

## *Sample Lesson by Arthur Rustigian*

### The Ideals of the American Revolution – Promise or Dream?

National Standards:

Era 2 – Standards 1 and 3

Era 3 – Standard 1

Grade: 11 and/or 12

Recommended Time: Two/Three classes

### **Overview and Goals**

In this unit of the study students will be learning about political, religious, economic, and social developments in the late Colonial period through the early post-Revolutionary period. The content of the unit/lessons will focus on the rhetorical foundations and the political, religious, economic, and social developments that contributed to the Colonist's "resistance and rebellion" philosophy such as: the Great Awakening, the effects of the French and Indian War, the Enlightenment, British Imperial policy and trade regulation, Colonial political developments (self-rule), the diverse economies of New England, the Middle and Southern Colonies, etc.

Specifically, the lesson will focus on the contradictory nature of statements made about liberty by the holders and/or supporters of slavery. This is summed up in Samuel Johnson's comment, "How is it we hear the loudest yelps for liberty among the drivers of slaves." The students will also be learning about the shift in anti-slavery rhetoric, to this point mainly based on religious condemnation, to a more secular anti-slavery argument based on natural rights.

Additionally, the students will be exploring the ideals of the Revolution embodied in the Declaration of Independence, as well as, why these goals were not met, especially on the issue of slavery. This is especially apparent when John Brown of Providence, RI decides to return to the slave trade in 1784. These issues raise questions such as: Liberty for whom? What do the ideals of the Revolution really mean in everyday life? In what ways do economic realities trump moral decisions? Is the Declaration a concrete promise or a utopian ideal?

### **Objectives**

Students will:

- Listen and take notes to lecture to establish historical context
- Examine primary sources by various authors on slavery and the slave trade
- Read and successfully SOAP several documents

- Evaluate the effectiveness of the author's commentary
- Write several short-answer responses ("stop-and-jot") to each document
- Write an essay that demonstrates an understanding of the content, the complexity of the diverse arguments presented, and the connection to modern controversial issues

### **Materials**

Primary Documents by:

James Otis, John Wesley, Declaration of Independence, and John Brown (see below)

SOAP worksheet (explained below)

Direction sheet

Writing rubric

### **Procedure**

Students will listen and take notes, next

Students will examine one primary source document at a time (see above order), next

Students will complete the SOAP worksheet for each document, next

Students will read aloud excerpts from the documents, share responses to the SOAP questions, and analyze the content of the source, next

Students will write responses to short-answer questions (listed below), next

Students will share out the responses to the short-answer questions, next

Students will be given the extended writing prompt (see below) and discuss possible answers to the extended writing prompt

### **Follow up and evaluation**

The extended essay and a formal test at the end of the unit.

### **Short-answer questions (rough/simple ideas)**

- Which argument, James Otis or John Wesley, is more compelling to you?
- Which might have been more compelling in the 1760s? 1770s? 1780s?
- Why weren't these arguments effective?
- How might you explain the contradiction between Otis and Jefferson (Declaration of Independence) "yelping" for liberty while both are complicit in "driving" slaves?
- What does this say about words and actions?

### **Extended writing (rough/simple ideas)**

-In what ways and to what extent is the Declaration of Independence a concrete promise and in what ways and to what extent is it a utopian ideal?

-Research a current topic that has elements of a modern moral dilemma that appears to be clear-cut (the participants “know” what is “right” and what is “wrong”) but the behavior continues.

## SOAPSTone Reading Strategy Guide

(Adapted from the College Board)

To encourage and strengthen readers’ interaction with and comprehension and analysis of text.

### Speaker

**Who is the voice that tells the story?** The author and the speaker are NOT necessarily the same. An author may choose to tell the story from any number of different **points of view**. Is someone identified as the speaker? What assumptions can be made about the speaker? What age, gender, class, emotional state, education, or...? In nonfiction, how does the speaker’s background shape his/her point of view?

### Occasion

**What is the time and place of the piece -- the (rhetorical) context that encouraged the writing to happen?** Is it a memory, a description, an observation, a valedictory, a diatribe, an elegy, a declaration, a critique, a journal entry or...? Writing does not occur in a vacuum. There is the **larger occasion**: an environment of ideas and emotions that swirl around a broad issue. Then there is the **immediate occasion**: an event or situation that catches the writer’s attention and triggers a response.

