



Kansas Standards

Social Studies:

- KH8B3I4: Describe role of important individuals during territorial period (e.g., John Brown)
- KH8B8I3 Δ8: Examine and analyze historical documents.

Others:

- Reading 7-S1B4I11▲▲: Explain the relationship between elements of author's style and his purpose for writing the text.
- Writing 7-S3B9I1 & 2: Write a descriptive or narrative piece.

Objectives

Knowledge:

- John Brown believed violence was justified if it made Kansas a free state.
- John Brown made a personal commitment to the abolitionist cause.

Skills:

- Primary source
- Evaluate a written source
- Writing
- Retelling

Focus Questions

- What actions did John Brown take to support his abolitionist beliefs?
- What sacrifices did John Brown make in his efforts to make Kansas a free state?

Assessment Tools

- worksheet analysis of the John Brown letter
- class discussion
- newspaper article writing assignment

Activities

1. Introduce theme of Kansas Territory, free-state, the struggle over the slavery issue.
2. Introduce students to John Brown with the "Student Reading" worksheet.
3. Explore Brown's actions and personal commitment to the abolitionist cause in Kansas Territory with the worksheet "John Brown Speaks."
4. Using the focus questions for this lesson, lead a discussion about the students' exploration of John Brown through this letter.
5. The Battle of Osawatimie propelled John Brown to national recognition as accounts of it appeared in newspapers throughout the nation. Have students write a newspaper article about the Battle of Osawatimie from John Brown's perspective.



TEACHING INSTRUCTIONS

This lesson plan was prepared by the Education and Outreach Division, Kansas State Historical Society for Territorial Kansas Online. This cooperative project of the Kansas State Historical Society and the Kansas Collection, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas was made possible with funds provided by the Institute of Museum and Library Services--National Leadership Grants Program. This lesson plan may be reproduced for classroom use. Any other use or distribution of this lesson plan MUST CREDIT the web site www.territorialkansasonline.org, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the Kansas State Historical Society, and the Kansas Collection, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.

Prior Knowledge

Students

- have a basic understanding of the Kansas territorial period that includes the role of popular sovereignty and the struggle between proslavery and free-state supporters

Lesson Background

The purpose of this lesson is to examine one aspect of John Brown's life using a primary source. John Brown made a personal commitment when he decided to move to Kansas Territory to support the free-state cause. His commitment to ending slavery ultimately cost him his life. The primary source chosen for this lesson marks a turning point in John Brown's life, the Battle of Osawatomie.

Primary sources are valuable tools to use when learning about the past. Types of primary sources include diaries, photographs, census records, letters, and maps. Primary source materials are used as the basis for drawing conclusions or interpretations of past events. They are pieces from which we form a picture of the past.

Primary sources are not unbiased. They are influenced by the point of view of the person telling the story. For example, if two of your friends had a disagreement and e-mailed you about it each would probably tell only his, or her, side of the story. Both e-mails probably contain true information, but most likely neither contains all the information you need to fully understand what happened. It is important to learn to analyze primary sources for bias and credibility.



Who was John Brown?

Many people came to Kansas Territory to oppose slavery and support the free-state cause. One of these was John Brown.

John Brown was raised in a very religious family that did not believe in slavery. One time he stood up before a large crowd of people and vowed to spend his life helping to end slavery. He, his wife, and children all felt strongly that slavery should not exist.

Why was John Brown in Kansas Territory?

Five of John Brown's sons moved to Kansas Territory so they could vote for a free-state constitution. Two of his sons, John Jr. and Jason, brought their families with them. They wrote home that more help was needed to make Kansas a free state so John Brown followed them to Kansas Territory. His wife and younger children remained at home in northern New York.

Some people in Kansas Territory did more than just vote to make Kansas free. People fought over the issue of slavery. John Brown took part in these conflicts as well as led other supporters of the free-state cause. His oldest son, John Jr., was taken prisoner after one of his father's most violent attacks on proslavery settlers. John Jr. was in prison during the Battle of Osawatimie.

