

Harpers Ferry and the Story of John Brown

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STUDY GUIDE

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Where History and Geography Meet

Today, John Brown's war against slavery can be seen as a deep, divisive influence on the course of mid-19th century American politics. This Study Guide, along with the book *John Brown's Raid* and the video *To Do Battle in This Land*, is designed to help junior and senior high school teachers prepare their students to understand this essential issue in American history. It can also be used to lay the groundwork for a visit to Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, where travelers can explore firsthand the places associated with the event that intensified national debate over the slavery issue and helped to bring on the Civil War.

Harpers Ferry and the Story of John Brown

STUDY GUIDE

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Contents

Introduction

The Study Guide and How to Use It 4

Using the Book and Video

Synopsis 6

Pre-viewing Discussion Questions and Activities 7

Post-viewing Discussion Questions and Activities 8

Extended Lessons

Law, Politics, Government, and Religion 10

The Importance of Geography 12

Slavery and the Constitution 13

Property and Economics 14

The Role of the Media 15

Women's Rights 16

Literature 17

Music 18

Resources

Glossary 19

Chronology of John Brown's Life and Related Events 20

Chronology of John Brown's Raid on Harpers Ferry, 1859 22

Harpers Ferry and Vicinity in 1859 24

Harpers Ferry in 1859 25

U.S. Armory and Arsenal in 1859 26

Harpers Ferry Today 27

Books for Students	28
Audiovisual Resources	30
Books for Teachers	31
Visiting Harpers Ferry	32

Learning Places in the Parks

Although schools, libraries, and museums provide the foundation for a sound educational system, our physical surroundings also offer fertile opportunities for scholastic development. Like other nations, the United States draws upon its many natural and historical sites as “learning labs” for the young. These out-of-doors classrooms augment school studies, stimulating the desire to learn from the environment itself.

A century ago, in 1891, Professor Rollin Sallsbury of the University of Chicago, took geology students to what was soon to be Glacier National Park for a summer of field exploration in that remarkable mountain setting. Now, more formally called *interpretation*, park educational work has expanded to encompass the places, events, and individual contributions that have shaped the American experience. National parks offer opportunities to study geography, history, and the natural sciences in settings that are part of our national culture. Whether indoors with effective teaching tools or afield in these great natural or historical settings, parks are places with a special invitation for people to learn.

Introduction

The Study Guide and How to Use It

In 1859, John Brown and the 21 men known as his “raiders” took up arms against slavery in Harpers Ferry, Virginia (now West Virginia). At the time of the raid, four million people in the United States were slaves. Within the next year-and-a-half, the issue of slavery would be crucial in a war that would cost 600,000 lives and rip the country apart.

Although there is disagreement over some details about what happened at Harpers Ferry, the basic facts concerning John Brown’s attack are not in dispute. Brown and his men secured the two bridges into town, freed slaves from surrounding farms and plantations, and took hostages. Within a few hours, four townspeople, ten raiders, three liberated slaves, and one marine had been shot and killed in what would become known as “John Brown’s Raid.” Brown was captured and, before the year was out, tried and executed.

These are well-documented events of American history. Their importance lies in what they mean, both to the people of the mid-19th century and to students today. The Park Service has prepared classroom materials to help teachers in junior and senior high schools explore that meaning with their students.

This Study Guide is based on the following two instructional aids:

1. *John Brown’s Raid*, a 70-page paperback book that chronicles Brown’s life, his commitment to abolishing slavery, his raid on Harpers Ferry, and his trial and execution.
2. *To Do Battle in the Land*, a 26-minute video about John Brown’s raid narrated by actor Ossie Davis.

To get the most out of the Study Guide, start with the following sections:

Using the Book and Video, which includes a synopsis of the book and video as well as pre-viewing and post-viewing discussion and activities related to the video as a whole; and

Extended Lessons, which suggests ways of using both video and book to focus on specific parts of the curriculum, such as government, social history, geography, economics, literature, art, and music. Lessons contain classroom activities as well as “Points to Discuss.” The latter can also be used to stimulate research and writing assignments.





U.S. Marines under the direction of Lt. Israel Green attack the armory engine house in which John Brown (right) and some of his raiders had taken refuge.

Using the Book and Video

Synopsis

The book *John Brown's Raid* and the video *To Do Battle in the Land* tell the story of John Brown, an abolitionist whose raid on Harpers Ferry, Virginia, in 1859 brought the issue of slavery in the United States to the forefront of the political and social agenda.

The book is illustrated with contemporary photographs, engravings, and paintings, and follows John Brown's life from his birth to his death on the gallows 59 years later. Although it emphasizes the attack on Harpers Ferry, the book provides background information to explain Brown's motives and objectives.

The video uses period music and illustrations, as well as specially commissioned artwork, to tell John Brown's story. Narrator Ossie Davis uses locations in present-day Harpers Ferry and Charles Town to introduce opposing views of Northern abolitionists and Southern slaveholders and to address

major issues related to the event. These include the rights of the individual versus the rights of the government and the constitutionality of slavery. Throughout the video, visitors to Harpers Ferry offer comments about John Brown and his cause in the form of a running debate.

Both the book and the video describe how John Brown's childhood and religious convictions led him to become a radical abolitionist. Each reviews Brown's activities in Kansas following the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and identifies features that led him to select Harpers Ferry as his target. Each recreates the attack and its aftermath, raising the question of why Brown allowed himself to be entrapped in Harpers Ferry after he must have realized that his basic mission had failed. Was he protecting his hostages or was he caught off guard? Did he intend to be a martyr from the beginning?

The drama of John Brown's trial, sentencing, and hanging are presented at length in both book and video. In the video, Ossie Davis presents various reactions to Brown's case while standing at the Charles Town courthouse where Brown was tried. Davis explains how John Brown used his access to the press to influence not only public opinion but such writers as Thoreau, Emerson, Longfellow, and Louisa May Alcott. Finally, Davis tells how newspaper reporters kept Brown's cause alive.