### Audience

**Who is the audience – the (group) of readers to whom this piece is directed?** The audience may be one person, a small group, or a large group; it may be a certain person or a certain people. Does the speaker identify an audience? What assumptions exist about the intended audience?

### Purpose

**Why was this text written?** You should ask yourself, “**What does the speaker want the audience to think or do as a result of reading this text?**” How is this message conveyed? What is the message? How does the speaker try to spark a reaction in the

audience? What techniques are used to achieve a purpose? How does the text make the audience feel? What is its intended effect? Consider the purpose of the text in order to examine the argument and its logic.

### Subject

**What are the general topic, content, and ideas contained in the text?** You should be able to state the subject in a few words or a phrase. How do you know this? How does the author present the subject? Is it introduced immediately or delayed? Is the subject hidden? Is there more than one subject?

### Tone

**What is the attitude of the author?** The spoken word can convey the speaker's attitude, and, thus, help to impart meaning, through tone of voice. With the written work, it is tone that extends meaning beyond the literal. If the author were to read aloud the passage, describe the likely tone of that voice. It is whatever clarifies the author's attitude toward the subject. What emotional sense pervades the piece? How does the diction point to tone? How do the author's **diction, imagery, language,** and sentence structure (**syntax**) convey his or her feelings?

## Documents

### **James Otis, The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved (1763)**

The colonists are by the law of nature freeborn, as indeed all men are, white or black. No better reasons can be given for enslaving those of any color than such as Baron Montesquieu has humorously given as the foundation of that cruel slavery exercised over the poor Ethiopians, which threatens one day to reduce both Europe and America to the ignorance and barbarity of the darkest ages. Does it follow that 'tis right to enslave a man because he is black? Will short curled hair like wool instead of Christian hair, as 'tis called by those whose hearts are as hard as the nether millstone, help the argument? Can any logical inference in favor of slavery be drawn from a flat nose, a long or a short face? Nothing better can be said in favor of a trade that is the most shocking violation of the law of nature, has a direct tendency to diminish the idea of the inestimable value of liberty, and makes every dealer in it a tyrant, from the director of an African company to the petty chapman in needles and pins on the unhappy coast. It is a clear truth that those who every day barter away other men's liberty will soon care little for their own. . . .

That the colonists, black and white, born here are freeborn British subjects, and entitled to all the essential civil rights of such is a truth not only manifest from the provincial charters, from the principles of the

common law, and acts of Parliament, but from the British constitution, which was re-established at the Revolution with a professed design to secure the liberties of all the subjects to all generations. . . .

I say men, for in a state of nature no man can take my property from me without my consent: if he does, he deprives me of my liberty and makes me a slave.

### **John Wesley, Thoughts Upon Slavery (1774)**

And this equally concerns every gentleman that has an estate in our American plantations; yea, all slaveholders, of whatever rank and degree; seeing men-buyers are exactly on a level with men-stealers. Indeed you say, "I pay honestly for my goods; and I am not concerned to know how they are come by." Nay, but you are; you are deeply concerned to know they are honestly come by. Otherwise you are a partaker with a thief, and are not a jot honester than him. But you know they are not honestly come by; you know they are procured by means nothing near so innocent as picking of pockets, house-breaking, or robbery upon the highway. You know they are procured by a deliberate series of more complicated villany (of fraud, robbery, and murder) than was ever practised either by Mahometans or Pagans; in particular, by murders, of all kinds; by the blood of the innocent poured upon the ground like water. Now, it is your money that pays the merchant, and through him the captain and the African butchers. You therefore are guilty, yea, principally guilty, of all these frauds, robberies, and murders. You are the spring that puts all the rest in motion; they would not stir a step without you; therefore, the blood of all these wretches who die before their time, whether in their country or elsewhere, lies upon your head. "The blood of thy brother" (for, whether thou wilt believe it or no, such he is in the sight of Him that made him) "crieth against thee from the earth," from the ship, and from the waters. O, whatever it costs, put a stop to its cry before it be too late: Instantly, at any price, were it the half of your goods, deliver thyself from blood-guiltiness! Thy hands, thy bed, thy furniture, thy house, thy lands, are at present stained with blood. Surely it is enough; accumulate no more guilt; spill no more the blood of the innocent! Do not hire another to shed blood; do not pay him for doing it! Whether you are a Christian or no, show yourself a man! Be not more savage than a lion or a bear!

Much less is it possible, that any child of man should ever be born a slave. Liberty is the right of every human creature, as soon as he breathes the vital air; and no human law can deprive him of that right which he derives from the law of nature.

