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Teaching American History Grant
Cape Cod
September 24, 2009

Unit:

Cotton, Slavery, and the Lowell Mills (The connection between the agricultural south and the industrial north).

Objectives:

- Students will be able to describe the effect the cotton gin had on the economy of the south, slavery, and the country as a whole.
- Students will be able to explain how the Industrial Revolution led to a rise in slavery and increased economic differences between the north and south.
- Students will be able to analyze the complex relationship between southern plantation owners and northern textile mill owners.
- Students will be able to describe the conditions of workers in the textile mills, and compare them with the conditions of slaves.

Activity #1: Introduction of Unit & Key Terms

- 1) Introduce the unit by showing students the cartoon titled “The innocent cause of all the trouble” (an overhead transparency copy is included). Discuss it with students
- 2) Pass out the worksheet titled “Cotton, Slavery, & the Lowell Mills.” Working in groups, students should complete the worksheet using materials in the room. This worksheet will serve as an overview for the unit.
- 3) As a class, discuss and add to students’ answers.

Assessment: Students must choose either the cotton gin or textile mill, and then make a drawing or illustration explaining how it worked.

Activity #2: Cotton & the Cotton Gin

- 1) Pass out raw cotton to students in the room and encourage them to try to get the seeds out. The cotton can be ordered at www.cottonman.com/cotton.htm.
- 2) Do the “Cotton Gin Role Play.” See the sheet included in this packet for direction and explanation of the role play.

Assessment: Students should write a brief essay, a “Pearl,” no more than 200 words, on how the Industrial Revolution actually increased economic differences between the north and south. If time, brainstorm in class possible ideas.

Activity #3: The Connection between Lowell and the South

- 1) Pass out copies of Document 2, from the “Cotton, Cloth, and Conflict” packet prepared by the Tsongas Industrial History Center and the Graduate School of Education at the University of Massachusetts at Lowell (copy included in packet). As a class, discuss the chart and the conclusions that students draw from it.

- 2) Then, pass out copies of Documents 8 and 9. Working in groups, students should read and the answer the questions. Each group should present one key conclusion they came away with from the documents.
- 3) As a class, discuss answers to the questions. Also, point out that while it was clear that Lowell was benefiting from slavery, and that there were ant-abolitionist feelings in Lowell, that there were also plenty of people in Lowell who did support abolition.

Activity #4: Who had it worse – slaves or mill workers?

- 1) Divide the class into 2 sides – the north and the south.
- 2) Then, tell those representing the north, that they need to defend the conditions of mill workers while condemning the conditions of slavery. Obviously, the southern side must do the opposite.
- 3) Then, pass out copies of the following to every student (included in packet):
 - Excerpts from the “Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass”
 - Document 16 (from same packet as Activity #3)
 - Document 18
 - Document 19
 - Document 20
 - Document 21
 - Document 22
- 4) Then, tell students, using these primary source documents, they need to make their case – attacking the other side while being prepared to defend your side.
- 5) As a class, debate the two sides.

Assessment: Write a “Pearl” taking the other side (from the one assigned in class) in the debate on whose conditions were worse.

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