The video ends with John Brown's hanging. The book carries the story into the Civil War years and describes the effect the war had on Harpers Ferry. An appendix contains a firsthand account of John Brown's capture by Lieutenant Israel Green, the officer who led the marines in the attack on the armory's fire engine house.

Teachers or parents directing the study of John Brown's raid should review the materials in advance, deciding how to use them to best advantage. The video should probably be shown first to stimulate interest in the subject, using the book for follow-up discussions and assignments. Here are some alternative ways to introduce the book and the video:

- Have students describe their concept of slavery before and after viewing the video.
- To identify what students know and what myths they believe at the start, have them create a list of adjectives that they think describe John Brown. Identify paradoxes or seemingly mutually incompatible traits that appear on the list. Encourage students to confirm or refute their ideas about the video.
- Explain to students that in the video they will hear a number of ordinary citizens expressing opinions about John Brown and his actions. Direct students to pay careful attention to these segments as they watch the video. Ask them to remember one opinion with which they agree and one with which they disagree.
- Have students list the things they would like to know about John Brown, his raid, his life, or life in America in the mid-1800s. Challenge students to locate answers in the video and book, or from their own research.
- As they view the video, have students prepare a scorecard regarding John Brown's life and his raid on Harpers Ferry, noting what they like or dislike about Brown. Tally the results and discuss the differences found in the scores.

John Brown's life is a study in dedication to an abiding cause. From his early zealotry for the anti-slavery movement on the plains of Kansas to his fateful attack on Harpers Ferry, both book and video describe the steady intensification of Brown's emotional commitment to the idea of freedom for slaves. Engage students in a critical thinking exercise about Brown and his mission by asking them to consider some or all of the following:

- Have students analyze the list of adjectives describing Brown that they created before seeing the video. Which do they still believe are true? Which would they eliminate? What specific parts of the video helped them to support or refute their initial list?
- Ask students what they think would have happened if any of the circumstances surrounding John Brown's raid had been slightly altered. For example, what do they think would have happened if . . .

... John Brown had escaped during the raid on Harpers Ferry?

... John Brown had been killed during the raid?

... John Brown had escaped from his jail in Charles Town?

... John Brown had succeeded at Harpers Ferry?

... John Brown had pleaded insanity during his trial?

... Women had been included among John Brown's raiders at Harpers Ferry?

... John Brown had been tried by the Federal Government instead of the Commonwealth of Virginia?

... John Brown had been tried in Massachusetts instead of Virginia?

... John Brown's trial had been held a year later rather than a few weeks after his raid on Harpers Ferry?

... John Brown's jury had included African-Americans?

... John Brown had not been given access to the press?

... John Brown had not received support from abolitionists?

• Ask students to identify specific parts of the video and book that show how Brown's background influenced his desire to abolish slavery.

• During and after his life, Brown was called many things. Following are just a few of the descriptive ways people refer to him. Discuss which of these descriptions students think are most appropriate. Ask them if they can add to them?

Captain John Brown: The abolitionist zealot.

Commander-in-Chief: The leader of the Provisional Army of the U.S.

The Lunatic: The insane defendant.

The Martyr: The man who died for his antislavery convictions.

Ossawatimie Brown: The man who led a bloody massacre in Kansas.

Old Devil Brown: The man who terrorized Kansas and Virginia.

Old John Brown: The business failure who fathered 20 children.

Saint John the Just: The martyr willing to sacrifice his life to rid the country of slavery.

• Look into and compare the views of Thomas Jefferson and John Brown regarding revolution.

Points to discuss:

- Can opposing words describe the same person?
- What did students learn about John Brown that surprised them?
- John Brown has been described as both a success and a dismal failure. Which of these is true? Why?
- Was John Brown a terrorist? Why or why not?
- What issues today would arouse people's passions as seriously as John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry? Why?
- What range of opinions about slavery do you think Americans held in 1859?
- Was John Brown a revolutionary or an insane fanatic? What other revolutionaries have had an impact on American history? What made them revolutionaries?

• Many people considered John Brown a martyr. What is a martyr? Who are other well-known martyrs in history? What principles were they protecting?

• Why does John Brown remain such a controversial figure in American history? Who are the contemporary John Browns?

• Was John Brown a leader? What qualities do leaders have?

• Where would you place John Brown's name in a list of American civil rights leaders?

• Were the methods John Brown used to try to end slavery justified? Why or why not?

Extended Lessons

10

Law, Politics, Government, and Religion

Have each student write a letter to the editor of a newspaper discussing how John Brown might have appealed to the Bill of Rights as justification for his actions or as support for his trial defense. Or have students write an editorial on this topic.

Re-enact John Brown's trial in the classroom. Among the roles that should be assigned are: John Brown, his lawyer, the prosecuting attorney, witnesses, jurors, and the judge.

Divide the students into two groups. Have one group pretend to be citizens of Harpers Ferry, Virginia, the other citizens of Concord, Massachusetts. Debate the meaning and impact of John Brown's raid from these two viewpoints.

Points to discuss:

- John Brown felt that nonviolent protest was useless in the fight against slavery. Other abolitionists, like Harriet Beecher Stowe and Frederick Douglass, fought with pen rather than pike. Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* were considered abolitionist propaganda, for example. How did Brown's ideology and attitude differ from other abolitionists of that period? Is violence necessary to effect major social or political change? Is violence ever justified? Is war ever justified as a strategy to achieve peace?

- John Brown's bloody attacks in Kansas and at Harpers Ferry have been compared to modern day terrorist attacks. Some terrorists call themselves "freedom fighters." What do you think they mean? Does being a freedom fighter justify violence?

- John Brown was a resolute and religious man who defended his actions on the basis of his interpretation of the Bible. Do religious beliefs ever override the law of the land or that of societies? Who should interpret religious laws? What contemporary political events have been shaped by an individual's religious beliefs?

- Shortly before his assassination in April 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr., proclaimed, "I just want to do God's will." Compare King's belief in God with that of Brown. What role did religion play in each man's life? How did each view the use of violence? Compare the techniques each man used to bring about change in America.

