

Sectional Conflict Increases

BIOGRAPHY READING

John Brown

With religious zeal, John Brown devoted his life to abolishing slavery. In 1859 he staged an unsuccessful takeover of the arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia (now West Virginia), in order to equip slaves with weapons and ammunition. He was hanged for treason, but later was considered a martyr and hero in the abolitionist movement.

John Brown was born to a devoutly religious family in Torrington, Connecticut, in 1800. When he was around age five, his family moved to Ohio, an antislavery state. As Brown was growing up, he learned about the way that slaves were mistreated in the South. He felt so strongly about the evils of slavery that at age 35 he became involved in the abolitionist movement.

John Brown dedicated an abundance of time to this worthy cause, but was often unable to provide for his wife and children. Brown tried his hand as a businessman, farmer, shepherd, and tanner, and sought out odd jobs in between. From 1825 to 1855 he moved his family 10 times in his quest to find work. He opened each of his homes to African Americans traveling the Underground Railroad and demanded that the churches he attended accept African Americans into their congregations.

Five of Brown's sons also were committed to ending slavery. In 1855 John Brown moved to Kansas to help them fight off attacks by people who were trying to establish slavery in that state. The trouble continued and, in May of 1856, Brown and a group of supporters dragged five pro-slavery settlers out of their cabins along Pottawatomie Creek and massacred them with swords. Those and other violent deaths gave the state the name "Bleeding Kansas." Brown justified his actions, claiming they were willed by God.

John Brown was more popular in the Northeast, where he was proclaimed a hero in the abolitionist movement. In October of 1859 he executed his most militant plan yet—an attack on an arsenal in Harpers Ferry to equip slaves for a future rebellion. He and 21 followers were quickly ambushed by future Confederate general Robert E. Lee. Lee's troops captured Brown and killed half of his men.

John Brown was found guilty of conspiracy to rebel, murder, and treason. He was hanged on December 2, 1859. He voiced his last words as he approached the scaffold, predicting the battles and slaughter to come: "I, John Brown, am now quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away but with blood."

■ UNDERSTANDING WHAT YOU READ After you have finished reading the selection, answer the following questions in the space provided.

1. What trades did Brown try to learn in order to make a living?

2. Why did Brown raid Harpers Ferry?

3. What methods did John Brown employ in his attempts to end slavery? What other approaches might he have taken?

4. How did John Brown justify his militant approach to ending slavery?

ACTIVITY

Imagine that you are a close friend of John Brown's family and are asked to deliver the eulogy at his funeral. Write what you would say about him. Try to acknowledge his strengths, while admitting that he had faults as well.

3. Whittier believed that Webster succumbed to temptation when he argued for a compromise on slavery. Whittier writes that since everyone may at some time fall prey to temptation, Webster should not be hated for his action.
4. John Brown's hanging body was a portent, or an omen, of the violence and horror to come.
5. A meteor produces a bright light that draws attention to its destruction, just as Brown's raid drew attention to the slavery issue and preceded the nation's destruction in the Civil War.
6. Although Melville was a Quaker and might have abhorred Brown's violence, he might also have regarded Brown as a hero and a martyr for his antislavery beliefs.

ACTIVITY

Students' poems will vary, but should be historically based.

PRIMARY SOURCE

1. 60
2. He was an African American, one of the very people the raid was to benefit.
3. He was a religious fanatic, and believed it was his duty to free the slaves, even if in doing so he lost his own life.
4. Possible answer: He acknowledges their deaths with sorrow but no show of emotion. He does not allow the deaths to disrupt his mission.
5. He will not fire on an unarmed man.
6. He was brave and sensible except when it came to slavery; he was not a vicious man.

ACTIVITY

Articles should reflect an understanding of the reading.

BIOGRAPHY

1. being a businessman, tanner, shepherd, and farmer
2. He wanted to collect arms and ammunition for his planned slave rebellion.
3. violence; peaceful demonstrations, plead for new legislation
4. He claimed that his actions were willed by God.

ACTIVITY

Students' answers should include that Brown's whole life was dedicated to ridding the South of slavery, and that he felt violence was an acceptable means to achieve that because it was the will of God.

CHAPTER 12

LITERATURE

1. a soldier who is on the losing side in a battle
2. bones and bloodstains on the battlefield, as well as dead men: "Men too straight to stoop again"; powerful images suggesting brokenness: "Piles of solid Moan," "Chips of Blank—in Boyish Eyes—," "scraps of prayer"
3. Some soldiers might rather have died than to have caused the carnage required for victory.
4. a soldier who is on the winning side of the battle
5. At first he is proud, but later ashamed, and even wishes himself among the dead.
6. His sorrow or repentance over having killed means nothing to the soldiers who have died.
7. The word "today" in the first line of the first poem implies that the defeat is temporary; tomorrow will bring another battle and with it possible victory (or another defeat). The first two lines of the second poem describe the soldier's sense of victory lasting only until the drums at the battle scene ended and he saw the bodies of the dead.

ACTIVITY

Students' poems and prose pieces should contain many descriptive metaphors.

PRIMARY SOURCE

1. Lincoln had a high-pitched voice that sounded almost like a shriek. He spoke slowly and deliberately, though without much expression.
2. He thinks they were perhaps expressions of personal opinion on the part of other reporters.