Because of his actions John Brown had to hide from proslavery supporters. Often he would live in the woods, use other names and hope people didn't recognize him, or hide at friends' homes.

What was the Battle of Osawatimie?

The proslavery territorial governor ordered the militia to attack free-state troops in late August 1856. Missourians welcomed this call to action and marched 250 men toward the town of Osawatimie, a free-state town. John Brown's son Frederick became the first casualty that day. He was shot as he walked to a neighbor's house to pick up some mail early on the morning of August 30. Word of the attack spread quickly to Brown and other free-state fighters camped near Osawatimie. They rushed to defend the town but were hopelessly outnumbered. As the free-state troops retreated, Brown was shot but not seriously hurt. He and his son Jason hid in the area for several days before traveling north to Lawrence. There he received a hero's welcome. The free-state forces lost the Battle of Osawatimie, but the conflict propelled Brown to national attention. He soon became known as John Brown of Osawatimie.



John Brown Speaks: Analyzing a Primary Source

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Lawrence, 7th Sept 1856

Dear Wife & children every one

I have one moment to write you to say that I am yet alive that Jason & family were well yesterday John [Jr.]; & family I hear are well (he being yet a prisoner). On the morning of the 30th of Aug an attack was made by the ruffians on Osawatomie numbering some 400 by whose scouts our dear Fredk was shot dead without warning he supposing them to be Free State men as near as we can learn. One other man a Cousin of Mr Adair was murdered by them about the same time that Fredk was Killed & one badly wounded at the same time. At this time I was about 3 miles off where I had some 14 or 15 men over night that I had just enlisted to serve under me as regulars. There I collected as well as I could with some 12 or 15 more & in about 3/4 of an Hour attacked them from a wood with thick undergroth. with this force we threw them into confusion for about 15 or 20 minuets during which time we killed & wounded from 70 to 80 of the enemy as they say & then we escaped as well as we could with one killed while escaping; two or three wounded; & as many more missing. Four or Five Free State men were butchered during the day in all. Jason fought bravely by my side during the fight & escaped with me he being unhurt. I was struck by a partly spent Grape Canister or Rifle shot which bruised me some but did not injure me seriously. "Neither to the Lord hath helped me" not withstanding my afflictions. Things now seem rather quiet just now; but what another Hour will bring I cannot say – I have seen Three or Four letters from Ruth & One from Watson of July or Aug which are all I have seen since in June. I was very glad to hear once more from you & hope you will continue to write to some of the friends so that I may hear from you. I am utterly unable to write you for most of the time May the God of of our Fathers bless & save you all

You affectionate Husband & Father — — — John Brown

Vocabulary

- Kansas Territory

- proslavery supporters

- short for Frederick, John Brown's son

- Brown's brother-in-law who lived in Osawatomie

- men Brown recruited to serve under him to fight for the free-state cause

- a "buckshot" type of cannister fired from a cannon

- Ruth and Watson are two of Brown's older children who remained in New York

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Name: _____

1. What type of primary source is this?
2. Who wrote it?
3. When and where was it created?
4. Who was meant to read it?
5. Decide which words or phrases in the letter indicate facts. Highlight these facts.
6. Does this piece contain enough facts to prove the author was present at the event being described?
7. Sometimes a reader can gain insight into a writer's emotions by the words the writer used. In a different color highlight any words or phrases that give you a clue to what the writer is feeling.
8. What emotions do these words convey?
9. How might these emotions influence the version of events being told by this writer?
10. What do these emotions tell you about the personal commitments John Brown made in his efforts to help make Kansas a free state?
11. Often an examination of a primary source will provide the reader with some information even while it suggests more questions to answer. What questions do you have after reading this piece?

A historian might ask, "Why did John Brown ask his wife to write to friends so that he could hear from her?"

John Brown took part in some very violent acts in Kansas. At the time he wrote this letter to his wife he was in hiding. He had no home in Kansas Territory. He had to rely on letters and notes passed along to him from friends who knew where to find him. He asked his wife to write to friends hoping that he would eventually be able to read her letters.