

The Urgency of Our Pen: Literacy Laws

Compelling Question			
How does literacy provide power?			
State Standard(s)	Ohio. Grade 8. 1, 4, 14, 20 & 21 Kentucky. 8.C.CV.1, 8.H.CH.2, 8.I.UE.2, 8.I.CC.3		
C3 Framework Indicator(s)	D2.Civ.6.6-8, D2.Civ.10.6-8, D2.His.6.6-8, D4.3.6-8, D4.8.6-8		
Learning Goals	<table border="0"> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <p>Students will understand</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ That literacy provides power. ■ That legal actions were taken to keep the enslaved illiterate and limit their power. ■ That the enslaved resisted and found ways to become literate. ■ How it took courage, cooperation, and perseverance for the enslaved to get their voices heard. ■ That the inclusion and exclusion of voices in modern literature is significant. </td> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <p>Students will be able to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Analyze primary sources. ■ Develop an understanding of the power of literacy and inclusive literature. ■ Identify examples of resistance. ■ Identify the ways abolitionists utilized literacy to promote change. ■ Apply their understanding of literacy laws and the power of literacy to advocate for the inclusion of multiple perspectives in modern literature. </td> </tr> </table>	<p>Students will understand</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ That literacy provides power. ■ That legal actions were taken to keep the enslaved illiterate and limit their power. ■ That the enslaved resisted and found ways to become literate. ■ How it took courage, cooperation, and perseverance for the enslaved to get their voices heard. ■ That the inclusion and exclusion of voices in modern literature is significant. 	<p>Students will be able to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Analyze primary sources. ■ Develop an understanding of the power of literacy and inclusive literature. ■ Identify examples of resistance. ■ Identify the ways abolitionists utilized literacy to promote change. ■ Apply their understanding of literacy laws and the power of literacy to advocate for the inclusion of multiple perspectives in modern literature.
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Supporting Question	Supporting Question	Supporting Question	Supporting Question
Why and how was literacy withheld from the enslaved?	Why and how did the enslaved resist and become literate?	How did anti-slavery activists use literacy to promote change?	Why do we need to understand diverse narratives?
Featured Sources	Featured Sources	Featured Sources	Featured Sources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Primary source: Alabama Slave codes of 1833 #31, 32, and 33 archives.alabama.gov/teacher/slavery/lesson1/doc1-9.html 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Text: The Value of Literacy to the Enslaved edsitement.neh.gov/sites/default/files/2018-07/value-of-literacy-slaves.pdf 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Text: The Salem Female Anti-Slavery Society blackpast.org/african-american-history/female-anti-slavery-society-salem-massachusetts-1832-1866/Freedom.pdf 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Text: Africans in America. (n.d.). <i>Slave Narratives and Uncle Tom's Cabin</i>. PBS. https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p2958.html

- **Primary Source:** South Carolina Act of 1740 and Virginia Code of 1819
thirteen.org/wnet/slavery/experience/education/docs1.html

- **Primary Source:** Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's "Learning to Read"
edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plans/frances-ellen-watkins-harpers-learning-read
- **Video:** "Learning to Read" with Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's "Aunt Chloe"
youtube.com/watch?v=adKddL4_TWg
- **Video:** The Rosenwald Schools.
youtube.com/watch?v=kfxfxSgSIGM

- **Text:** The Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society
explorepahistory.com/hmarker.php?markerId=1-A-105
- **Text:** Nov. 20, 1835: New York Committee of Vigilance Founded
zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/new-york-committee-vigilance-ruggles
- **Text:** David Ruggles Center for History and Education: Anti-Slavery and Racial Equity Activism in New York:
davidrugglescenter.org/david-ruggles
- **Text:** A voice for freedom: The Life of Sarah Parker Remond
london.ac.uk/news-and-opinion/leading-women/a-voice-freedom-life-sarah-parker-remond
- **Text:** Biography of Sarah Parker Remond, North American 19th-Century Black Activist
thoughtco.com/sarah-parker-remond-biography-4068400
- **Primary Source:** Black Abolitionists Archive. (n.d.). Remond, Sarah