- The video portrays John Brown as a man who takes the law into his own hands. After his death sentence was pronounced, Brown told the court: "This court acknowledges the validity of the law of God. I see a book kissed here which I suppose to be the Bible, or at least the New Testament. That teaches me that all things whatsoever I would have that men should do to me, I should do even so to them. It teaches me, further, to 'remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them.' I endeavored to act up to that instruction." How does this statement explain Brown's philosophy?
- Should John Brown have been put to death?
- Today, the death penalty is still legal in 35 States. Should it be extended to all 50 States or abolished completely? Students might research the status of capital punishment in their State or write to their Senators and Representatives to learn their positions on the issue.
- According to *John Brown's Raid*, Brown's defense counsel wanted to use insanity as a defense to prevent him from being sentenced to hang. Look into the definition of insanity as used by doctors and lawyers. Discuss how this definition changes with the times. Should a plea of insanity be used to defend a murderer? Do you think that Brown was insane? Should an insane person be tried in the same manner as a sane person?

Direct students to read pages 13-18 of *John Brown's Raid*, which describe the strategic location of Harpers Ferry and the resources there that appealed to Brown.

Distribute copies of Map 1—Harpers Ferry and Vicinity in 1859—on page 24. Have students identify those geographic features that caused Brown to select this target, especially mountain ranges, rivers, railroads, and industry. Discuss the role each played and list the features in order of importance to Brown's mission.

Distribute copies of Map 2—Harpers Ferry in 1859—on page 25 and have students identify the specific resources that attracted John Brown to Harpers Ferry, particularly the U.S. Armory, the rifle factory, and the canal.

Using the chronology of John Brown's raid on pages 22-23, have students number the events on the chronology and mark these numbers on Map 1 to show Brown's route.

Students might also consult a map of the mid-Atlantic States to put Harpers Ferry into a larger context. For example, its nearness to Pennsylvania, only 37 miles away, was an important geographic factor. Pennsylvania was a free State, and escaped slaves were generally among friends upon reaching there.

Points to discuss:

- According to *John Brown's Raid*, George Washington considered Harpers Ferry "the most eligible spot on the [Potomac] river" for an armory. This was because of abundant water power, iron ore, hardwood forests to supply charcoal, and a secure inland position. What other industries would have found Harpers Ferry an attractive location?

- Why was Harpers Ferry a strategically important location to both North and South during the Civil War?

- The video states that the Blue Ridge Mountains were to be "the staging area for a grand scheme to raid Southern plantations and free slaves." Using a topographical map of the United States, have students consider why this particular mountain range was more attractive for Brown's purposes than other mountain ranges in the area. Note that the Blue Ridge Mountains extend deep into the South, linking with the Smokies, which go even farther south. Brown intended to use these mountains as his fortress and his getaway route for slaves.

- What alternative sites might John Brown have chosen? Why did he not choose a site deeper in the South?

John Brown and other abolitionists wanted to put an end to what the South referred to as its “peculiar institution.” To demonstrate the constitutionality of slavery in the United States, have students read the Bill of Rights and the three parts of the Constitution that relate to slavery. These are: Article I, Section 2 (The Three-Fifths Compromise); Article I, Section 9 (Importation of Slaves); and Article IV, Section 2 (Fugitive Slaves). Discuss how these documents reflect American philosophy of the period.

Ask students to create a poster or draw a political cartoon that expresses support for the following constitutional amendments: XIII (prohibiting slavery), XIV (prohibiting States from violating due process or equal protection of the law), and XV (guaranteeing rights of citizens against Federal or State infringement based on race, color, or previous condition of servitude).

Direct students to read a summary of the Dred Scott decision by which the Supreme Court denied Congress the power to keep slavery out of the territories. What effect did this decision have on the antislavery movement? Discuss the power of the Supreme Court, through the Constitution, to define the Nation’s laws and the effect the makeup of the Court has on its interpretation.

Points to discuss:

- Why was slavery protected in the Constitution?
- *John Brown’s Raid* (pages 3–4) tells a story about how a young John Brown witnessed a “very gentlemanly landlord” badly treat and abuse a slave about his own age. Following this incident, Brown is said to have declared “eternal war with slavery.” How do personal experiences influence a person’s perspective on an issue? Have students identify which of their own political beliefs have been influenced by a personal experience?

Help students differentiate examples in which rights are violated from those in which feelings are hurt.

- John Brown, his financial supporters, and most of his raiders were white. Why did some white citizens oppose slavery? What did white abolitionists contribute to the movement? What did black abolitionists contribute?

In order for students to fully understand the issues raised by John Brown, they must understand that slaves were considered to be property, not human beings. Many slaveholders had millions of dollars invested in slaves.

Because they were considered to be property, slaves could be bought and sold. As an investment, the value of this property could go up or down. If a slave ran off, the owner lost his investment.

While Brown morally opposed slavery, he also understood the economics of the system. By helping slaves escape, he intended to bankrupt the entire institution of slavery by making it risky to invest in slaves.

Have students locate advertisements for slaves that appeared in newspapers of the period. What features of slaves did owners stress? How do these ads support the notion that slaves were investments in property?

Have students imagine that they own a plantation in 1860. Have them list the changes they would anticipate in their lifestyle if slavery were abolished. Then list the ways in which the lives of their slaves would change.

Point to discuss:

- What economic justification did Southern slaveholders give for maintaining the institution of slavery?



This engraving of a Virginia slave auction underscores the ruling passion of John Brown's life. Brown believed slavery to be "a great wrong against God and humanity" and vowed "Eternal war" against it.

Historical Pictures Service

John Brown's trial and execution made headlines in newspapers across the country. Reporters kept Brown's name in the papers and the public's attention focused on his cause. Even after his capture, Brown continued to write letters. Many newspapers published Brown's letters during the period between his trial and his execution.

