

CIVIL WAR

ON THE WESTERN BORDER

LESSON PLAN

CIVILWARONTHEWESTERNBORDER.ORG



OVERVIEW

John Brown and Bleeding Kansas

GRADE LEVEL:

8-12

SUBJECT:

U.S. History

Missouri History

Kansas History

ESTIMATED CLASS TIME:

50-70 minutes

WEBSITE RESOURCES:

[Bleeding Kansas: From the Kansas-Nebraska Act to Harpers Ferry](#)

[John Brown Border War Encyclopedia Entry](#)

[Letter from Martin White to John W. Geary](#)

[Letter from John Brown to Orson Day](#)



Tragic Prelude, ca. 1938-1940, John Steuart Curry.

Created by [Michael Wells](#), Kansas City Public Library

Introduction

Bleeding Kansas, a period marked by violent conflict between [Free-State](#) and proslavery forces, defined the struggle for Kansas statehood beginning in 1855 and lasting until the onset of the Civil War. During this time the American people became familiar with bloody deeds associated with such names as [James H. Lane](#), Henry Clay Pate, and Henry Titus, but none became as simultaneously celebrated and despised on the national scale as that of [John Brown](#). Brown was born and spent his early adulthood in the northeastern part of the country before the radicalization of his antislavery views led him to join the growing abolitionist movement. The violent incidents carried out by Brown and his contemporaries in the Kansas-Missouri border region during the antebellum period both reflected and fueled the growing sectional conflict that would eventually tear the Union apart and drive the nation into war.

Objectives

This lesson plan introduces students to the politically charged and often violent events that characterized the time prior to the Civil War and to the actions of the radical abolitionist John Brown. Students will be exposed to a secondary interpretation of the era that links the consequences of its events to the national debate over slavery and secession taking place in the 1850s and investigate two primary sources representative of conflicting viewpoints of the day's events. Students will make decisions about the necessity of violent acts to bring about social change and express their opinions through a letter writing exercise.

Requirements

Students will require access to web accessible computers or tablets.

The instructor should read the essay "[Bleeding Kansas: From the Kansas-Nebraska Act to Harpers Ferry](#)," by Nicole Etcheson prior to implementation of this instructional plan.

Instructional Plan

1. Instruct students to read the [Border War Encyclopedia entry for John Brown](#) before responding to the following questions and prompts:

1. Why do historians believe that John Brown helped bring about the Civil War?
2. What happened to Brown between 1846 and 1855?
3. Describe three of Brown's anti-slavery actions from 1856.
4. Describe the events that led to Brown's Execution in 1859.

- Instruct students to read [Martin White's letter to John W. Geary from October 5, 1856](#), before responding to the following question:

5. According to White, of what crimes are Brown and his followers guilty?

- Instruct students to read [John Brown's letter to Orson Day from December 14, 1855](#), before responding to the following question:

6. According to Brown, what has he and his followers accomplished through their actions in Kansas?

- Assign students to assume the role of a Free State Kansas settler during the Bleeding Kansas era and to compose a letter to a friend or relative expressing either their support for or opposition to John Brown's violent actions. Instruct students to draw information and examples to support their position from the John Brown Border War encyclopedia entry in addition to the letters they have read.

Standards Statement

This lesson plan has been designed in keeping with the National Council for the Social Studies' framework for social studies content standards, with focus placed upon the goals of encouraging students to better understand important concepts, such as change over time, historical context, continuity, and bias, so that they may become more effective historical researchers and argumentative writers.

Suggested Assessment Rubric

Letter Assessment Rubric				
Category	4	3	2	1
Sentences & Paragraphs	Sentences and paragraphs are complete, well-constructed and of varied structure.	All sentences are complete and well-constructed. Paragraphing is generally done well.	Most sentences are complete and well-constructed. Paragraphing needs some work.	Many sentence fragments or run-on sentences, or paragraphing needs lots of work.
Ideas	Ideas were expressed in a clear and organized fashion. It was easy to figure out what the letter was about.	Ideas were expressed in a mostly clear manner, but the organization could have been better.	Ideas were somewhat organized, but were not very clear. It took more than one reading to figure out what the letter was about.	The letter seemed to be a collection of unrelated sentences. It was very difficult to figure out what the letter was about.
Content Accuracy	The letter contains at least 10 pieces of accurate information that directly relates to the prompt.	The letter contains 6-8 pieces of accurate information that directly relates to the prompt.	The letter contains 2-4 pieces of accurate information that directly relates to the prompt.	The letter contains no pieces of information that directly relates to the prompt.
Neatness	Letter is clean and easy to read with no distracting errors.	Letter is clean and easy to read with very few distracting errors.	Letter is somewhat difficult to read with a distracting amount of errors.	Letter is difficult to read and has many distracting errors.