- **Video:** CBS Evening News. (2017, April 18). 19th-century ads written by newly freed slaves tell story about chapter in history. YouTube.
youtube.com/watch?v=XoFOgOI99c
- **Text:** Berry, K. D. (2017, Jan. 25). Singing in Slavery: Songs of Survival, Songs of Freedom. Mercy Street: PBS.
pbs.org/mercy-street/blogs/mercy-street-revealed/songs-of-survival-and-songs-of-freedom-during-slavery
- **Video:** We Need Diverse Books. Campaign Videos.
diversebooks.org/about-wndb

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Parker Anti-slavery Advocate. University of Detroit Mercy. libraries.udmercy.edu/archives/special-collections/index.php?collectionCode=baa&record_id=1390 	
Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task
Anti-Literacy Laws guide (Appendix A)	<p>Frances Ellen Watkin Harper’s “Learning to Read” Student Version PDF</p> <p>edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plans/frances-ellen-watkins-harpers-learning-read</p> <p>Exit Slip (Appendix B)</p>	<p>Female Anti-Slavery Societies guide (Appendix C)</p> <p>David Ruggles guide (Appendix D)</p> <p>Sarah Parker Remond guide (Appendix E)</p>	Exit Slip (Appendix F)

Summative Performance Task	<p>ARGUMENT: In this inquiry, the Summative Performance Task and Taking Informed Action are combined.</p> <p>Students will create an argument as to why people should read diverse and inclusive texts representing an array of perspectives.</p>
	<p>EXTENSION: Students will create an argument for the inclusion of diverse and inclusive texts representing an array of perspectives in their library (personal, school, or local). Students could generate a list of inclusive texts.</p>

Taking Informed Action	<p>UNDERSTAND: Students will research the diversity and inclusiveness of the publishing industry and learn about how and why some texts are published while others are not.</p>
	<p>ASSESS: Students will evaluate the diversity and inclusiveness of texts representing multiple perspectives in their library (personal, school, or local).</p>

Taking Informed Action (cont.)

ACT: Students will present an argument for the inclusion of diverse and inclusive texts representing an array of perspectives in libraries (personal, school, or local) in a public forum.

Students could generate a list of diverse and inclusive texts and generate funds to add them to their library (school or local).

Students could begin a diverse and inclusive book club or create a must-read list of inclusive books where students provide overviews and reviews of texts.

Inquiry Description

In *The Urgency of Your Pen* inquiries, students are introduced to materials that reveal the historical relevance of literacy and the importance of literacy, authorship, and publishing for abolitionism. The anti-slavery era is an exemplary time when people fought against injustice and took to reading and their pens to change the tide of history. The legacy of literacy and engaging society through multiple forms of writing continues to be a vibrant dimension of U.S. culture today. Students will be inspired to engage and influence society by using the power of their pen.

This inquiry focuses on pre-Civil War literacy laws and expands into education for Black Americans during Reconstruction. Through an exploration of anti-literacy laws, the determination of the enslaved to break these laws, and the literacy-based methods of abolitionists, students will come to understand the power of literacy. By examining first-person accounts and primary sources, students will also understand the benefits of including diverse perspectives in literature. Finally, students will apply these understandings to assess and improve diversity and inclusion in available reading materials.

Students will engage in social justice work by purposefully seeking multiple perspectives when critiquing the “stock story” narrative of U.S. history. They will also advocate for the inclusion diverse perspectives in libraries (personal, school, and public).

This inquiry embodies the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center principles of **courage**, **cooperation**, and **perseverance** by emphasizing how the enslaved got their voices heard and how the abolitionists fought to end slavery. This inquiry also embodies these principles by asking students to advocate for inclusive, diverse books.