To demonstrate the role of the media in influencing public opinion, ask students to write an opinion piece, either an editorial or a letter to the editor, giving their views on the John Brown case. Divide students into pairs in which one student plays the role of a reporter and the other plays one of the following individuals: a plantation owner, a freed slave, John Brown, Mary Day Brown, Virginia's Governor Henry A. Wise, or a Harpers Ferry resident. By the time all interviews have been reported, students will have been exposed to a variety of opinions and may

select one on which to build their assignment. Students also may want to read excerpts from *John Brown's Raid* before completing the assignment.

One way to demonstrate the role of newspapers in influencing public opinion is to assign students the task of finding newspaper columns that express a range of views about an issue today.

Have students imagine they are television reporters. How would they report on John Brown's raid and subsequent trial? Among those they might interview are: John Brown, Judge Parker, prosecuting attorney Andrew Hunter, one of Brown's defense attorneys, a juror, Brown's son Owen, Brown's daughter Annie, Col. Lewis Washington, Lt. Col. Robert E. Lee, and a Harpers Ferry resident. Would they report it differently, perhaps interview different people, if their television station were in Massachusetts rather than South Carolina?

Points to discuss:

- How have newspapers, radio, and television influenced political events in our lifetime? Consider events in the United States as well as in other countries.
- Should the print and television media be used to influence public opinion?
- If you had been a newspaper publisher in 1859, would you have allowed Brown to voice his opinion in your paper? Why or why not?
- Should terrorists have access to the media? Why or why not?
- Is freedom of speech an absolute freedom? Develop scenarios in which an individual's freedom of speech is abridged for the good of society.

The antislavery movement presented an opportunity for female abolitionists to influence public opinion. Women raised their voices and their pens to liberate slaves, and by so doing, liberated themselves. Sarah Lewis, president of the Women's Anti-Slavery Society, wrote: "It is our only means of direct political action. It is not our right to fill the offices of government, or to assist in the election of those who shall fill them. We do not enact or enforce the laws of the land. The only direct influence we can exert upon our Legislatures is by protest and petitions."

Points to discuss:

- According to *John Brown's Raid*, Brown worried that neighbors in Virginia and Maryland would uncover his plans. He reasoned that neighbors would be less fearful if women lived among the group, so he asked his wife and daughter to come with him. He told them, "It will be likely to prove the most valuable service you can ever render to the world." His daughter Annie and his daughter-in-law Martha joined him. They cooked, cleaned, kept watch and boosted the morale of the men. By assigning such mundane roles to women, John Brown expressed his understanding of women's rights. How does that understanding compare to his abolitionist philosophy? How did their roles reflect women's roles of the period? If you were Annie or Martha Brown, would you have gone? Why or why not? In what ways did their roles in the abolition movement differ from more educated abolitionist women like Julia Ward Howe, Sarah Lewis, or Harriet Beecher Stowe?

- What was the role of free black women in the abolition movement?
- Would Annie and Martha Brown have raided Harpers Ferry like John Brown? What do you think that they would have done differently?
- How often do the book and the video mention women? In what context are women mentioned? What conclusions can you draw about the 1850s and 1860s from this exercise?
- What questions would you want to ask Mary Day Brown or Annie Brown?
- When did freed slaves and women obtain the right to vote?
- What role do women play in government today?

John Brown influenced many great writers. His supporters included Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Herman Melville, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Louisa May Alcott, and Harriet Beecher Stowe. Many of these writers went on to write poems, stories, and books based on John Brown's life. Among the more famous works is Stephen Vincent Benét's *John Brown's Body*, an epic poem about the Civil War era.

To illustrate how literature reflects history, have students write a poem based on John Brown's life. Encourage them to be descriptive and use words and phrases found in the Glossary (page 19).

Have students read or listen to the lyrics of "John Brown's Body," a popular song based on Brown's raid at Harpers Ferry. Compare it to the story as portrayed in the video. How does this story of Brown differ from the poem, the book, and the video? How do print and film influence the story?

To get to the essence of historical thought, ask students to read biographies of John Brown written at different times. Compare the interpretations.

Points to discuss:

- The words of many abolitionists who wrote about Brown and his raid at Harpers Ferry are still read more than a hundred years after they were written. Ask students to consider how history and current events influence writers. Have them identify specific examples. Similarly, ask students to identify how writers influence the course of history.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, "If he [Brown] shall suffer, he will make the gallows glorious like the cross." Henry David Thoreau concluded in *Civil Disobedience*, "I think that we should be men first, and subjects afterward. It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right." By contrast, Nathaniel Hawthorne thought that "Nobody was ever more justly hanged." Were Emerson and Thoreau promoting violence as a means to end slavery? Did they romanticize Brown's idealism and actions? How? Why was Hawthorne's point of view so different?

Music has always played an important role in American culture and expression. The video features “John Brown’s Body,” a popular tune among Union soldiers during the Civil War. Many stories exist about the origin of the song “John Brown’s Body.” One claims that it was written following a parade in Boston after Brown’s hanging. Another suggests that a Boston Light Infantry Quartet improvised some words about one of its members (a Mr. Brown) and set it to the popular camp meeting tune, “Say Brothers Will You Meet Us?”

Divide the class into small groups. Have each group express its feelings about John Brown and his role in abolishing slavery, either by creating a rap song or by writing new lyrics for a popular tune. Encourage students to include words or phrases from the Glossary (page 19).

Find examples of protest songs from the 1960s, another period of unrest in America. Compare the themes of protest between songs of the 1860s and those of the 1960s. Are the lyrics timeless or unique to the period in which they were written?

Points to discuss:

- What songs currently popular have a political message or opinion? In what ways do these songs influence opinion? In what ways does music provide a way to be “heard” in our society?
- Before the Civil War, slavery in the South greatly influenced African-American culture. Spirituals became an important form of social response. These songs often expressed the oppressive conditions under which the slaves lived and reflected Christian ideals that were imposed on them in the United States. Why were these songs so important to the slaves?

The Glossary contains words found both in *John Brown's Raid* and in *To Do Battle in the Land*.

Abolitionist: Advocate of the compulsory emancipation of slaves.

Armory: A factory where arms are produced.

Arsenal: A warehouse where arms and military equipment are stored.

