



Lesson 5: The Fugitive Slave Act and Dred Scott

Lesson Plan for Grade 8

OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

Students will be able to answer the essential questions:

What did the Fugitive Slave Act do to fuel tensions between the north and south?

Explain how a legal verdict such as the Dred Scott decision can affect national policy.

How was the Dred Scott decision influenced by national politics and rising tensions pre-Civil War?

EDUCATION STANDARDS

1. H1.6-8.6 Explain how themes and developments help to define eras in United States history from 1763 to 1877.
2. H2.6-8.5 Explain and analyze how individuals and movements have shaped United States history (1763-1877).

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to explain how the 1850 amendment to the Fugitive Slave Act and the 1857 Dred Scott Decision illustrate tensions that would precipitate the Civil War.

MATERIALS NEEDED

 Dred Scott Reading and Questions

ASSESSMENTS

Dred Scott Reading and Questions

ACTIVITY

1. Fugitive Slave Act

a. Review (2-3 min)

- i. Slides 1-3: Review from previous lesson on political compromises. Remind students of the “balance of power” in Congress between free and slave states.

b. Close read the text (15-20 min)

- i. Slides 4-6: In an attempt to prevent a civil war, Congress enacted a series of laws that became known as the Compromise of 1850. These included an enhanced Fugitive Slave Law. This law required law enforcement officials throughout the country to aid in the arrest of alleged runaway slaves. It provoked a national controversy and many Northerners refused to enforce the law’s provisions.
- ii. Review the [Act](#) or the [cherry-picked quotes](#). Have students discuss: Which provisions do you think are most significant? Choose three, and explain.
- iii. What part of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 could many Northerners interpret as a direct infringement of their own personal rights and freedom? Quote from the act. What would a Southerner who advocated slavery say in defense of the Fugitive Slave Act?

c. Zoom-in analysis (15-20 min)

i. Slides 7-11: Effects of the Fugitive Slave Act (1850)

- 1. Zoom In Inquiry: “looking at a cartoon in small pieces, looking at a specific part of the cartoon and not the entire image, and revealing slowly the entire image to them, thereby eliciting responses about more specific pieces of the cartoon to engage in some hypothesis making and think

about what's coming next and what they expect to see in the rest of the cartoon." See more (for teacher):

<https://teachinghistory.org/digital-classroom/beyond-the-chalkboard/24158>

2. Discuss frames and questions.
3. The big reveal: On slide 11, follow the linked cartoon to the LC page or read the About this Item information in the notes on the slideshow.
 - ii. Slides 13-16: Practical Illustration of the Fugitive Slave Law (1851)
 1. Repeat process.
2. Dred Scott v. Sandford (depending on time, consider pausing here)
 - a. Slides 17-18 (5 min): The growing tensions between states in which slavery was allowed and states in which it was outlawed was one of the reasons the Dred Scott case was so important to people at the time. Keeping these states in balance was considered crucial to keeping the country together. Neither side wanted the other to have the majority of power in Congress. In order to picture this balance, view the animation and note which states allowed slavery at key dates: 1789, 1821, 1846, 1858, and 1861. Consider the following questions:
 - i. How many slave and free states are there on each map?
 - ii. How does the amount of the country where slavery is legal or outlawed change over time?
 - iii. What did the country look like at the time of the Dred Scott case?
 - iv. How might this balance (or imbalance) play a role in the outcome of the case?
 - b. Slide 19-23: Overview of the decision (25 min)
 - i. Watch the Crash Course Video (end 9:20)
 - ii. Remind students about how the majority opinions and dissents work on the Supreme Court.
 - iii. Close read the excerpts from Taney and Curtis. What is the main idea of Taney's argument? What is Curtis's argument?
 - c. Reading the article (Note on time: The lesson so far should have taken 60-75 minutes to run. Consider running this final section of the lesson in a separate class period).

- i. First read: Read aloud with reading discussion questions as you go:
 - 1. What reason did Dred and Harriet Scott first sue for their freedom?
 - 2. Write a list of the dates and places where the Scotts went to court. How many times was their case tried in total?
 - 3. Which court case or cases happened in St. Louis?
 - 4. Why did people become interested in their court case?
What else was happening in the country at the time?
 - 5. What did the Supreme Court decide about the case?
 - 6. What role did this decision play in leading to the Civil War?
- ii. Second read: Read to self and write about it:
 - 1. Who was involved?
 - 2. What happened? This will include several places. Describe what happened in those places. When? What were the dates?
 - 3. Why? Why did people become interested in their court case? What else was happening in the country at the time?
 - 4. How did this decision lead to the Civil War?
 - 5. Write a 3-5 sentence summary of this event.
- iii. Extension: Be a Courtroom Sketch Artist! We don't have any pictures of the court cases the Scotts participated in. Instead, we have to imagine what the courtroom felt like and looked like during the trials. In modern day courtrooms, sketch artists draw the scene for news articles. Now, it's your turn to picture what the courtroom looked like! Choose one of the series of court cases the Scotts participated in, and draw what you think the courtroom looked like.
 - 1. Who is in the courtroom?
 - 2. Who are the judges hearing the case? Who are the lawyers? What are their backgrounds?
 - 3. Are there people listening to the trial? What do they look like? What do they care about?
 - 4. What kinds of emotions might people in the courtroom be feeling?

5. What point of the trial is your picture capturing?
- iv. Wrap Up:
1. Why do you think the Dred Scott case was so important at the time it was decided? Why is it important now?
 2. How do you think the Scotts felt during the different court cases they participated in?
 3. What would you like to know more about or explore? What is missing that you're still curious about?