We encourage teachers and students to visit our museum and learn more about the methods employed by abolitionists to end slavery. Students will learn how the abolitionist and Underground Railroad movements, the first major social justice movements in the U.S., utilized literacy to spread awareness and promote their cause.

Required Prior Knowledge

To fully engage in this inquiry, students need a basic understanding of institutional slavery in the U.S. Students must understand the legal and social nature of chattel slavery and how slavery became a regional institution in the United States between the Colonial Era and the Civil War. Additionally, students should know that all Northerners were not anti-slavery, just as all Southerners were not pro-slavery.

Staging The Compelling Question

The term “literacy” is most simply defined as 1.) the ability to read and write, and 2.) competence or knowledge in a specified area. With a partner, have students generate a list of content specific literacies. To fill in gaps, provide the following list. Have students generate examples of each form of literacy.

Basic Literacy - ability to read, write, and do basic arithmetic or numeracy.

Civic/Social Literacy - knowledge and skills needed to your life, participate and contribute effectively to your



community, and connect with one another through dialogue.

Digital Literacy - knowledge and skills needed to access information electronically, use and share information, create original content, evaluate the value of information, and make informed decisions to fully participate in a digital society.

Financial Literacy - knowledge and skill to become informed consumers, grow and manage wealth, and foster innovation and entrepreneurship

Health Literacy - knowledge and skills needed to manage your well-being and be empowered to become effective partners with healthcare providers.

Legal Literacy - knowledge and skills needed to access justice and effectively navigate the legal services and resources available.

Media Literacy – knowledge and skills needed to access and analyze media messages as well as create, reflect and take action, using the power of information and communication to make a difference in the world.

Ask students to brainstorm ways they utilized both forms of literacy that day. Discuss how they acquired these literacies. Encourage students to add literacies to the list that people need to be successful members of our society. Discuss how their lives would be different if they lacked these literacies.

Supporting Question 1

The first supporting question — Why and how was literacy kept from the enslaved? — has students examine anti-literacy laws of the early 1800s in order to understand the power of literacy. By examining this question:

- **Students will understand** that literacy provides power.
- **Students will understand** that legal actions were taken to keep the enslaved illiterate and limit their power.
- **Students will be able** to analyze primary sources.
- **Students will be able** to develop an understanding of the power of literacy and inclusive literature.

Begin by sharing the 1877 painting “Sunday Morning” by Thomas Waterman Wood found at americanart.si.edu/artwork/sunday-morning-28208, and the 1863 painting “The Lord is My Shepherd” by Eastman Johnson found at americanart.si.edu/artwork/lord-my-shepherd-11494. Have students observe and report what they see what they think is significant about the pieces. Then, share information about the anti-literacy laws at that time. We recommend utilizing the background information found in “Literacy as Freedom” from the Smithsonian American Art Museum as it ties historical information to both paintings (americanexperience.si.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Literacy-as-Freedom.pdf). After providing additional information, have students observe the paintings and determine their significance using this new knowledge.

Then, have students examine Alabama Slave codes of 1833 #31, 32, and 33 (archives.alabama.gov/teacher/slavery/lesson1/doc1-9.html), South Carolina Act of 1740 and Virginia Code of 1819 (thirteen.org/wnet/slavery/experience/education/docs1.html) using provided guide found in Appendix A. You may choose to have students work individually or in groups. We recommend closing by discussing the final prompt: What do Anti-literacy Laws teach us about the power of literacy?

Supporting Question 2

The second supporting question — Why and how did the enslaved resist and become literate? — emphasizes the resilience of enslaved and free Black persons as they fought to use literacy to achieve freedom. By examining this question:

- **Students will understand** that the enslaved resisted and found ways to become literate.
- **Students will understand** how it took courage, cooperation and perseverance for the enslaved to be heard.
- **Students will be able** to develop an understanding of the power of literacy and inclusive literature.

