THE DRED SCOTT DECISION

Citizenship, slavery, and the struggle for constitutional justice | Grades 6–12

First Name: _____ Last Name: _____

CENTRAL HISTORICAL INVESTIGATION

How did Dred Scott v. Sandford use constitutional interpretation to protect slavery and deny citizenship, and how did people challenge those limits?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE AND EVIDENCE TARGET

Objective: Analyze the Scotts' freedom claims, the majority opinion, a dissent, and constitutional change. DOL: Construct a RACE response using at least three sources, explain their significance, and address a competing interpretation.

INTERDISCIPLINARY LENSES

History and civics: federalism, judicial power, citizenship, dissent, and amendments. Geography: how movement across legal boundaries affected freedom claims. Economics: the conflict between enslavers' property claims and human liberty. ELA: perspective, corroboration, and evidence based argument.

NJSLS SOCIAL STUDIES

Grades 6–8: 6.1.8.HistoryCC.5.a, causes of the Civil War; 6.1.8.HistoryUP.5.a, effectiveness of Reconstruction amendments. Grades 9–12: 6.1.12.CivicsDP.4.a, interpretations of the Reconstruction amendments; 6.1.12.CivicsDP.4.b, equality in founding and Civil War documents.

NJSLS ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

Grade 6 anchor alignment: RI.CR.6.1, textual evidence; RI.PP.6.5, perspective; RI.AA.6.7, argument; W.AW.6.1, evidence based writing. Grades 9–10 extension: RI.CR.9–10.1 and W.AW.9–10.1. Select corresponding indicators for other grades.

COMMON CORE LITERACY CONNECTIONS

CCSS/CCLS: RH.6–8.1, RH.6–8.2, RH.6–8.6, RH.6–8.9; WHST.6–8.1 and WHST.6–8.9. High school extensions: RH.9–10.1, RH.9–10.6, WHST.9–10.1; RH.11–12.1, RH.11–12.6, WHST.11–12.1.

Readings A–E → interdisciplinary inquiry → 15 multiple choice questions → RACE planner and final response. The sources document racist legal reasoning for critical examination, never endorsement.

DAY 1 | A FAMILY SUES FOR FREEDOM

Objective: Explain how Dred and Harriet Scott used the courts to claim freedom.

DOL: Support an explanation with at least two relevant source details.

Do Now: How can a person challenge a law that denies their freedom?

SOURCE A | DRED AND HARRIET SCOTT’S CLAIM

Classroom synthesis based on National Park Service accounts of the freedom suits.

Dred and Harriet Scott were enslaved people who pursued freedom for their family through legal action. In April 1846, each filed a freedom suit in St. Louis, Missouri. Their claim relied on residence in places where slavery was prohibited. Dred had lived in Illinois and at Fort Snelling, then in Wisconsin Territory. Harriet also lived at Fort Snelling, where she and Dred married. Their family included daughters Eliza and Lizzie. Earlier Missouri decisions had recognized freedom claims based on residence on free soil. The Scotts therefore used an existing legal strategy, rather than asking a court to invent a completely new one. Their suits remind us that enslaved people were historical actors who contested their treatment as property. Filing a petition did not mean the legal system treated them as equals. The family still faced the authority of enslavers and courts. Their struggle connected everyday family security to larger questions about where slavery could exist and whose claims the government would recognize.

I Do: Model the difference between a claim and supporting evidence. We Do: Identify the family’s legal argument. They Do: Explain it with a partner before writing.

Source Analysis 1: Why did residence in a free jurisdiction matter to the Scotts’ claim?

Source Analysis 2: How does Harriet’s participation change a history focused only on Dred?

Quick Write: Explain how the freedom suits demonstrate agency despite enslavement. Use two details.

Exit Ticket: Identify one fact you would verify in an original petition.