

LESSON PLAN: FREEDOM

Read “The Remarkable Life of Venture Smith,” *Where I Live: Connecticut*.

Next, read the following selections from Venture Smith’s life story as he told it in 1798.

| Excerpt from Venture Smith’s Memoir: | For Young Readers: |
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| <p>1. When Venture was a young boy</p> <p>The reader is here presented with an account, not of a renowned politician or warrior, but of an untutored slave, brought into this Christian country at eight years of age, wholly destitute of all education but what he received in common with other domesticated animals, enjoying no advantages that could lead him to suppose himself superior to the beasts, his fellow servants. And, if he shall derive no other advantage from perusing this narrative, he may experience those sensations of shame and indignation that will prove him to be not wholly destitute of every noble and generous feeling.</p> | <p><i>This passage is from the introduction. It was likely written by the man who wrote down Venture’s story. He says: Here Venture’s story. It’s not the story of a famous man. It’s the story of an enslaved person who was never allowed to go to school. It’s the story of how Venture was brought to America when he was 8 years old. And how he was treated like the animals on a farm and made to believe he was no better than the animals.</i></p> <p>I hope when you read his story, you will feel ashamed and angry. This will show you have compassion.</p> |
| <p>The first of the time of living at my master's own place, I was pretty much employed in the house at carding wool and other household business. In this situation I continued for some years, after which my master put me to work out of doors. After many proofs of my faithfulness and honesty, my master began to put great confidence in me. My behavior to him had as yet been submissive and obedient. I then began to have hard tasks imposed on me. Some of these were to pound four bushels of ears of corn every night in a barrel for the poultry, or be rigorously punished. At other seasons of the year, I had to card wool until a very late hour. These tasks I had to perform when I was about nine years old.</p> | <p>I first lived on my owner George Mumford’s farm. I worked in the house most of the time. I prepared sheep’s wool to spin into yarn. I did other tasks in the house, too.</p> <p>I worked at tasks inside the house for several years. When I was old enough I worked outside. I gained my master’s trust by being faithful and honest. I obeyed him. But he only made my work harder. I had to pound many ears of corn into chicken feed. If I didn’t do this, I was punished.</p> <p>In the winter, I had to card wool until late at night.</p> <p>I was only 9 years old.</p> |
| <p>2. When Venture was Young Man</p> | |
| <p>I asked my master one time if he would consent to have me purchase my freedom. He replied that he would. I was then very happy,</p> | <p>I asked my owner Oliver Smith if he would let me buy my freedom from him. He agreed. I was very happy because I had some money</p> |

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| <p>knowing that I was at that time able to pay part of the purchase money by means of the money which I some time buried. This I took out of the earth and tendered to my master....What was wanting in redeeming myself, my master agreed to wait on me for, until I could procure it for him. I still continued to work for Colonel Smith. [Money I borrowed and] which I got by fishing, I laid out in land adjoining my old master Stanton's. By cultivating this land with the greatest diligence and economy, at times when my master did not require my labor, in two years I laid up ten pounds.</p> | <p>saved. I had buried it to keep it safe. I dug it up and paid it to him. He agreed to wait for the rest. I continued to work for Oliver Smith. I borrowed some money. I earned more by fishing. I bought some land next to my old master Stanton's land. I farmed this land when I could. With hard work and careful use of my money, I earned and saved another £10.</p> |
| <p>3. When Venture Was an Old Man</p> | |
| <p>...But amidst all my griefs and pains, I have many consolations: Meg, the wife of my youth, whom I married for love and bought with my money, is still alive. My freedom is a privilege which nothing else can equal. Notwithstanding all the losses I have suffered by fire, by the injustice of knaves, by cruelty of my own countrymen whom I have assisted and redeemed from bondage, I am now possessed of more than one hundred acres of land, and three habitable dwelling houses. It gives me joy to think that I have and that I deserve so good a character, especially for truth and integrity.</p> | <p>Even with the grief and pains of old age, I have comforts. Meg, my wife, whom I married for love and bought with my money, is alive. I value my freedom above all else. I have suffered many losses. Losses from fire, and dishonest white people. I have suffered cruelty of other Africans who I had helped to get free from slavery. But I now own more than 100 acres of land and three houses. It gives me joy to think that I have the reputation of a man of good character. I am known as someone who is truthful and honest.</p> |

Inquiry Activity:

1. Research the definition of "Freedom."
2. In small groups, closely read the excerpts of Venture Smith's memoir. Answer these questions:

Excerpt 1: When Venture was a young boy

1. How does the man who wrote down Venture's story describe him? Look for clues in the reading about what he compares him to.

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2. What does that tell you about what it like to be enslaved?
3. What does he hope the reader will feel after reading Venture's story?
4. What kind of work did Venture do when he was a young boy?
5. How does he describe his behavior?
6. Was his behavior punished or rewarded?

Excerpt 2: When Venture was a young man

1. How did Venture plan to get his freedom?

Excerpt 3: When Venture was an old man

1. Do you think Venture had a hard life or an easy life?
2. What was he most proud of?

Communicating Conclusions

Based on your reading and thinking about what freedom means, create a poster, Google slide show, song, or poem about Venture Smith. Include what freedom means to you.

Places to Visit:

Venture Smith's gravesite is located at First Church Cemetery, 489 Town Street, East Haddam, Connecticut.

Glossary:

Bushel: a unit of measure for fruit and grain. About 125 apples makes up a bushel.

Destitute: without something that is needed

Diligence: careful hard work

Knave: a dishonest person

Redeem: to buy back or pay back

Renown: great fame and respect

Rigorous: very strict and demanding, hard to endure

Submissive: obey someone else

Tender: to give as payment