

Title: African Americans and the Port of Baltimore in the Nineteenth Century

Lesson Developed by: Jennifer Jones Frieman

Grade Level: 4, 8

Duration: 60 minute class period

MARYLAND VSC:

History: Grade 4

C. Conflict between Ideas and Institutions

2. Explain the political, cultural, economic and social changes in Maryland during the early 1800s
 - b. Describe the importance of changes in industry, transportation, education, rights and freedoms in Maryland, such as roads and canals, slavery, B&O railroad, the National Road, immigration, public schools, and religious freedoms

History: Grade 8

C. Conflict between Ideas and Institutions

4. Analyze the institution of slavery and its influence on societies in the United States
 - b. Analyze the experiences of African-American slaves and free blacks

Skills & Processes: Grade 3-5

D. Acquire Social Studies Information

1. Identify primary and secondary sources of information that relate to the topic/situation/problem being studied
 - c. Locate and gather data and information from appropriate non-print sources, such as music, artifacts, charts, maps, graphs, photographs, video clips, illustrations, paintings, political cartoons, interviews, and oral histories

Skills & Processes: Grade 6-8

D. Acquire Social Studies Information

1. Identify primary and secondary sources of information that relate to the topic/situation/problem being studied
 - c. Locate and gather data and information from appropriate non-print sources, such as music, artifacts, charts, maps, graphs, photographs, video clips, illustrations, paintings, political cartoons, multimedia, interviews, and oral histories

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- use primary sources to describe some of the ways African Americans contributed to the Port of Baltimore, and how enslaved African Americans were able to use port activities to their advantage.

Vocabulary:

See “Port Jobs Vocabulary” sheet within the lesson

Materials/Resources::

- Photocopy the primary sources:
 - Baltimore City Directory, 1849-1850. Maryland Historical Society. – 3 pages
 - Runaway slave ad, *The Sun*, January 8, 1849
 - Runaway slave ad, *The Sun*, August 27, 1858
 - Runaway slave ad, *The Sun*, October 1, 1847

Teacher Background:

During the early and mid-nineteenth century, the African American community, both free and enslaved, contributed a great deal to the economic activity of the Port of Baltimore. Maryland was a slave state, and the “peculiar institution” was firmly entrenched in the plantations of Southern Maryland and the lower Eastern Shore. But slavery was on the decline in the northern and western portions of the state, where the soil and climate favored the cultivation of wheat rather than labor-intensive tobacco. In Baltimore City and County, by 1860, free blacks outnumbered enslaved blacks by more than 5 to 1. In fact, Baltimore City’s free black community was the largest of any city in the nation and boasted its own churches, schools, and professionals. The presence of so many free blacks helped to mitigate the experience of slavery in Baltimore. Many enslaved African Americans were able to mingle with, work with, and often live among, free blacks. In some cases, plantation owners hired slaves out to work in Baltimore, where the enslaved blacks would live on their own and sometimes even arrange their own employment, paying their owner a high percentage of their wages. It was a degree of freedom a plantation slave would never know.

Many African Americans found employment related to the port’s activities. Free and enslaved blacks worked side by side building ships, loading and unloading cargo, transporting goods, and providing many other support services associated with Baltimore’s shipping industry. Early in the 1800s, free blacks held some of the more skilled and prestigious occupations, such as ship carpentry, and blacks dominated the caulking trade. Gradually, however, blacks were pushed into more menial jobs as restrictions on free blacks increased and competition with white workers, especially immigrants, grew. Still, the smooth operation of the Port of Baltimore owed much to the contributions of African Americans.

For enslaved blacks, port activities not only provided jobs, they also provided opportunities for escape. It was relatively easy for a runaway slave to hide himself among Baltimore’s large population of free blacks working along the wharves, and the constant traffic of ships provided possible means of transportation to the North. Some slaves sought positions on board ships as a way to escape their owners, hoping that they would find themselves in a free port at some point. Slaves in Southern Maryland and on the Eastern Shore often secreted themselves on board boats bound for the Port of Baltimore, disappearing into the crowd once the boats docked. In many such cases, these escaped slaves turned to friends and relatives living in Baltimore for assistance. Not surprisingly, for many slaves, the Underground Railroad tracked right through Baltimore’s waterfront.

Frederick Douglass was among the enslaved African Americans who worked in Baltimore’s Fells Point shipyards. Douglass was an enslaved man born on Maryland’s Eastern Shore. He was sent to Fells Point to work in the shipyards as a caulker at various times during the 1830s and took advantage of the opportunities available in a setting where enslaved people lived and worked alongside free blacks and whites. Douglass taught himself to read and write and was able to convince his owner to allow him to hire out his time. In 1838, he escaped slavery by dressing in a sailor’s uniform and carrying a free

black seaman's freedom papers as he took trains and steamboats from Baltimore to New York City. Douglass eventually settled in Massachusetts with his wife, a free woman he had met while living in Baltimore, and became a central figure and gifted orator in America's abolitionist movement. As a result of his fame as an abolitionist, a group of British abolitionists legally purchased Douglass' freedom by paying his old master. Douglass' connection to the Port of Baltimore continued long after he had fled the state, however. He was an early investor in Fells Point's Chesapeake Marine Railway and Dry Dock Company, a black-operated shipyard founded by free black Baltimorean Isaac Myers (later a national labor leader) and several other black and white investors just after the Civil War.

