

Three Sides of the Smalls Story

Parent Guide, page 1 of 2

Read the “Directions” sheets for step-by-step instructions.

SUMMARY

In this activity, students will identify and analyze the historical data found within two newspapers reporting on Robert Smalls and the *CSS Planter*.

WHY

Through analyzing these two primary sources, students can better exercise critical thinking skills and consider perspective in written documents. Most documents include a bias of some kind, and comparing two stories about the same event helps students understand the roles of bias and perspective.

TIME

- 30 minutes or more, depending on student reading levels

RECOMMENDED AGE GROUP

This activity will work best for children in 4th through 6th grade.

CHALLENGE WORDS

See the individual articles for definitions.

GET READY

- Read *Seven Miles to Freedom* together. *Seven Miles to Freedom* is a biography of Robert Smalls, a brave man who used his boat-piloting skills to escape slavery and help the Union navy during the Civil War. For tips on reading this book together, check out the Guided Reading Activity (http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/pdf/smalls/smalls_reading.pdf).
- Read the *Step Back in Time* sheets. Students will need a basic understanding of the Civil War to complete this activity thoughtfully.

More information at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/smalls/>

Three Sides of the Smalls Story

Parent Guide, page 2 of 2

YOU NEED

- *Directions* sheets (*attached*)
- *Step Back in Time* sheets (*attached*)
- Copies of the *ThinkAbout* sheet (*attached*)
- Copies of the *transcripts of articles* from the *New York Herald* and the *Charleston Daily Courier* (*attached*)
- 1 or more copies of *Seven Miles to Freedom*

More information at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/smalls/>



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National Museum of American History
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Three Sides of the Smalls Story

Step Back in Time, page 1 of 2

For more information, visit the National Museum of American History website <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/smalls>.

About the Civil War

In the middle of the 1800s, the United States was splitting apart. Factories and business were bringing wealth to the North while the South depended on an economy based on plantations farmed by **slaves**. In the North, most people wanted to stop the spread of slavery, and **abolitionists** wanted to end it altogether. In the South, slaveholders and small farmers feared that their way of life would disappear under the power of the North.



Robert Smalls lived in South Carolina, which was a Confederate state. He escaped and helped fight for the Union.

Image from *Seven Miles to Freedom*.

In 1860 Abraham Lincoln was elected president and seven southern states **seceded** from the United States, creating the Confederate States of America. When President Lincoln refused to remove U.S. troops from Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina, Confederate guns fired on the fort. Then four more states **seceded** and joined the Confederacy.

A long and bloody war followed between the South (the Confederacy) and the North (the Union). In 1865, after five years of fighting, the North won the war, slavery ended, and the country was reunited.

For more information on the Civil War, visit the exhibition *The Price of Freedom: Americans at War* (www.americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/).

Three Sides of the Smalls Story

Step Back in Time, page 2 of 2

About the Navy during the Civil War

The Union and the Confederacy had different ways of using their navies. The Union's main goal was to **blockade** Confederate ports to keep the South from getting supplies. The Confederate navy's major goal was keeping supplies moving by sea, using fast ships called "**blockade runners**" to speed past the Union **blockade**.

About Robert Smalls

Robert Smalls (1839–1915) was born a **slave** in Beaufort, South Carolina. He became a skilled boat pilot and on May 12, 1862, he used his skills to steal the ship *CSS Planter* with his boat crew and family, who all were **slaves**. Once his ship reached the Union **blockade**, he offered the Union navy the *CSS Planter*. Having escaped into Northern territory, he was no longer a **slave**. He worked alongside the Union navy until the end of the Civil War. After the war, Robert Smalls worked for the South Carolina state and national governments, and represented South Carolina in the U.S. Congress for five terms.



Robert Smalls learned to navigate the waters near Charleston, South Carolina by studying maps.

Image from *Seven Miles to Freedom*.

abolitionist: a person who wants to stop or abolish slavery

blockade: an act of war in which one side uses ships to stop people or supplies from leaving or entering the other side

seceded: separated from a nation and became independent

slave: someone who is owned by another person and is forced to work for that person without pay

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Three Sides of the Smalls Story

Directions, page 1 of 2

For adults and kids to follow together.

