter to a newspaper editor. In the letter, describe an issue that you feel strongly about and want to change. In the letter, address some of the following questions:

- Do people still resist today?
- What acts of resistance have you seen in your lifetime?
- How can people go about creating change?
- How can educating others about examples of oppression and resistance in history help?

Materials

Portrait of James McCune Smith:

<http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/dgkeysearchdetail.cfm?trg=1&strucID=578015&imageID=1229418&word=Smith%2C%20James%20McCune%2C%20%2D%2D%201813%2D1865&s=3¬word=&d=&c=&f=2&lWord=&lField=&sScope=&sLevel=&sLabel=&total=3&num=0&imgs=12&pNum=&pos=3>

New York Divided website:

<http://nydivided.org/VirtualExhibit/T2/G4/G4ReadMore.php>

Printable excerpt of James McCune Smith letter to Horace Greeley

<http://books.google.com/books?id=NrsUEN6X5E8C&pg=PA430&lpg=PA430&dq=%22figures+cannot+be+charge+d+with+fanaticism%22&source=web&ots=hqyStNQd1Y&sig=8LeKQzatumy-464Mt5CqGx9JB5Q#PPA430,M1>

Handout One: James McCune Smith Question Sheet

Handout Two: Double Entry Journal for Analyzing James McCune Smith's Letter to Horace Greeley

Handout One: James McCune Smith Question Sheet

1. What were James McCune Smith's major accomplishments?
2. How did James McCune Smith receive an education?
3. In what different ways did James McCune Smith resist slavery?
4. Do you think that McCune Smith's level of education helped him to resist slavery? Why or why not?
5. Which of the methods that you described in question 3 do you think was the most effective way to resist slavery? Why?
6. Do you think that acquiring an education is valuable for yourself? Why or why not?
7. Can education help a person see and respond better to examples of oppression in contemporary society? Can it help a person devise more effective forms of resistance?

Handout Two: Double Entry Journal for Analyzing James McCune Smith's Letter to Horace Greeley

Use the excerpt from James McCune Smith's letter to Horace Greeley to complete the following Double Entry Journal.

- In the left hand column write down words, phrases or passages that you think connect to the idea of resistance.
- In the right hand column, explain how this passage connects to oppression within the community.

| Passage | Explanation |
|--|--|
| <u>Example</u> "James McCune Smith petitioned the senate" | <u>Explanation</u> McCune Smith is writing to the United States Congress to argue that statistics from the US Census demonstrate the harmful nature of slavery. |
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