### **Declaration of Independence (1776)**

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security. — Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.

### **Excerpt from the Rough Draft of the Declaration of Independence**

He has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, capturing and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. This piratical warfare, the opprobrium of INFIDEL powers, is the warfare of the CHRISTIAN king of Great Britain. Determined to keep open a market where MEN should be bought and sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this execrable commerce. And that this assemblage of horrors might want no fact of distinguished die, he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms against us, and to purchase that liberty of which he has deprived them, by murdering the people for whom he also obtruded them: thus paying off former crimes committed against the LIBERTIES of one people, with crimes which he urges them to commit against the LIVES of another.]

**John Brown, Letter to Moses Brown, November 27, 1786**

*\*See following pages\**

**JOHN BROWN TO MOSES BROWN**  
**A Slave Trader's Rationalization, Providence, November 27, 1786<sup>24</sup>**

*Moses and John Brown were two of five brothers born to a prominent Providence, R.I., commercial family. John had a natural ability to adjust to changing political and economic circumstances and soon became known as the "Providence Colossus." He and his brothers regularly participated in the slave trade before the Revolution. In 1773, however, several months after the death of his wife, Moses Brown converted from being a Baptist to a Quaker. The rest of his life was devoted to the amelioration of the condition of slaves and freedmen. John Brown underwent no such conversion and continued the slave trade.*

*In 1784 John Brown represented the town of Providence in the assembly. Despite instructions from the town meeting to vote for the gradual emancipation bill, Brown led the opposition to the measure. Because of this violation of his instructions, he was not reelected to legislature later in the year. He was reelected, however, in 1786. When the legislature prohibited the slave trade, John Brown refocused his commercial attention on the newly opening trade with the Far East.*

Your Esteemed Favour was this Day at Diner handed me by your Son. I have not yet had time to peruse the Treetice you was so kind as to Accompany with the Letter but will do it Soone, by begining it this Evening. You mention that you had heard, as Last Evening, I had it in Contemplation the Sending an Other Vessell to Affrica in the Slave Trade. Its true that I have not only had an Other Voyage in Contemplation but have been preparing the Cargo for this 4 Months past & this Day before I Received yours began taking in the Ballis having before Shipt the Captin & Mate. I have no Doubt of your Sinsearity, in Your Exurtions to Discourage the Slave Trade, and did I Consider it as You do I would by no means be Concernd in it, but from the best Information I can Git & that has beene from Grait Numbers the Slaves are possitively better off, that is brought from the Coast than those who are Left behind or then those would be was they not brought away—More aspetially those who are Caried Among the French, as I propose this Vessill as Well as the One Allredy Gone will Land them on High spanolia, where all Accounts Agree they are better Treeted then in Aney part of the English West Indies. This Trade has beene permitted by the Supreame Govenour of all things for time Immemmoriel and whenever I am Convinced, as you are, that its Rong in the Sight of God, I will Immediately Deasist, but while its not only allowd by the Supreame Govenour of all States but by all the Nations of Europe, and perhaps the most of Any by that Very Government which has beene & is Still So Much Esteemed & Incoraged by those Very people who Appears the Most Active in Writing and Clammering Against the Trade I cannot thinke this State ought to Decline the Trade. I fulley Agree with You that no past Proffit

<sup>24</sup>Peck Collection, Rhode Island Historical Society.

that I have purtooke in the trade Can be My Inducement having Lost & that Very Graitly in allmost Every Voyage to Guiney I have beene Concernd in but You are Sencible much property has beene Acquired by this Trade from Newport. I Lately heard Severil of their principle people Say that the Merchants of Newport Very Scarsly Ever Cleard any property in Aney other Trade & that all the Estates that had Ever beene Acquired in that Town had beene Got in the Guiney Trades. It may be as you Suppose Determind by that power which presides over all Events that no Inhabitant of this Town Shall Ever Prosper in the Slave Trade. You Mention that the Melasses Trade may be Caried on without Extending it to the Guiney Trade. I agree it may be in a Limmited Degree. The Newfoundlands as well as all other British ports you are Sencible is Shet up from this Commerce which Used to be Very Grait.