Lesson Development:

1. Ask students to define "port."
2. Ask students to describe the sorts of activities one might find going on at a port, e.g. loading and unloading ships, selling supplies for ships, building ships, etc. What sorts of jobs might one find being performed at a port?
3. Explain that, during the early and mid-1800s, Baltimore was one of the United States' major ports. The city's economy centered on shipping. A large portion of Baltimore's workforce did jobs that directly or indirectly supported port activities.
4. Briefly explain the status of African Americans in Baltimore in the first half of the nineteenth century: Slavery was legal in Maryland at this time. Enslaved African Americans were legally owned by another person. Enslaved people had to do whatever work their owner told them to do, and they were not paid for their work.* Not all African Americans were enslaved, however. Baltimore had the largest population of free black people in the country. Many of them found work in the port of Baltimore.
(* In Baltimore, some slaves WERE actually paid meager wages. Sometimes slaves were even allowed to live on their own and find their own employment, paying a very large percentage of their wages to their owners. Frederick Douglass himself lived under such an arrangement during part of his time in Fells Point. It is best not to get into such complexities with students of this age, however.)
5. Ask students to think about how African Americans, both free and enslaved, might have contributed to and benefited from being involved in the port's activities.

Part One: Free African American Jobs at the Port

1. Explain to students that they will be exploring some primary source documents to discover how African Americans might have contributed to the work of the Port of Baltimore.
2. This activity will contain quite a bit of difficult new vocabulary pertaining to various jobs. To familiarize students with these new terms, ask students to describe some jobs associated with a port. As students describe each type of work, provide them with the correct term for a person who does such work. For example, if students offer that people would need to build the ships, explain to students the terms "caulker," "ships carpenter," etc.
3. Divide the class into three groups, and distribute one page of the Baltimore City Directory of 1849-1850 to students of each group. Also distribute the vocabulary list. You may choose to have stu-

dents within the groups work in pairs.

4. Explain to students that the City Directory was like a phone book, except that there were no phones at the time. In alphabetical order, it listed the names of free people living in Baltimore with their address and occupation. White people and black people were listed in different sections. In the 1800s, African Americans were referred to as “colored” people, although this is a term that is not appropriate to use today. Enslaved people were not included in the City Directory.
5. Direct students to analyze their City Directory page to fill in the worksheet “Free African Americans Working in the Port of Baltimore, 1849-1850.”
6. When the groups are finished analyzing their pages, pull together the information from the three groups. On the overhead projector or chalkboard, list the various port jobs and record each group’s total number of people doing each job. Add the numbers together to find the grand total number of people doing each job, and then add these numbers together to find the grand total number of people doing any sort of port-related job.
7. Compare the grand total number of people doing any sort of port-related job to the total number of names listed on these three pages of the directory (286). Depending on the math abilities of your students, you may choose to find the percentage by dividing the number of people doing a port-related job by the total number of names listed. The point is to find that a large portion of African Americans were contributing directly to shipping in the Port of Baltimore.

(NOTE: THE CITY DIRECTORY FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS IS MORE THAN 60 PAGES LONG. REMIND STUDENTS THAT THEY ARE LOOKING AT A SMALL NUMBER OF THE TOTAL NUMBER OF AFRICAN AMERICANS LIVING IN BALTIMORE CITY IN 1849-50.

Part Two: Runaway Slaves and the Port

8. Explain that the African Americans listed in the City Directory were all free people, but that enslaved African Americans were working right alongside free African Americans, doing the exact same jobs.
9. Ask students whether they think an enslaved person would find advantages to working in and/or living near a port, where lots of ships come and go and there is a lot of activity always going on. How might this situation help an enslaved person?
10. Tell students that they are going to be examining runaway slave ads from the Baltimore Sun newspaper in the mid-1800s. Remind students that enslaved people were legally considered another person’s property. When they attempted to escape from slavery, usually to go to Northern states where slavery was illegal, their owners would put advertisements in the newspaper so that people would be on the lookout for the runaway slave and might help the owner get him or her back.
11. Keeping students in their three groups, distribute one ad to students in each group. Direct them to read the ad in pairs to answer the following FOCUS QUESTION: HOW DID THIS RUNAWAY SLAVE BENEFIT FROM THE PORT OF BALTIMORE’S ACTIVITIES?
 - Runaway ad for Henry, January 8, 1849 – Henry lived in Baltimore and was trying to get on board a ship to go to Philadelphia or New York, where he would be free.

- Runaway ad for Stewart, August 27, 1858 – Stewart was a sailor. Although he lived in Virginia, his work as a sailor on board his master’s schooner had taken him to Baltimore, where he had made friends and was well known. It is possible that he went to Baltimore to get help in escaping from his friends.
- Runaway ad for Isaac, October 1, 1847 – Isaac probably went to Baltimore on one of the sailboats that regularly sailed from Southern Maryland to Baltimore to bring goods to the market

12. After students have had time to analyze their ad, have each group share their findings with the class.

13. Discuss the many ways enslaved African Americans could use the Port of Baltimore to their benefit:

It was easy to blend into and find support from the many free and enslaved blacks who worked in the port. It was easy to find jobs in the port. Runaway slaves could find transportation on the many ships always coming and going.

Assessment:

Have students write a runaway slave advertisement for an enslaved African American named “Frederick” who escaped from a plantation on the Eastern Shore of Maryland and is thought to have come to Baltimore. In their ad, students should include the following information: Why did Frederick come to Baltimore? How did he get there? What is Frederick believed to be doing in Baltimore?

Closure:

Post the Runaway Slave Ads. Have the students view the ads in a Gallery Walk activity.