- **Students will be able** to identify examples of resistance.
- **Students will be able** to explain the ways abolitionists utilized literacy to promote change.

Begin by reading and discussing “The Value of Literacy to the Enslaved” found at edsitement.neh.gov/sites/default/files/2018-07/value-of-literacy-slaves.pdf. You may choose to have students read the text individually or in groups, or to read the text as a class. Before reading, set the purpose as determining how enslaved persons became literate and inferring the value of literacy in the enslaved community. Ask, is literacy freedom?

Continue by sharing Frances Ellen Watkins Harper’s poem “Learning to Read” found at edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plans/frances-ellen-watkins-harpers-learning-read. Introduce Frances Ellen Watkins Harper and how she used the character Aunt Chloe to narrate this poem. Have students read and annotate the poem using the student version PDF found on the webpage. Then, show the video “Learning to Read” with Frances Ellen Watkins Harper’s “Aunt Chloe” (2:15) found at youtube.com/watch?v=adKddL4_TWg. Discuss the purpose of the poem and the use of the Aunt Chloe character.

Finally, explain to students how and why education for freed Black Americans was emphasized during Reconstruction. Show the video “The Rosenwald Schools” (9:00) at youtube.com/watch?v=kfxfxSgSIGM to illustrate the significance of this movement as well as the challenges it faced through the Civil Rights Era. Close by having students complete the exit slip (Appendix B). To emphasize the courage and resilience needed to resist discriminatory laws and institutions of the time, discuss the final question: How did African Americans resist and create opportunities for education?

Supporting Question 3

The third supporting question — How did anti-slavery activists use literacy to promote change? — explores the methods employed by abolitionists, specifically newspapers, pamphlets, books, and lectures. It also emphasizes the importance of civic participation at the community level which can grow to have a more extensive impact. Students will also learn about the role of women in the anti-slavery movement, and two lesser-known abolitionists who utilized literacy in their work. By examining this question, students will:

- **Students will understand** that literacy provides power.
- **Students will understand** how it took courage, cooperation, and perseverance for the enslaved to be heard.
- **Students will be able** to analyze primary sources.
- **Students will be able** to identify the ways abolitionists utilized literacy to promote change.

Begin by reading about the Salem Female Anti- Slavery Society (blackpast.org/african-american-history/female-anti-slavery-society-salem-massachusetts-1832-1866) and the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society (explorepahistory.com/hmarker.php?markerId=1-A-105). Students should use the Female Anti-Slavery Societies guide (Appendix C) to guide and record their thinking.

Next, use the David Ruggles guide (Appendix D) to introduce David Ruggles and direct students to use information found at “Nov. 20, 1835: New York Committee of Vigilance Founded” (zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/new-york-committee-vigilance-ruggles) and “David Ruggles Center for History and Education: Anti-Slavery and Racial Equity Activism in New York” (davidrugglescenter.org/david-ruggles) to answer the prompts. You may wish to discuss the answers as a class. We recommend discussing the final prompt — How did participating in local organizations allow Ruggles to make an impact in both his local community and on a larger scale? — as a class to emphasize civic participation and draw parallels to modern day civic participation.

Finally, use the Sarah Parker Remond guide (Appendix E) to introduce Remond and direct students to use information found at “A voice for freedom: The Life of Sarah Parker Remond” (london.ac.uk/news-and-opinion/leading-women/a-voice-freedom-life-sarah-parker-remond) and “Biography of Sarah Parker Remond, North American 19th-Century Black Activist” (thoughtco.com/sarah-parker-remond-biography-4068400) to answer the prompts. Emphasize how Remond used her roots as a local activist to become a lecturer in England and Europe.

Students are prompted to analyze the primary source Black Abolitionists Archive. (n.d.). *Remond, Sarah Parker Anti-slavery Advocate*. University of Detroit Mercy. libraries.udmercy.edu/archives/special-collections/index.php?collectionCode=baa&record_id=1002. This is an opportunity to discuss the prompt — How did Remond use words, phrases, and imagery to promote her causes?