I owe an Enormus Sum of Money in Europe & am Striving in Every Trade Which Appears Lawfull & Right to me, to pay as Much of the Debt as possable Dureing My Life time as I Wish Most Ardently to Leave My Famely Less Invouled In Debt then is Now the Case. You are Sencible I have Tryd the Tobacco Trade, have a Ship Now Gone to Verginnia for a Load, have Tryd the Fishery having fifteen Schooners in the Buissiness, but have not yet beene So Fortunate as to Lessen the Debt. Should the Brigg I am now Fitting to Guiney & the Snow Captain Cooke who Sailed in July Last the Ship Captain Sheldon now Gone to Verginnia & bound to France together with the Fisherman, which I propose Shall all Sail Very early in the Spring in order to Make up a Cargo of the best & Earlyest Spring Fish for Billbo [Bilbao, Spain]; I Say Should all these Succeede but Tollorably Well I hope to Discharge a Very Large proportion of My Debts, and I do Assure You I have not nor never had one Feeling in my Mind but that the Guiney Trade, or the Slave Trade as you More Explissetly Call it, was and is as Just & Right as Aney Trade I am or Ever Was Concernd in & Vastly More So then to Send a Vessill to Jamaica with a Two Fold or Double Intention nay Three Fold Contrediction to the professions of Some Owners of Vessills. First, if the Slave Trade is Rong why will the Men Who thinks So Incorage it by Sending for the produce Raised & made by those Slaves So Rongfully & unritchously Imported from their own Native Country. Are they Not doing as bad as tho they was to Undertake to Incorage A Theif by purchessing his Goods tho they knew they was Stole from an Honest Man?

Secondly, to thus Incorage the Trade of Carying Slaves to the West Indies have they Not Coverd their property with Fals papers & by this Means Indeverd to Disseive the people they was bound Among, by bringing their produce to this Country Directly Conterary to their Laws?

& Thirdly, to Introduce the produce of the English Islands In to this State Under Different Cullers & Different papers their others being Conseal'd, & all this Done by Owners & a Captin who are So Consheus bound as to use None but the plain Langwige & the better to Cover their Wickedness they Appear Among the Foremust to write & Taulke against the Guiney Trade & The Lord deliver me from Such Wolves in Sheeps Cloathing.



If you Incline to have a Law passed in this State to Stop the Guinea Trade, I once told you & I now Repeete it that I Shall be happy to Step out of the Seet Whenever it Can be So much better Fild as it will be when you Accept. I am Fulley Sencible that you Can Searve the Town & State at Large all better as a Legislater than I Can and wish with all My hart you woud once more Concent to Searve the publick in that Way. Our Different Sentiments Respecting the Guinea Trade will Weigh Nothing in My Mind against your taking my place in the House.

I will not Detain you aney Longer. I am Exceeding Sorry to Differ So much from you in this Buissiness, but I have Charrity for You that you thinke you are doing Gods Service when you go According to the Lite of Your Contience. I only wish for the Same Charritable Disposition towards me that will I go According to the Dicketates of my Contious I may have mercey Extended to me tho I am not Endowd with that Devine Light to See the Guinea Trade with the Same Eyes as you do. I Respect you as a Brother & a Friend. I Respect your Childron and Sincearly wish they mought be Indulged to be More Furmillior with mine. I am Shure my Childron has a perticular Regard for Yours—

#### THE NORTHWEST ORDINANCE July 13, 1787

*Between 1784 and 1787, Congress considered various ordinances for the sale and government of the western lands ceded to it by the states. An ordinance drafted in 1784 by Thomas Jefferson provided for the prohibition of slavery in Congress' territory north and west of the Ohio River, but the ordinance never received approval from Congress. In 1785 Congress passed an ordinance for the surveying and sale of the Northwest Territory and two years later Congress adopted an ordinance creating the governmental structure for the territory. The Northwest Ordinance provided for two stages: a territorial stage and full-fledged statehood on a par with the original thirteen states. An abbreviated bill of rights was incorporated into the ordinance, and slavery was prohibited.*

*Southern delegates to Congress supported this prohibition of slavery for economic, political, and demographic reasons. They did not want a competing plantation economy to develop in the North. Furthermore, by prohibiting slavery from the Northwest Territory, a tacit understanding existed that slavery was permissible in the territory southwest of the Ohio River. Finally, migration patterns indicated that most settlers moving to the Northwest Territory were emigrating from New England, and thus were predisposed to opposing slavery. These settlers would probably build anti-slavery provisions into their state constitutions.*

*As a counterbalance to the prohibition of slavery, Congress included a fugitive-slave clause in the Northwest Ordinance. This clause served as a model for the Constitutional Convention, which was meeting simultaneously in Philadelphia.*