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**Seminar in Teaching American History: Women in American History**  
**Dr. Susan Williams**  
**July 2006**

**CLASS:** Women in American History

**GRADE LEVEL:** 8

**TOPIC:** Contributions of women to the Abolitionist Movement

**STANDARDS:**

US History I- Learning Standard: **USI 31:** Describe the formation of the abolitionist movement, the roles of various abolitionists, and the response of southerners and northerners to abolition.

**Essential Question:** How did women contribute to the Abolitionist Movement?

**Objectives:** Students will understand that a book of historical fiction, Uncle Tom's Cabin was a powerful tool in the Abolitionist Movement.

Students will understand that a historical narrative, Harriet Jacobs Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl was also a powerful tool in the Abolitionist Movement.

Students will identify the breakup of the family as a common theme in each book and as a major factor fueling the Abolitionist Movement.

**SCHEDULE/MATERIALS:**

Overhead of Uncle Tom's Cabin fact sheet.

Copy of Uncle Tom's Cabin or copies of select pages.

Copy of Harriet Jacobs Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, or copies of select pages.

**TIME:** Two 55 minute Social Studies Blocks

**DAY ONE ACTIVITIES:**

After studying about abolitionists and the Abolitionist Movement introduce students to the novel, Uncle Tom's Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe. Make sure they understand this is a novel of historical fiction. Outline on an overhead the following information (or duplicate it in a handout):

**UNCLE TOM'S CABIN** by Harriet Beecher Stowe. Published in 1852.

-Sold 10,000 copies the first week.

- Sold 300,000 copies the first year.

-First American novel to sell one million copies.

**NORTH:**

-Plays, poems songs created from scenes from the novel.

- Dioramas, engraving, figurines, candles, plates, busts, embossed spoons, painted scarves, needle point, games (one reuniting families separated by slavery) were created.
- By the end of the year, 300 babies from Boston were named Eva, the novel's heroine.

## **SOUTH**

- In some regions the novel was not sold or not advertised.
- Southerners who read the novel were outraged.
- Subject of scathing reviews.
- The character of Harriet Beecher Stowe was attacked.

## **MISCELLANEOUS**

- In the preface of the novel Stowe writes of her intention to awaken "sympathy and feeling for the African race...under a system so cruel and unjust"
- Queen Victoria is reported to have cried while reading the novel.
- In 1862 Abraham Lincoln may have greeted Stowe with, "So, you are the little woman who made this great war."

After introducing Uncle Tom's Cabin to the class hand out photocopies of an excerpt from Chapter 12 **Select Incident of Lawful Trade** (page 127-129 Barnes & Noble Classic edition).

Set the scene: Explain to the class how Uncle Tom has been sold by a good master who found himself in debt. He is very saddened to be separated from his family but tries to find comfort in his religion. The slave trader Haley who has purchased him has also purchased other slaves to be sold at auction with him. A slave named Lucy and her baby are part of this group.

Read aloud the excerpt as the students follow along with their photocopies (the language can be difficult and students will comprehend more if the teacher reads).

Ask for volunteers to analyze the passage. Guide students to pinpoint important parts: Lucy's baby is cruelly snatched from her and sold when she is not looking, Haley has no human compassion for Lucy and is desensitized to the trauma associated with separating slave families, Tom witnesses this and unlike Haley feels terrible for Lucy and the wrong that has been done to her and her baby. Tom tries to comfort Lucy but she is distraught. Lucy throws herself overboard and drowns.

Ask the students: **Why was this novel an important tool for abolitionists? What kind of a reaction do you have to this passage and why?**

Record their brainstormed responses on the board. Do not erase. Save for day two. Focus the student's attention to the emotional response to the passage. (I

personally cried at this passage the first time I read it and will share that with the students). Read over a piece of the excerpt focusing on Lucy's anguish and/ or encourage students to do the same to stress the point they are making. Help students to realize that human compassion that readers felt toward the slaves in the novel fueled abolitionist sentiments. The breakup of the family was the heart of the abolitionist's cry. Book sales skyrocketed in the North and around the world.

No Homework at the end of day one.

## **DAY TWO ACTIVITIES:**

Explain to students that today they are going to read a passage from the narrative of an escaped slave. Make sure they understand the difference between Uncle Tom's Cabin and the Jacob's narrative. Introduce them to Harriet Jacobs known as Linda Brent and hand out photocopies of an excerpt from Chapter 1 **Childhood** (pages 8-11, Dover Thrift Edition).

Read aloud the excerpt as students follow along with their photocopies.

Ask for volunteers to analyze the passage. Guide students to pinpoint important parts: What is her father's greatest wish? Did he succeed? What does her grandmother save her money for? What happens to her grandmother's children? What does her mistress promise her mother as her mother is dying? Does the mistress honor this promise? Analyze the last two sentences in the chapter: "Notwithstanding my grandmother's long and faithful service to her owners, not one of her children escaped the auction block. These God-breathing machines are no more, in the sight of their masters, than the cotton they plant, or the horses they tend."

Ask the students: **Was this novel an important tool for abolitionists?  
What kind of a reaction do you have to this passage and why?**

Record their brainstormed responses on the board next to the responses from the previous day.

Now compare the passage from day one to the passage from day two. What is the common thread between the two?

## **ASSESSMENT:**

For homework students must answer the question: "How did Harriet Beecher Stowe and Harriet Jacobs contribute to the Abolitionist Movement in a five paragraph essay. Encourage students to focus on the breakup of the family and to quote from the passages.

**REFERENCES:**

**Jacobs, Harriet**, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, New York, Dover Publications Inc., 2001.

Stowe, Harriet Beecher, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, New York, Barnes & Noble Books, 1852, 2003.