Bleeding Kansas: The frontier territory where pro-slavery and anti-slavery settlers fought over the extension of slavery.

Border Ruffians: Pro-slavery supporters in the Kansas Territory.

Confederacy: The 11 Southern States that seceded from the United States in 1860 and 1861.

Emancipation: The act or process of becoming free from the control, restraint, or power of another.

Engine House: The armory firehouse where John Brown was captured.

Free Soilers: Opponents of the extension of slavery into new States and territories.

Foundry: An establishment where metals are cast.

Free Coloreds: Freed slaves.

Insurrection: Slaves rebelling against their masters.

Jay Hawkers: Anti-slavery supporters in the Kansas Territory.

Kennedy Farm: Brown's secret headquarters in the Maryland countryside and the place from which he began his raid.

Liberty Guards: John Brown's quasi-militia company in Kansas.

Militia: Civilian military units, similar to today's National Guard. They surrounded and helped to capture Brown at Harpers Ferry.

Pike: A long wooden rod with a sharp metal spear attached at the top. Brown ordered 1,000 pikes to arm slaves untrained in the use of firearms.

Plantation: An agricultural estate usually worked by resident labor, mostly slaves.

Provisional Army of the U.S.: The term John Brown gave his abolitionist army just before the attack on Harpers Ferry.

Raider: A member of John Brown's group of 22 men who took up arms to raid Harpers Ferry, Virginia.

Sharps Carbine: A single-shot rifle loaded from the rear and used by Brown's raiders.

Slavery: The condition of holding another person as property.

Treason: An attempt to overthrow the government to which the offender owes allegiance.

Chronology of John Brown's Life and Related Events

- 1800** Born in Torrington, Connecticut, May 9.
- 1805** Brown family moves to Ohio.
- 1819** Attends schools in Massachusetts and Connecticut.
- 1819-1825** Works as a tanner in Ohio.
- 1820** The Missouri Compromise prevents a political crisis between North and South on the issue of slavery.
- 1821** Marries Dianthe Lusk, June 21.
- 1825** Abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison calls for the immediate emancipation of slaves.
- 1831** Nat Turner leads a slave insurrection in Virginia.
- 1832** Dianthe Lusk Brown dies on August 10.
- 1833** Marries Mary Ann Day on July 11.
- 1835-1840** Speculates in land near Hudson, Ohio.
- 1837** Suffers heavy financial losses in the Panic of 1837. Abolitionist editor Elijah Lovejoy is murdered by a mob. Brown vows to dedicate his life to the destruction of slavery.
- 1841** Begins sheep farming.
- 1842** Applies for bankruptcy.
- 1843** Four of his children die of dysentery in one month.
- 1847** Reveals to Frederick Douglass his plan to free the slaves.
- 1849** Travels to Europe to sell wool. Moves to a farm at North Elba, New York.
- 1850** A new Fugitive Slave Law denies protection to slaves who have escaped to the North.
- 1851** Founders the Black Abolitionist "League of Gileadites" to resist the Fugitive Slave Law by force.

1851-1854

Brown's wool business fails.

1852

Harriet Beecher Stowe publishes *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

1854

The Kansas-Nebraska Act enrages abolitionists by opening the western territories to slavery. Five of Brown's sons move to Kansas.

1855

Attends convention of abolitionists at Syracuse, New York. Joins sons in Kansas. Helps defend Lawrence, Kansas, against pro-slavery forces.

1856

In retaliation for the "Sack of Lawrence," murders five pro-slavery settlers along Potawatomie Creek in Kansas. Leads a guerrilla band as "Bleeding Kansas" explodes in violence.

1857

Gains support from abolitionists in Boston, New York, and throughout New England. Orders 1,000 pikes. Establishes a military headquarters in Tabor, Iowa.

In the Dred Scott decision, the U.S. Supreme Court declares that slaves are property and that Congress cannot deprive slave owners of that property.

1858

Attends the Chatham Convention in Canada and receives support for a "Provisional Constitution" of the United States to govern the nation freed from slavery. Leads a raid into Missouri and frees 11 slaves.

1859

The U.S. Supreme Court upholds the Fugitive Slave Act.

Arrives in Harpers Ferry, Virginia, on July 3. Begins raid on Harpers Ferry armory and arsenal on October 16. Captured in the armory fire engine house on October 18.

Tried in Charles Town, Virginia, October 27-30. Executed at Charles Town, December 2. Buried at the Brown farm in North Elba, New York, December 8.

July 3

John Brown, with sons Oliver and Owen, and Jeremiah Anderson, arrives in Harpers Ferry.

July 4

Brown rents the Kennedy farm. In twos and threes, men join Brown at the farm through October.

October 16

8:00 p.m. Brown and 21 raiders advance toward Harpers Ferry.

10:30 p.m. The raiders take the U.S. Armory and Arsenal and the buildings of Hall's Rifle Works on Virginian Island.

Midnight Colonel Lewis W. Washington with his slaves and John Allstadt with his son and slaves are captured at their homes west of Harpers Ferry.

October 17

1:25 a.m. The raiders halt a Baltimore & Ohio passenger train. Hayward Shepherd, a free black and the station baggage master, is shot dead.

4:00-5:00 a.m. The hostages are held in the armory fire engine house.

Daybreak Messengers carry the alarm to nearby towns. The raiders seize armory employees as they report to work.

7:00 a.m. The townspeople begin firing on the raiders. Groceryman Thomas Boerly is killed by return fire.

10:00 a.m. The Jefferson Guards capture the Potomac River bridge. Dangerfield Newby is shot. He is the first raider to die. Other militia take positions commanding the entrance to the armory and the Shenandoah River Bridge. Brown asks for a truce, but raider William Thompson is seized under a white flag.

Raiders Watson Brown and Aaron Stevens are shot under a second truce flag.

Raider William Leeman is killed trying to escape across the Potomac.

1:30 p.m. U.S. Marines commanded by Colonel Robert E. Lee travel by train from Washington.

2:00 p.m. George W. Turner, a prominent local farmer, is killed by the raiders.