Supporting Question 4

The fourth supporting question — Why do we need to understand diverse narratives? — requires students to use what they learned about the past to improve the present. Students will learn how the enslaved got their stories told to the public, and the impact this had on the public’s understanding of society. Ultimately, students will understand the value hearing diverse voices. By examining this question, students will:

- **Students will understand** that literacy provides power.
- **Students will understand** how it took courage, cooperation and perseverance for the enslaved to be heard.
- **Students will understand** that the inclusion and exclusion of voices in modern literature is significant.
- **Students will be able** to identify examples of resistance.
- **Students will be able** to identify the ways abolitionists utilized literacy to promote change.
- **Students will be able** to apply their understanding of literacy laws and the power of literacy to advocate for the inclusion of multiple perspectives in modern literature.

Individually, in groups, or as a class, students should read and view the following:

- Africans in America. (n.d.). *Slave Narratives and Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. PBS. pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p2958.html
- CBS Evening News. (2017, April 18). 19th-century ads written by newly freed slaves tell story about chapter in history. YouTube. [youtube.com/watch?v=XoF_OgOI99c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XoF_OgOI99c) (2:15)
- *Berry, K. D. (2017, Jan. 25). Singing in Slavery: Songs of Survival, Songs of Freedom*. Mercy Street: PBS. pbs.org/mercy-street/blogs/mercy-street-revealed/songs-of-survival-and-songs-of-freedom-during-slavery

Use the prompts on Exit Slip: Slave Narratives (Appendix F) to guide discussion. Before answering the final prompt - Why is it important to include multiple perspectives in modern literature? Why do we need diverse books? – Debrief what students have learned about the power of literacy and getting your voice heard. Have students ponder what happens when voices are purposefully or unintentionally disregarded. View the campaign videos for “We Need Diverse Books” (diversebooks.org/about-wndb) and discuss the arguments provided.

Summative Performance Task & Taking Informed Action

In this inquiry, the Summative Performance Task and Taking Informed Action are combined.

As a summative task, students will create an argument as to why people should read diverse and inclusive texts representing an array of perspectives. Students will extend their learning by creating a class argument for the inclusion of diverse and inclusive texts representing an array of perspectives in their library (personal, school or local).

Students will need to research to better understand the importance of diverse texts and support their argument. Additionally, students should research the diversity and inclusiveness of the publishing industry and learn about how and why some texts are published while others are not.

To take informed action, students should evaluate the diversity and inclusiveness of texts representing multiple perspectives in their library (personal, school, or local). Students will present an argument for the inclusion of diverse and inclusive texts representing an array of perspectives in libraries (personal, school, or local) in a public forum. To promote action, students could generate a list of diverse and inclusive texts and generate funds to add them to their library (school or local).

Alternatively, students could begin a diverse and inclusive book club or create a must-read list of inclusive books where students provide overviews and reviews of texts.

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QE Adventurers. (2014, June 19). *The Rosenwald Schools*. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kfxfxSgSIGM>

Smithsonian American Art Museum. *Literacy as Freedom*. <https://americanexperience.si.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Literacy-as-Freedom.pdf>

The David Ruggles Center for History and Education. (2020). *David Ruggles: Anti-Slavery and Racial Equity Activism in New York*. <https://davidrugglescenter.org/david-ruggles/>

The Value of Literacy to the Enslaved. EDSITEment! The Material and Emotional Realities of Childhood in Slavery. <https://edsitement.neh.gov/sites/default/files/2018-07/value-of-literacy-slaves.pdf>

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University of London. (n.d.). *A voice for freedom: The Life of Sarah Parker Remond*. <https://london.ac.uk/news-and-opinion/leading-women/a-voice-freedom-life-sarah-parker-remond>

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