

Creating Characters in a Historical Context: The Family Tree

By Rick Vanderwall

Overview

This lesson, which interrelates with the lesson **The Tragedy of Slavery and its Aftermath, in *Beloved: Establishing Contexts for Understanding***, allows students to better understand the lives of African Americans under slavery beyond what they glean reading documents and history books. Students will work in groups to develop a fictional family tree by creating characters drawn from the presentation groups of the above lesson. Each group will present the portion of the family tree that depicts the lives of family members during the particular time assigned to the groups. This activity will also may give students some experience in creating characters from the study of historic periods.

Student Objectives

Students will:

- Research issues and interests by generating ideas and questions and posing problems;
- Gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience (NCTE Standard 7);
- Apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts; and
- Draw on their previous experience, interactions with other readers and writers, knowledge of word meaning and other texts, word identification strategies, and understanding of textual features, such as sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, and graphics (NCTE Standard 3).

Skills Attained

Students will be able to:

- Organize information they obtain from websites and the video series to produce a fictional family tree; and
- Create a short obituary for each person on the tree.

The Lesson

Anticipatory Set

Instruct students to return to their research groups from the previous lesson, **The Tragedy of Slavery and its Aftermath, in *Beloved: Establishing Contexts for Understanding***.

Procedures

1. Outline the process of creating timelines (three class periods).
2. Give the timeline handout, with a sample, to each group.
3. Have each group decide on the basic names and personalities of the family members.
4. Assign family members to group members who write a short obituary of each one.
5. Have groups present their timelines to the class.

Assessment

Grading Areas	Point Distribution
Group points for group timeline and presentation	50%
Individual points for obituary essay	50%

Family Tree Instructions Handout

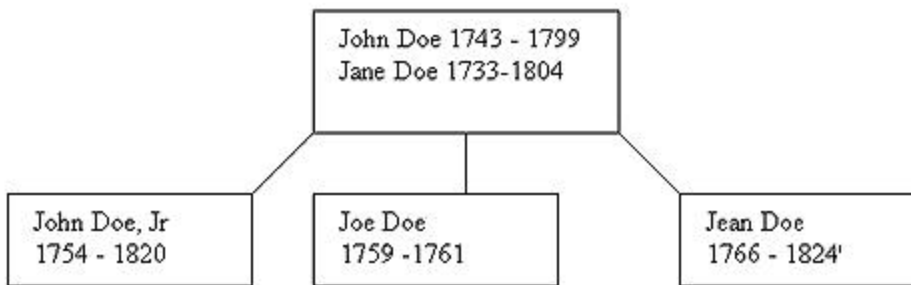
Your class has been divided into four groups. Your assignment is to take the period of the history of slavery your group researched and create a family tree. Your group is Group #_____.

Your group's period of the history of slavery is: (circle your assigned part)

1. The Terrible Transformation, 1450-1750
2. Revolution, 1750-1805
3. Brotherly Love, 1791-1831
4. Judgment Day, 1831-1863

Take the information your group has gathered and create a fictional family tree for that period. Once your tree is complete, each member of the group should select members of the tree, then write a short obituary for each member of the family tree he or she has selected.

Family Tree Sample



Make sure your obituary contains dates of birth and death and a "survived /preceded by," naming family members who are still living and those who have died, in the death statement. Finally, the obituary should include a one-paragraph narrative relating the major life events that occurred during the subject's lifetime.

Rick Vanderwall is the Chair of the Language Arts Department at Malcolm Price Laboratory School in Cedar Falls, Iowa.