2:30 p.m. A party of citizens storms Hall's Rifle Works. Three raiders attempt to escape across the Shenandoah, but John Kagi is killed, Lewis Leary is mortally wounded, and John Copeland is captured. A drunken mob, enraged by the mayor's death, drags William Thompson from the Wager House, murders him, and tosses his body into the Potomac.

3:00 p.m. Militiamen force Brown and his men into the engine house and free many of the hostages. Militia units pour into town.

Raiders Owen Brown, Cook, Barclay Coppoc, Francis Meriam, and Charles Tidd, who had been guarding supplies in Maryland, escape through the nearby mountains.

Darkness The streets of Harpers Ferry are jammed with hundreds of excited militiamen, townspeople, and families of the hostages. Many are drunk.

Copeland is captured. In the confusion, Raiders Albert Hazlett and

Osborn P. Anderson leave the arsenal, cross the Potomac, and flee north. Raider Stewart Taylor is shot and killed.

11:00 p.m. Ninety marines under Colonel Lee enter the armory yard.

October 18
Oliver Brown is killed.

7:00 a.m. Lieutenant J. E. B. Stuart twice delivers surrender demands to Brown.

A storming party of 12 marines smashes through a door of the engine house. One marine is killed, another is wounded. Lieutenant Israel Green falls John Brown with his sword. Raiders Thompson and Anderson are killed. Raiders Coppoc and Shields Green surrender. The fight ends in three minutes. No hostages are injured. Watson Brown dies.

October 19
Brown, Stevens, Coppoc, Green, and Copeland are jailed in Charles Town.

October 27-31
Brown is tried for treason against the Commonwealth of Virginia for conspiring with slaves to rebel and for murder.

November 2
John Brown is sentenced to hang.

December 2
John Brown is executed in Charles Town.

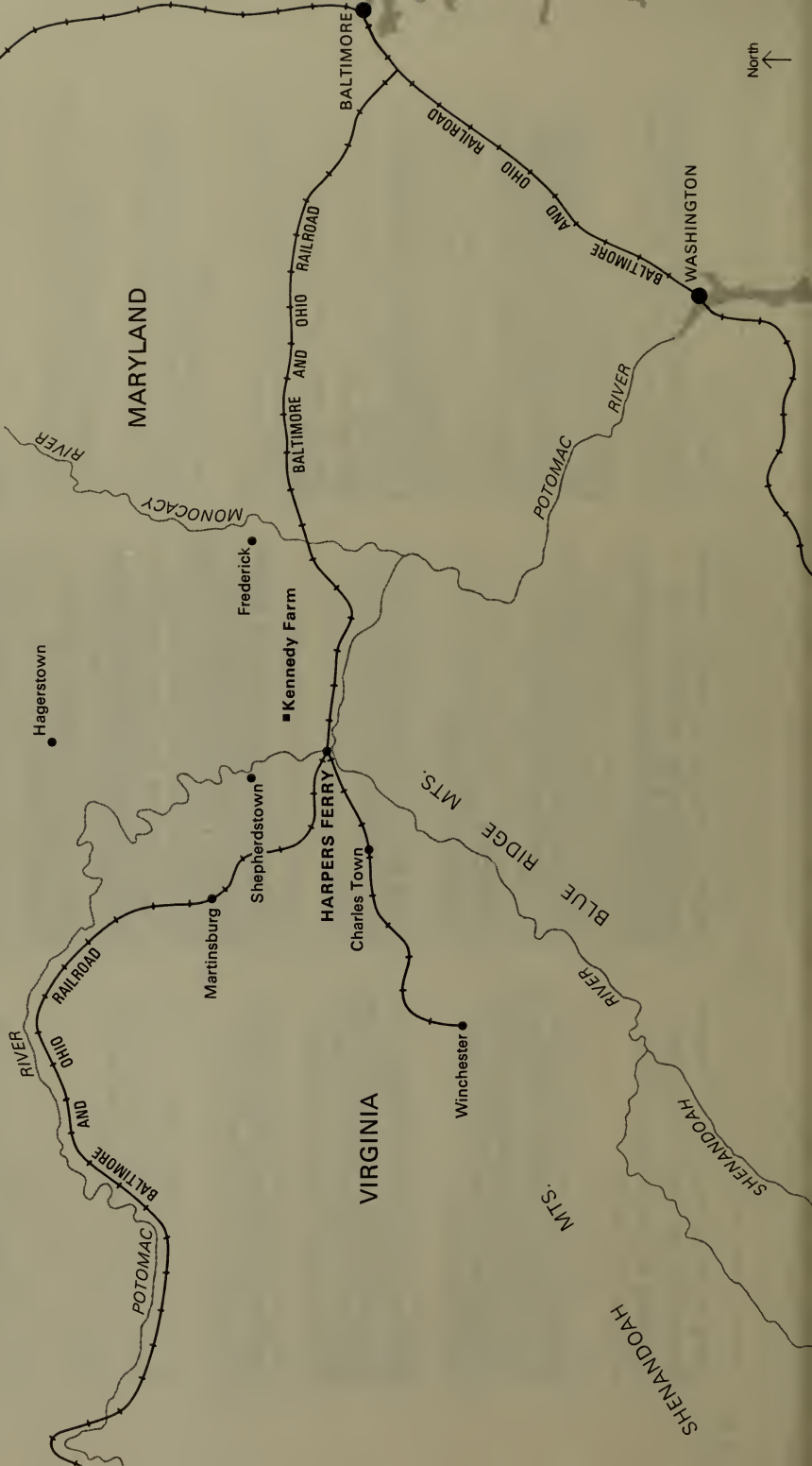
Resources

Harpers Ferry and Vicinity in 1859

PENNSYLVANIA

MARYLAND

VIRGINIA



Harpers Ferry in 1859

BALTIMORE AND OHIO RAILROAD

C. & O. Canal

RIDGE

STREET

Lutheran Church

WASHINGTON STREET

CAMP HILL TAYLOR

FILLMORE STREET

Commanding Officers Quarters and Grounds

Paymasters Clerk

Superintendents Clerk

Stone Quarry

CLIFFS

Town Tumpike

Lower Locks

Upper Locks

Rifle Factory

(Harpers Ferry & Charles Town)

LOWER HALL I.

