



The Experience of Michael Shiner, an African American at the Washington Navy Yard, 1813–69: Instructor's Guide



Hand-tinted woodcut depicting fishermen working in the Eastern Branch (present-day Anacostia River), April 1861. The shiphouses and shops of the Washington Navy Yard are visible in the background.

Source: U.S. Navy Art Collection, Naval History and Heritage Command, Washington, DC.

Essential Question

- ⚙ How might we use Michael Shiner's diary to understand his values, aspirations, and accomplishments?

Instructor's Guide:

The Experience of Michael Shiner, an Enslaved Worker at the Washington Navy Yard, 1813–69

Duration

80 minutes (double period or two single periods)

Grades

9–12

Subjects

- ✿ Social Studies
- ✿ U.S. History and Government

Materials Needed

Student Packet (one per student)

Field-Specific Vocabulary

- ✿ antebellum
- ✿ plantations
- ✿ enslaver
- ✿ enslaved person
- ✿ slaver
- ✿ manumission
- ✿ Confederacy/confederates
- ✿ emancipation

Planning and Preparation

Classroom arrangement: pairs or individual desks, instructor's discretion.
Prior knowledge for the instructor to have:

- Slavery and race in the antebellum United States
- The American Civil War
- Slavery and racism in 19th-century Washington, DC
- General sense of the major wars of the period 1812–65

Skills and Competencies Objectives

- Analyze a diary as evidence.
- Build an argument by setting two or more quotations in conversation.
- Establish context by combining and evaluating information in sources.
- Use evidence to demonstrate the validity of an argument.

Content Objectives

- Identify the relationship between slavery and the growth and stability of the United States before the Civil War.
- Appreciate the dignity of an enslaved and later free African American.
- Assess the formation of uniquely African-American identities in processes of enslavement, emancipation, and freedom.

Essential Question

- ✿ How might we use Michael Shiner's diary to understand his values, aspirations, and accomplishments?

Sequence of Activities

The lesson (and formative assessment) is designed for a double block (1 hour, 20 minutes) or two class periods (40 minutes each). The homework (summative assessment) is designed to take 30 to 45 minutes.

At the instructor's discretion, this lesson could expand to include more time for discussion and/or direct instruction. The lesson also contains an optional extension exercise for deeper engagement with the topic and themes.

Sequence of Activities (continued)

1. Distribute the Student Packets.
2. Read the context section aloud with the students and answer any questions about slavery and 19th-century racism in the United States; the legal peculiarities of Washington, DC; and the Civil War.
3. Read “About This Source” and Selection 1 together and model with the students how to analyze a source.
4. Put the students in groups of two or three and have them read and discuss the rest of the source selection. Working together, they should complete the worksheet (formative assessment).
5. Collect the worksheets and redistribute them in random order around the classroom. For questions A, B, and C, ask the students to share answers from the worksheets in hand. For question D, initiate group discussions or discuss as a class.
6. Return worksheets to their respective authors. Allow students to make any corrections or additions to their worksheets from what they learned during the activity (and/or discussion).
7. Explain the homework assignment (summative assessment).
8. At the next class, collect both the formative (worksheet) and summative assessments.

*Please note: This lesson plan does not contain rubrics. The intent is for the plan to be malleable enough for integration into an existing skills-based curriculum. It is therefore recommended that the instructor use those rubrics with which the students are already familiar.

Assessments

Formative: Student worksheet (self- or peer-assessed)

Summative: Homework paragraph (instructor-assessed)

Optional Summative for Extension Exercise: Analytic response (instructor-assessed)

Further Reading

The diary of Michael Shiner, available for download and in the original script at <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/d/diary-of-michael-shiner.html>.

“Washington Navy Yard,” <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/browse-by-topic/organization-and-administration/installations/washington-navy-yard.html>.

Learning Standards Sources

Common Core: State Sponsored Initiative—Preparing America’s Students for College and Career, accessed 11 September 2019, <http://www.corestandards.org/>.

National Council for the Social Studies, “National Curriculum for Social Studies: Executive Summary,” accessed 11 September 2019, <https://www.socialstudies.org/standards/execsummary>.

Adjustments in Relation to Common Core Standards

This lesson adheres to the pedagogical adjustments required by the Common Core standards as implemented by the states. This lesson is a series of skills-based activities designed to develop students’ competencies with respect to the Common Core.

Learning Standards

Common Core Learning Standards in ELA and Literacy in History/Social Studies

For Grades 9 and 10

RH.9–10.1; RH.9–10.2; RH.9–10.3; RH.9–10.4

For Grades 11 and 12

RH.11–12.1; RH.11–12.2; RH.11–12.3; RH.11–12.4; RH.11–12.5; RH.11–12.7; RH.11–12.8

Common Core Learning Standards in ELA and Literacy in Reading Informational Texts

For Grades 9 and 10

CR.9–10.1; CR.9–10.3; CR.9–10.4; CR.9–10.5; CR.9–10.6; CR.9–10.8

For Grades 11 and 12

RI.11–12.1; RI.11–12.4; RI.11–12.6

Common Core Learning Standards in ELA and Literacy in Writing

For Grades 9 and 10

WHST.9–10.1; WHST.9–10.1A; WHST.9–10.1B; WHST.9–10.1C; WHST.9–10.2; WHST.9–10.2C; WHST.9–10.4; WHST.9–10.5; WHST.9–10.9

For Grades 11 and 12

WHST.11–12.1; WHST.11–12.1A; WHST.11–12.1B; WHST.11–12.2B; WHST.11–12.2C; WHST.11–12.4; WHST.11–12.5; WHST.11–12.9

National Council for the Social Studies Themes

- ✿ Culture
- ✿ Time, Continuity, and Change
- ✿ Individual Development and Identity
- ✿ People, Places, and Environments
- ✿ Power, Authority, and Governance
- ✿ Production, Distribution, and Consumption
- ✿ Science, Technology, and Society
- ✿ Global Connections