1. Break students into three groups and assign each group one of the three information sources.

Tip

The information sources are not all the same reading level. *Seven Miles to Freedom* is written for children and is the easiest to read. The *Charleston Daily Courier* is the next easiest to read. The *New York Herald* is the hardest to read. Consider the difficulty of the sources as you assign sources to your student groups.

2. Distribute copies of the sources and copies of the *ThinkAbout* sheet.
3. Once groups have completed their *ThinkAbout* sheets, bring all three groups together and have groups report on their answers for each source.
4. Discuss the following questions or topics as a class.
 - What details do the sources agree on?
 - Where is Charleston? Where is New York? Find both places on a map. Which city was a part of the Union and which was a part of the Confederacy?
 - How do you think people in Charleston or New York felt while reading about these events? Do you think they would think Robert Smalls was a good American? Why or why not?
 - The *New York Herald* uses the names of the slaves. The *Charleston Daily Courier* only uses the names of the slaves' masters. Does this agree with other things you know about the North and South in the Civil War?

Three Sides of the Smalls Story

Directions, page 2 of 2

- *Seven Miles to Freedom* was written more than 140 years after the event. One of the last pages in the book lists the different sources of information that the author, Janet Halfmann, used to write her book. The *Charleston Daily Courier* article and the *New York Herald* article are both listed as sources. Which article's perspective do you think Ms. Halfmann wrote from? How do you think this book would be different if the South had won the Civil War?
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5. Consider using one of these extension activities as a class project, extra credit, or homework assignment.
- Using all three sources, create a single timeline of events in the story of Robert Smalls.
 - Take on the role of news reporters and imagine that the television news shows existed in 1862. Create a news show representing the Union and Confederate sides of the story. Consider which individuals would be interviewed and the tone of the report.

Three Sides of the Smalls Story

ThinkAbout

	<i>New York Herald</i>	<i>Charleston Daily Courier</i>	<i>Seven Miles to Freedom</i>
Is it a primary source or secondary source?			
In what year was it published?			
Descriptions of Robert Smalls			
Descriptions of other slaves			
Descriptions of the <i>CSS Planter</i>			
Important steps in the escape			
Other interesting notes			

Three Sides of the Smalls Story

Excerpt Text, Charleston Daily Courier

Charleston, S.C. (Confederate States of America)

May 14, 1862

THE STEAMER PLANTER.-- Our community was intensely agitated Tuesday morning by the intelligence that the steamer Planter, for the last twelve months or more employed both in the State and Confederate service, had been taken possession of by her colored crew, steamed up and boldly run out to the blockades...

Between three and four o'clock Tuesday morning, the steamer left Southern wharf, having, it is supposed, on board five negroes, namely three engineers, one pilot and a deck hand. Upon leaving the wharf the usual whistle signal was given by those on board, and the usual private signals given when passing Fort Sumter. The officer of the watch at the latter post was called, as usual, but observing the signals and supposing all right, allowed her to proceed. She ran immediately out to the blockading vessels.

The Planter was a new high-pressure steamer, belonging to Capt. JOHN FERGUSON. She was regarded as one of the fastest boats in the harbor, and very valuable for river work but unfit for sea work. Three of the negroes who left also belonged to Capt. FERGUSON, one to Mrs. MICHEL, and one to Mrs. MCKEE.

There are rumors of others having gone who were missing from the city yesterday, but for information on this point we suppose we must await the next arrival of Northern news from Port Royal.

The Planter was observed alongside of the fleet yesterday afternoon, and from appearances it was supposed that one of the Federal gunboats was engaged in removing the arms from her deck. Such are the material facts so far as we have been able to gather them in relation to this extraordinary occurrence.

- **agitated:** disturbed
- **blockades:** acts of war in which one side uses ships to stop people or supplies from leaving or entering the other side
- **employed:** used
- **fleet:** group of ships
- **intelligence:** information
- **material facts:** basic information
- **occurrence:** event

Full transcript online at <http://www.robertsmalls.org/newspapers/CHARLESTON%20DAILY%20COURIER.5.14.62doc.htm>

Three Sides of the Smalls Story

Excerpt Text, New York Herald, page 1 of 2

SUNDAY, MAY 18, 1862

HEROISM OF NINE COLORED MEN

One of the most daring and heroic adventures since the war was commenced was undertaken and successfully accomplished by a party of negroes in Charleston on Monday night last. Nine colored men, comprising the pilot, engineers and crew of the rebel gunboat Planter, took the vessel under their exclusive control, and passed the batteries and forts in Charleston harbor, hoisted a white flag, ran out to the blockading squadron, and thence to Port Royal, via Helena Sound and Broad River, reaching the flagship Wabash shortly after ten o'clock last evening.

The following are the names of the black men who performed this gallant and perilous service: - Robert Smalls, pilot; John Smalls [no relation] and Alfred Gradine, engineers; Abraham Jackson, Gabriel Turno, William Morrison, Samuel Chisholm, Abraham Allston, and David Jones. They brought with them the wife and three children [sic] of the pilot, and the wife, child and sister of the first engineer, John Smalls. The balance of the party were without families.

The Planter is a high-pressure, side-wheel steamer... She was built in Charleston, was formerly used as a cotton boat ... Besides, she had on board when she came into the harbor one seven-inch howitzer, one long thirty-two pounder, and about two hundred rounds of ammunition, which had been consigned to Fort Ripley, and which would have been delivered at that fortification on Tuesday had not the designs of the rebel authorities been frustrated.

Robert Smalls, with whom I had a brief interview at General Benham's headquarters this morning, is an intelligent negro born in Charleston [sic] and employed for many years as a pilot in and about that harbor...

The Planter is just such a vessel as is needed to navigate the shallow waters between Hilton Head and the adjacent islands, and will prove almost invaluable to the Government. It is proposed, I hear, by the Commodore to recommend an appreciation of \$20,000 as a reward to the plucky Africans who have distinguished themselves by this gallant service...

- **ammunition:** explosive objects (as bombs) used in war or objects (as bullets) fired from guns
- **blockade:** an act of war in which one side uses ships to stop people or supplies from leaving or entering the other side
- **commenced:** began
- **comprising:** including
- **consigned:** delivered

Three Sides of the Smalls Story

Excerpt Text, New York Herald, page 2 of 2

- **designs:** plot or scheme
- **exclusive:** (in this context) full or complete
- **fortification:** a construction built for defense
- **gallant:** brave
- **hoisted:** raised
- **perilous:** dangerous
- **plucky:** brave
- **undertaken:** taken on as a duty
- **vessel:** ship

Full transcript online at <http://www.robertsmalls.org/newspapers/N.%20Y.%20HERALD.5.18.62.htm>

Three Sides of the Smalls Story

Teacher Guide, page 1 of 2

Read the “Directions” and “Parent Guide” sheets for specific instructions.

OBJECTIVES

The students will be better able to:

- Answer questions using written sources.
- Analyze written sources for bias.

STUDENT PERFORMANCE CRITERIA

- Notes include relevant details from sources.
- Discussion exhibits logical connections and comparisons.

STANDARDS

NCHS History Standards

K-4 Historical Thinking Standards

- 2D: Read historical narratives imaginatively.
- 2E: Appreciate historical perspectives.
- 3C: Analyze historical fiction.
- 4B: Obtain historical data.
- 4C: Interrogate historical data.
- 4D: Marshal needed information of the time and place.

K-4 History Content Standards

- 4B: The student understands ordinary people who have exemplified values and principles of American democracy.

5-12 U.S. History Content Standards

Era 5: Civil War and Reconstruction (1850-1877)

- 2A: The student understands how the resources of the Union and Confederacy affected the course of the war.

5-12 Historical Thinking Standards

- 2E: Read historical narratives imaginatively.

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Three Sides of the Smalls Story

Teacher Guide, page 2 of 2

2F: Appreciate historical perspectives.

3B: Consider multiple perspectives.

3F: Compare competing historical narratives

4B: Obtain historical data.

4C: Interrogate historical data.

4D: Identify the gaps in the available records and marshal contextual knowledge and perspectives of the time and place.

IRA/NCTE Language Arts Standards

1. Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

21st-Century Skills

Learning and Innovation Skills

- Critical Thinking and Problem Solving

Information, Media, and Technology Skills

- Information Literacy

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