UPPER HALL I.

J. S. Armony Lumber Yard

HALL ISLAND

WINCHESTER & POTOMAC RAILROAD

POTOMAC CANAL

POTOMAC STREET

Armory Magazine

School

HIGH STREET

CLAY STREET

Meth. Protestant Church

Meth. Episcopal Church

Harper Graveyard (4 Acres)

Paymasters Quarters and Grounds

Jefferson's School

Rock Church

Presbyterian Church

Stables

Armory

CLIFFS

Toll House

CLIFFS

Iron Foundry

Machine Shop

Cotton Factory (Ruins)

Cotton Mill

Saw Mill

CLIFFS

SHENANDOAH RIVER

POTOMAC RIVER

Engine House

Potomac Restaurant

Wager House

Hotel

Shops

U. S. Armony Grounds

U. S. Arsons

R.C. Church

P.E. Church

Jefferson's School

Rock Church

Presbyterian Church

Stables

Armory

CLIFFS

Toll House

CLIFFS

Iron Foundry

Machine Shop

Cotton Factory (Ruins)

Cotton Mill

Saw Mill

CLIFFS

SHENANDOAH RIVER

SHENANDOAH BRIDGE

HEIGHTS

MARYLAND

TO KENNEDY FARM

North

Resources

U.S. Army and Arsenal in 1859

LEGEND

- A Armory Employee Dwellings
- P Private Dwellings
- V Vacant at Time of Raid





Harpers Ferry Today

Information

Train Station

Original site of
John Brown's Fort

POTOMAC RIVER

POTOMAC STREET

HIGH STREET

SHENANDOAH STREET

B & O RAILROAD

Pedestrian Footbridge

SHENANDOAH RIVER

Suggestions for Additional Research

Benét, Stephen Vincent. *John Brown's Body*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1927. (Grades 6 and up)
This epic has been called "the most popular long poem of the century." It begins with John Brown's raid and concludes with the aftermath of the Civil War.

Beatty, Patricia. *Charlie Skedaddle*. New York: Morrow Junior Books, 1987. (Grades 5-9)
A story about a young boy who enlists as a drummer in the Union Army after his brother is killed in action at Gettysburg.

Blockson, Charles. *The Underground Railroad*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1984. (Grades 6 and up)
First-person narrative chronicling slaves' escape to freedom through various routes in the secret pre-Civil War organization known as the Underground Railroad.

Crane, Stephen. *The Red Badge of Courage: An Episode of the American Civil War*. New York: Avon, 1987. (Grades 7 and up)
This classic novel of the Civil War provides a faithful portrayal of the realities of the battlefield through the experiences of a young man caught up in the horrors of conflict.

Epstein, Sam, and Beryl Epstein. *Harriet Tubman: Guide to Freedom*. Easton, Md.: Garrard, 1968. (Grades 6 and up)

Follows the dramatic events of the life of this escaped slave and courageous abolitionist who helped more than 300 fugitive slaves reach safety in the North and Canada.

Freedman, Russell. *Lincoln: A Photobiography*. New York: Clarion Books, 1988. (Grades 6 and up)
A warm biography that illustrates the life and times of President Abraham Lincoln with dozens of photographs and prints from the period.

Hamilton, Virginia. *Anthony Burns: The Defeat and Triumph of a Fugitive Slave*. New York: Knopf, 1988. (Grades 6 and up)

Tells the true story of a young runaway Virginia slave who fled to Boston in 1854, only to be arrested and returned to his master. A group of Bostonians later bought his freedom.

Lester, Julius. *To Be A Slave*. New York: Dial Books, 1968. (Grades 7-12)
All aspects of slavery in the United States are described in detail by former slaves.

McKissick, Frederick, and Patricia McKissick. *Frederick Douglass: The Black Lion*. Chicago: Children's Press, 1987. (Grades 4 and up)
Details the life of Frederick Douglass as a young slave, tradesman, anti-slavery orator, journalist, writer, U.S. consul general, and minister resident to Haiti.

- Meltzer, Milton. *The Black Americans: A History in Their Own Words*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1984. (Grades 7 and up)
A collection of letters, speeches, memoirs, and testimony by African-Americans from 1619 to 1983.
- Meltzer, Milton. *Underground Man*. New York: Harcourt Brace and Jovanovich, 1972. (Grades 5 and up)
Drawing from court records, reminiscences of fugitive slaves, and abolitionists, Meltzer creates a suspenseful and historically accurate novel of a young white man aiding escaping slaves from Kentucky in pre-Civil War days.
- Miner, Jane C. Corey. New York: Scho-
 lastic, 1986.
A story about a house slave who joins the Jubilee Trail to escape from a South Carolina plantation.
- Quarles, Benjamin, editor. *Blacks on John Brown*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972. (Grades 7 and up)
This series of poems, letters, and personal narratives arranged chronologically from 1858 to 1972 provides a black perspective on the life and deeds of John Brown.
- Stampp, Kenneth. *The Causes of the Civil War*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1959. (Grades 8 and up)
A collection of historians' interpretations and the thoughts of civilians and soldiers that offers a unique look at the events leading to the Civil War.
- Stowe, Harriet Beecher. *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly*. New York: Modern Library, 1985. (Grades 7 and up)
Originally published in 1851-52 and in numerous editions since, this classic novel traces the life of Tom, a slave, who eventually becomes a free black. The book was one of the most effective contributions to the abolitionist movement.

"The Abolitionists," Program 9 in *America Past*. 15 minutes. Agency for Instructional Technology, 1987.
Focusing on the reform movement known as abolitionism, this program visits an underground railroad station in Foundation City, Indiana, and Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, where the story of John Brown's raid is told.

"The Ante-bellum South," Program 16 in *America Past*. 14 minutes. Agency for Instructional Technology, 1986.
Describes different perspectives on slavery in the South during the ante-bellum years.

