

John Brown Lesson Plan

CREATING A TIMELINE

CIVIL WAR TRUST

Grades: 9-12

Approximate Length of Time: 1 class meeting

Goals:

Students will gain a historical knowledge of John Brown's 1859 raid and how to use timelines when documenting a historical event.

Objectives:

- 1.) Students will be able to build a timeline of events as they occurred in John Brown's Harpers Ferry Raid;
- 2.) Students will be able to explain possible causes of the raid and the state of the country leading up to the 1859 raid.
- 3.) After learning about a popular song from the time period, which had been manipulated by the public, students will be able to manipulate the lyrics in a way that shows their opinion of the raid.

Materials:

- 1.) [The Trial of John Brown: A Chronology](#)
- 2.) [Timeline \(PDF\)](#)
- 3.) [Google Map of John Brown's travels](#)
- 4.) Song - "John Brown's Body"
 - [John Brown's Body Lyrics 1861](#)
 - [John Brown's Body Lyrics 1865](#)
 - [MP3 Version of John Brown's Body](#)
- 5.) ["Hero or Murderer" Assignment \(PDF\)](#)

6.) "Hero or Murderer" Rubric (PDF)

Before the Lesson:

Distribute a copy of the "Trial of John Brown: A Chronology."

Have students highlight all events related to slavery and all of John Brown's abolitionist activities.

Procedure:

Part 1:

Display a blank timeline on the board or overhead projector and distribute copies of the timeline.

Explain that today they are going to work together to create a timeline displaying

- The most relevant events in John Brown's life that the group members believe contributed to his decision to raid Harpers Ferry
- The events that focused on slavery or abolition leading up to the raid
- The raid as well as his trial and execution

To create this timeline they are going to use their copy of "Trial of John Brown: A Chronology" and the Google Map of John Brown's travels.

After each group has finished their timelines fill out your timeline as a class

- Go from group to group and ask each spokesperson to list
 - o an event,
 - o the date,
 - o time,
 - o and why they included the event on their timeline.

Collect Student Timelines.

Part 2:

Ask: Do you ever change a song's words to make a joke or talk about something that is currently going on? Do you ever see other people do this? Give examples (ex. Weird Al)

Explain that this is not something new, people did it for John Brown's raid.

Ask: Why do you think people did this for John Brown's Raid?

Play the song "John Brown's Body" and display "The Tragic Prelude".

Give students the lyrics to "John Brown's Body".

Tell students that some southerners created their own version of the song: "John Brown's Hangin' from a Sour Apple Tree". Both versions of the song were very popular due to the passion people felt about John Brown's Raid, the catchiness of the tune and the tune's origin as a Methodist hymn.

Place students back in their small groups. Ask them to discuss the following question:

"Was John Brown a Hero or a Traitor"? Students will support their positions using their primary source documents whenever possible. Circulate among the students.

Assessment:

1.) Write a new version of "John Brown's Body". The new song may be written from either a pro- or anti-John Brown viewpoint. Songs should be 5 stanzas long.