**SLAVE OPTIONS**

At its core, history is about choices—which ones were available, who got to make them and what impact did they have. To make sense of the history of the Civil War and slavery, our approach is to access this topic through this notion of choice. Who was making the decisions? How did so few people decide the destiny of so many? It is also imperative to recognize the power of the seemingly powerless to make choices about that which they could, to take chances, to control those aspects of their lives that they could.

This lesson is a template that you may expand or adapt to your students’ needs and interests. The questions included are just a starting point.

**Procedure**

1. We suggest you begin with the students’ own lives. Ask them a series of seemingly basic questions about themselves. They are listed on the Student Sheet. You may have them create a chart with several columns. Label the first column ME. The next one could be for Amos, a 14 year old slave in 1850 South Carolina. The third column could be for Mrs. Jones, the wife of Amos’ owner.
2. Number their chart, to begin with, 1-6. Have them answer YES or NO to the following:
3. Do you go to school?
4. Do you live with your family?
5. Are you allowed to read?
6. When you grow up, could you be President of the United States?
7. When you grow up, will you be allowed to get married?
8. When you grow up, will you buy a house?

They will respond YES to all of these questions.

1. Now have them answer the questions as Amos would have. For Amos, all answers would have been NO. And Mrs. Jones. About half or more of her answers would have been NO as well. Discuss that even white women of privilege had limited freedoms in the antebellum South.
2. Now transfer the lesson to the realities of how decisions were actually made at that time. Introduce the Identities from he *Torn in Two* exhibition. Have the students assume some or all of these personas and answers these questions as the Identities.
3. Have them answer these questions that would have been pertinent to an antebellum audience:
4. Would you return a runaway slave
5. Would have voted yea or nay on the Kansas-Nebraska Act
6. Did you support the Dred Scott Case
7. Did you vote for Lincoln
8. Would you have voted for secession?
9. Look at the Slave Owner chart with your Students. Who was actually making the choices in the United States South during the antebellum period?

The conversation that ensues is up to you and your students. What did freedom mean? Under what circumstances do people have control over their lives? The lives of others? When is it OK to break the rules? The law?

**Time Allocation:** 30-45 minutes

**Materials Needed**

Identities from the *Torn in Two: 150th Anniversary of the Civil War* exhibition

Slave Owner Chart

**Assessment Criteria**

Again, up to the goals you set for you and your students.

**Enrichment Activities**

Have the Identities debate any of the questions raised in #5 above.

**Common Core Curriculum Standards**

English/Language Arts: History/Social Studies. 9-12

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.9](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RH/9-10/9/) Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.9](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RH/11-12/9/) Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

What does it mean to be free? What choices do you get to make in your life? What happens to people who do not get to make choices? Might they decide to take the law into their own hands?

**Assignment**

Use this space to make your Slave Options Chart

***Slave Owner Chart (based on 1850 census data)***

**Number of Slaves Owned** **Number of Slave Owners**

* 1. 68,820

between 1-5 105, 683

between 5-10 80, 765

between 10-20 54,595

between 20-50 29,733

between 50-100 6,196

between 100-200 1479

between 200-300 187

between 300-500 56

between 500-1000 9

more than 1000 2