The Civil War. Nine videos, each 62 to 99 minutes in length. PBS Video, 1990.
This highly acclaimed series allows students to experience the Civil War through diaries, newspaper accounts, and the letters of those who lived through it. These are interwoven with archival photographs, moving period music, newsreel footage of veterans, and cinematography of the now-quiet battlefields.

"Civil War Songs and Historical Narration." Four 30-minute audio-cassettes. W.E.M. Records.
Chronicles the Civil War through song and narration and places the music in a historical context.

"Crisis of Union," *The American Adventure*. 30 minutes. PBS Video, 1987.
Explores the implications of the Supreme Court's 1857 Dred Scott Decision, including South Carolina's decision to secede from the Union.

"Frederick Douglass: An American Life." 30 minutes. National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1985.
A documentary on the personal and public life of orator, emancipator, and statesman Frederick Douglass, as told in his own words.

"Louisiana Plantation," Volume 10 in *American Scrapbook*. 15 minutes. Great Plains National, 1976.
A general study of the American South.

"North to Freedom," Volume 11 in *American Scrapbook*. 15 minutes. Great Plains National, 1976.
Details the famous Underground Railroad that helped slaves to escape.

"Frederick Douglass: The Slave Who Wouldn't Give Up," Program 5 in *Truly American*. 20 minutes. Great Plains National, 1974.
Photographs, films, interviews, and dramatizations re-create the life of Frederick Douglass.

Roots. Six videos, 90 minutes each. Wolper Productions, 1977.
Based on Alex Haley's book, this series chronicles an African-American family through several generations from freedom in Africa through slavery in America to emancipation.

"Sojourner Truth / Harriet Tubman: The Truth and Moses," Program 4 in *Truly American*. 20 minutes. Great Plains National, 1974.
Photographs, films, interviews, and dramatizations re-create the lives of Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman.

- American Anti-Slavery Society Staff. *American Anti-Slavery History of the John Brown Year: Being the Twenty-Seventh Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society*.
 Aptheker, Herbert. *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*. Volume I. New York: Carol Publishing Company, 1951.
 Avery, Elijah. *Capture and Execution of John Brown*. Arlington Heights, Ill.: Metro Books, 1969.
 Barry, Joseph. *The Strange Story of Harpers Ferry* . . . Martinsburg, W.V.: The Women's Club of Harpers Ferry District, 1903.
 Billington, Ray Allen, ed. *The Journal of Charlotte Forten: A Young Black Woman's Reactions to the White World of the Civil War Era*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1953.
 Du Bois, W.E.B. *John Brown*. Chicago: International Publishers Company, 1987. Originally published in 1909.
 Fisher, Miles. *Negro Slave Songs in the United States*. New York: Carol Publishing Company, 1978.
 Oates, Stephen B. *To Purge This Land with Blood: A Biography of John Brown*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984. (Suitable for advanced students)
 Rose, Willie Lee. *Documentary History of Slaves*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1976. (Suitable for advanced students)
 Rose, Willie Lee. *Slavery and Freedom*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982. (Suitable for advanced students)
 Ruchames, Louis, ed. *John Brown: The Making of a Revolutionary*. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1969. Originally *A John Brown Reader*.
 Sanborn, Franklin B., ed. *Life and Letters of John Brown, Liberator of Kansas and Martyr of Virginia*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1969. Reprint of 1891 edition.
 Scott, John A. *John Brown of Harper's Ferry*. New York: Facts on File, 1988.
 Smith, Page. *The Nation Comes of Age: A People's History of the Antebellum Years*. New York: Penguin Books, 1981.
 Stamp, Kenneth M. *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1959.
 Thoreau, Henry David. *Yankee in Canada, with Anti-Slavery and Reform Papers*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1970. Reprint of 1892 edition.
 Villard, Oswald G. *John Brown, 1800-1859: A Biography Fifty Years After*. Revised edition. New York: Knopf, 1943. Originally published in 1910.

Harpers Ferry National Historical Park is located in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. It sits at the confluence of the Shenandoah and Potomac Rivers and is dominated by the Blue Ridge Mountains. Harpers Ferry is approximately one-and-a-half hours from Washington, D.C.

Almost 250 years of history wait to be discovered at the park (see Map 1, page 24). Harpers Ferry began as a resting place for early settlers and expanded into a Government industrial town. It survived the impact of John Brown's raid only to be torn apart by the Civil War a few years later.

Maps for a walking tour of both the historic district and nearby Virginius Island, where industry was once located, are available at the park's Information Center. A booklet about Virginius Island can be purchased at the Bookstore. In addition, the Information Center and the John Brown Museum offer short films, slide presentations, and historical exhibits.

Before visiting the park, ask students to create a list of sites that they would like to visit. Note that not many of the original buildings associated with John Brown's raid still exist. The site itself, however, is rich with historical meaning. Among the places students might like to visit in the Jefferson County area are: the Courthouse and hanging site in Charles Town, and the Kennedy farmhouse in nearby Maryland.

At Harpers Ferry, visit the historical exhibits and discuss with students how the area has changed since 1859. For example, what remains of the buildings associated with John Brown's raid? What is important about the other buildings that are in the park? How do today's bridges differ from the one that John Brown crossed?

After visiting Harpers Ferry, students might want to start a scrapbook on Harpers Ferry, design a bulletin board on the class trip to Harpers Ferry, draw a map of Harpers Ferry, write a report on a favorite experience at Harpers Ferry, or conduct additional

research. Other possible topics for student exploration are John Brown, slavery, Harpers Ferry guns, and the Civil War. Students also might want to explore the role of industrialization at Harpers Ferry during the 19th century or investigate the role of Storer College in the Freedman's Movement for emancipated blacks. For information about the park and its educational programs, write Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, P.O. Box 65, Harpers Ferry, WV 25425, or call (304) 535-6029.

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*This old lithograph shows the United States
Army and Arsenal at Harpers Ferry in
1857, two years before John Brown's fateful
attack.*



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