

# Rewriting the Narrative

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Suitable for History Classes Adaptable for Grade 8

## Lesson Overview

Students will analyze the ads in RunawayProject.info and Enslaved.org to learn more about those who self-liberated. Students will use the information provided and their creativity to rewrite or re-imagine the stories from a different perspective.

## Objectives

Slavery is something that we discuss throughout the year in American History. Our goal for this lesson is to humanize slavery for our students. We want them to develop a connection with individuals in the ads as they read about their lives and experiences.

## Number of Class Periods

We spent approximately five, 50 minutes class periods on this lesson. This is dependent on if you have the students explore the site while analyzing ads or if you provide them with collections of ads to use. Additionally, this is dependent on how many ads you want the students to analyze before creating their final products.

## Grade Levels

We created this lesson for our 8th grade American History class, but it is very easily adaptable for either elementary or high school students.

## Materials

[RunawayProject.info](https://runawayproject.info)

[Enslaved.org](https://enslaved.org)

Graphical Organizers x4

Project Options Handout

Research Graphic Organizer

Sample Student Art

## Pre-teaching Thoughts

In our 8th grade American History class, the story of slavery and resistance is woven into each and every unit. When we teach about different events in history, it is very important to us that our students learn about multiple perspectives and not just the story of the victor, conqueror, or enslaver. This particular lesson is one that we teach after learning about George Washington as our nation's first president. Students not only learn about the wonderful contributions that Washington made during our country's infancy, but they also learn about how he was an enslaver. Students learn about the enslaved people living at Mt. Vernon and use the Mt. Vernon website to learn about the lives of specific individuals who were enslaved there. We finish that unit by discussing the self-liberation of Hercules and Ona Judge. We then show the students the ad that was placed for Oney Judge, with the hopes that she would be returned to Mt. Vernon. Thankfully, she was able to live out the remainder of her life as a free woman and was never recaptured.

## Procedures

Then, we introduce the [RunawayProject.info](http://RunawayProject.info) website to our students and show them that tens of thousands of similar ads were placed for other individuals who self-liberated. The goal of this particular lesson was to help us humanize slavery for our students. By reading these individual ads, which tell us stories about the lives of those who self-liberated, we want our students to feel and develop a connection with someone they read about. We want our students to think about what the lives of these individuals might have been like. Of course we will never know the whole story, only the small snippets from those who were attempting to retrieve them and profit from them. But, with these ads, the enslavers and jailers are unknowingly giving us a glimpse into the lives of the people that they tried so hard to silence. Students wonder how these individuals got certain scars or injuries. They make the connection that many individuals self-liberated after being sold away from loved ones. They try to make sense of the reward amounts and wonder how it is possible that someone could possibly determine a dollar amount for the value of someone's life. They are disgusted and appalled. Then, we ask them to rewrite the narrative. Instead of telling the story of a particular individual from the perspective of an enslaver or jailer as these ads do, students are empowered to tell a new story. They tell stories of love, hope, family and freedom. They give a voice to those who were silenced.

To start, students dive into the ads on the website. You can either give them time to explore the site themselves or create collections for them to explore. We created a Charleston collection, Nashville collection, and New Orleans collection. We also made a collection of ads from Brazil that we obtained from [enslaved.org](http://enslaved.org). Collections are really nice to use if you are in a time crunch. Each of the collections that we made contain 20 ads and each ad was very intentionally selected so that students saw many different types of ads. Each collection includes:

- Stories of men, women, and families
- People traveling alone and together
- Ad of an individual who has been captured and currently jailed
- Important skills and occupations
- Ages are often unknown and estimated
- Upsetting injuries and scars
- Same ad reappearing weeks/months later

- An ad that has not been transcribed
- Attempting to pass as free or has created a free pass
- Reward is larger if captured outside of state or in a free state
- Warning to anyone who may be harboring these individuals
- Self liberating to reunite with loved ones

While reading the ads we ask students to collect data on a graphic organizer. We have the students read and discuss the ads in small groups while we circulate around the room answering questions and asking questions. For us, this is where a bulk of the learning takes place as students discuss and question the ads in small groups.

After student groups have read approximately 20 ads, we ask them to select the ad that they are most drawn to in the collection or through their own exploration of the website. We call this their “inspiration ad”. In our opinion, giving students as much choice as possible throughout this lesson is very important.

After each student has selected their inspiration ad, we provide them with the project options (examples: artwork based on the ad, video presentation, slide presentation, trifold presentation board, etc.) and discuss each project choice with the students. We also show them examples. Students are then asked to submit a quick survey to let us know their final product choices. Students are asked to complete these projects independently. The next day, we put the students in groups based on the projects they selected. Then, we have brief mini-lessons with the students to go over each project thoroughly and answer any questions that students may have about the project.

Let the creativity flow! Students work on their projects and we support them throughout the process and answer any questions they have along the way!

## Assessment

When returning to our goal of this lesson, which was to help humanize slavery for students, we were not concerned with “grading” this lesson. The only item that we graded was the data collection graphic organizer that students completed when they studied the ads. We can honestly say that all students turned in quality and emotionally moving work for their final projects. We did give them credit for submitting those projects as well but did not feel it appropriate to grade or judge their work. Therefore, students received a completion grade for their final projects.

\*This would also be a great opportunity to partner with your language arts teacher. Students could learn about different types of poetry and apply that knowledge to the creation of their final products.

This lesson aligns to key concepts [4](#), [5](#), [6](#) and [10](#) of Teaching Tolerance’s [Teaching Hard History Framework](#).