

*Center for Technology and Teacher Education*

*Attitudes About Slavery in a Northern Community  
on the Eve of the Civil War*



Curry School of Education  
University of Virginia

Credits  
Alice Carter

Users should note that some materials on this site may be protected by the U.S. Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S.C.). This article may be copied in its entirety for personal or educational use.

## *Attitudes about Slavery in a Northern Community on the Eve of the Civil War*

### **Description of Module:**

- **Discipline:** U.S. History
- **Specific Lesson Topic:** Attitudes about Slavery in a Northern Community on the Eve of the Civil War
- **Methodology:** Primary Sources

### **K-12 Objectives:**

1. Compare and contrast differing sets of ideas, values, personalities, behaviors, and institutions by identifying likenesses and differences.
2. Consider multiple perspectives of various peoples in the past by demonstrating their differing motives, beliefs, interests, hopes, and fears.
3. Evaluate major debates among historians concerning alternative interpretations of the past.
4. Formulate historical questions from encounters with historical documents.
5. Interrogate historical data by uncovering the social, political, and economic context in which it was created; testing the data source for its credibility, authority, authenticity, internal consistency and completeness; and detecting and evaluating bias, distortion, and propaganda by omission, suppression, or invention of facts.
6. Demonstrate understanding of how the North and South differed and how politics and ideologies led to the Civil War.

### Materials Needed:

- This lesson is designed for a traditional (non-computer) classroom setting. Teachers may, however, choose to have students use the newspaper search page for the Franklin Repository and Valley Spirit to search for articles on slavery themselves.
- **Teachers who do so should be prepared for students' coming across extremely derogatory racial terms that may be upsetting or confusing.**
- Unless you plan to have students conduct their own [newspaper search](http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/vshadow2/news/news2.html) (<http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/vshadow2/news/news2.html>), print and copy [Student Worksheet One](#) (<http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/teacherlink/social/modules/attitudes/Northernattwkst1.htm>) in advance. This worksheet contains:
  - an article from the Franklin Repository and Transcript, the Republican newspaper,
  - an article from the Valley Spirit, the Democratic newspaper, and
  - questions for the students to answer after they have read the article(s).
- [Student Worksheet Two](#) (<http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/teacherlink/social/modules/attitudes/Northernattwkst2.html>) contains more articles and a follow-up essay assignment.
- If necessary, review the historical background contained on the following page.

### **Historical Background:**

The new Republican Party was formed largely around opposition to the westward expansion of slavery. Many prominent Republicans, such as William Seward and Abraham Lincoln, had publicly expressed their moral opposition to slavery. Taking advantage of the Republican Party's association with anti-slavery sentiment, Democrats charged the Republicans with advocating racial equality. Republican leaders knew that the party could never win a majority if it were associated with such radical ideas, so it frequently couched its opposition to the expansion of slavery in terms of a commitment to the welfare of white workers.

In response, the Democratic Party argued that the welfare of white workers depended not upon the limitation but upon the preservation of slavery. Any moves to weaken slavery would result in a decrease of white workers' economic and political power, because it would bring free black workers into wage competition with whites. This position allowed Democrats to appeal to both northerners and southerners, and thus allowed it to remain a strong political force.

Students will be reading articles from the Franklin Repository & Transcript, the county's Republican newspaper, and the Valley Spirit, the county's Democratic newspaper

## Procedures:

1. Brief students on as much of the background material that you think that they need to complete the exercise.
2. Students can work in teams of two to three or on their own. Hand out [Student Worksheet One](http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/teacherlink/social/modules/attitudes/Northernattwkst1.htm) (<http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/teacherlink/social/modules/attitudes/Northernattwkst1.htm>).
3. Instruct students to read one or both of the articles, take notes and underline to help with comprehension, and answer questions on worksheet.
4. When students have completed their task, reconvene whole group to share findings.
5. Questions for whole class discussion (after they have shared the answers on their worksheet):
  - What did both parties' messages about slavery have in common?
  - What influence might electoral politics have had on how these parties framed their positions?
  - Based on what you have learned today, will the Democrats and Republicans of Franklin County be committed to granting equal rights to African Americans once slavery is abolished?
  - "The cause of the Civil War was the sectional conflict over slavery." To what extent do the documents we have read support this interpretation?

## Assessment

*K-12:*

- Read the articles and answer the essay question in [Student Worksheet Two](http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/teacherlink/social/modules/attitudes/Northernattwkst2.html)  
<http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/teacherlink/social/modules/attitudes/Northernattwkst2.html>
- Use the articles in [Student Worksheet One](http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/teacherlink/social/modules/attitudes/Northernattwkst1.htm)  
<http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/teacherlink/social/modules/attitudes/Northernattwkst1.htm>  
and [Student Worksheet Two](http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/teacherlink/social/modules/attitudes/Northernattwkst2.htm)  
<http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/teacherlink/social/modules/attitudes/Northernattwkst2.htm>  
as well as your textbook and other material in the Valley Archives to write an essay on the causes of the Civil War.

## Standards:

[\*National History Standards: Standards in Historical Thinking\*](#)

- Standard 3: Historical Analysis and Interpretation
- Standard 4: Historical Research Capabilities Era
- Standard 5: Civil War and Reconstruction

[\*Virginia Standards of Learning\*](#)

[\*National Council for the Social Studies\*](#)

Strand II. Time, Continuity, and Change  
Strand V. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions