

# Lesson Plan: Freed from Slavery

Provided by the Art Institute of Chicago Department of Museum Education

**Suggested Grade Level:** 5–8

**Estimated Time:** Three to four class periods

## Introduction

On January 1, 1863, after the Civil War Battle of Antietam, U.S. President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. To gain an appreciation of the slavery issue in the Civil War, students examine and discuss John Quincy Adams Ward's *The Freedman*. On the Web, they read the Emancipation Proclamation in its original hand as well as slave narratives and discuss what they have learned. Based on this knowledge, students write a narrative about the life of Ward's figure.

## Lesson Objectives

- Critically analyze a work of art
- Gain a deeper understanding of slavery and its significance within the Civil War
- Learn to conduct research on the Web
- Write a historically based narrative

## Key Terms:

- emancipation
- proclamation

## Instructional Materials

- Paper
- Pencil
- Recommended Web sites (see below)

## **Procedures**

### ***Discussion***

Have students examine Ward's *The Freedman*. Ask:

- What do you see? Encourage students to identify all of the sculpture's details.
- How do we know this is a former slave?
- How do we know he is free?
- Does he appear strong or weak? Aggressive or hesitant? How can you tell?
- What do his expression and posture suggest about what he is thinking and what he is about to do next?

Explain that this sculpture was made during the Civil War.

### ***Activity***

- 1) Have students read and discuss the Emancipation Proclamation ([http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th\\_century/emancipa.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/emancipa.asp)). Ask:
  - What kind of language did Lincoln use to make his statement (formal, emotional, etc.)
  - Why might he have used such language (to make it sound official, not inflammatory)
  - Which slaves were declared free by Abraham Lincoln?
  - Who officially recognized and promised to maintain the freedom of these freed slaves?
  - In what circumstances did Lincoln say these freed slaves might resort to violence?
  - Could they join the military to fight in the Civil War?
- 2) Have students look at the original Emancipation Proclamation and read the historical interpretations on the Web sites of the National Archives and Lincoln Museum. Ask:
  - How does it feel different to read the original, handwritten manuscript than a later printing of the text?
  - Why did Lincoln choose to issue the Emancipation Proclamation at the time he did? Should he have issued it when he was first elected? When the war began?
  - Why didn't Lincoln declare that slaves in Union states were also free?
- 3) Have students divide into groups and read examples of slave narratives from the *Been There for So Long—Selections from WPA Slave Narratives* website (<http://newdeal.feri.org/asn/index.htm>). Ask students from each group to tell the story of an individual whose oral history they have read.
- 4) Have the groups spend half an hour exploring the Library of Congress Web page, *African American Odyssey: The Civil War*

(<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/aahtml/exhibit/aopart4.html>), with information and images that describe how slaves reacted to the Emancipation Proclamation. Ask them to report on three things they learned from the Web site.

- 5) Return to Ward's sculpture. Explain that the image was reproduced frequently because of its popularity. Ask students to consider why Ward's sculpture was so popular. Encourage them to consider how Ward's portrayal of this black man might have had more appeal than other portrayals of freed slaves in the 1860s. Ask:
  - What other images or works of art have become popular because of war or freedom?
- 6) Have students write a two- to three-page account of the life of Ward's figure, considering the following questions:
  - What were the circumstances of this man's enslavement?
  - Does his muscular figure provide a clue to the kind of work he did?
  - What is he thinking now that he has been released?
  - What will he do now? Will he volunteer for military service in the Civil War? Or will he seek other employment? How difficult might this turn out to be?

## **Evaluation**

Base students' evaluations on their participation in class discussion, ability to describe and interpret texts, appreciation of the slavery issue during the Civil War, and written assignments.

## **Illinois Learning Standards**

Language Arts: 1-5

Social Science: 14, 16

Fine Arts: 25, 27