

Growing Anti-racist UU's: A Curriculum for Children

www.uucharlottesville.org/anti-racist-curriculum/

Slavery - Lesson 4 for Grades 3-5

by Linda Dukes

LESSON OVERVIEW

THIS LESSON REQUIRES THAT TEACHERS DO ADVANCE PREPARATION TO BE EFFECTIVE! SEE LEADER PREPARATION SECTION.

INTRODUCTION

Thoughts to Ponder:

“To justify slavery, black Americans had to be dehumanized. A moral and legal framework to support slavery was constructed at the same time. The distortion of the black image begins here. If it is believed that a man is inferior, subhuman, it becomes easy to treat him as a pet, a toy, an object of comic relief, a crazed lower animal who must be controlled and ruled.” -- Robert Guillaume

Big Question:

Can we learn from the racist past of our country?

GOALS

- To learn about the enslavement of Africans in the English colonies and the first 85 years of the United States
- To further develop empathy

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Participants will:

- know that American chattel slavery in the English colonies and the first 85 years of the United States was a terrible system in which White people owned Black people, in which the enslaved were denied freedom, often treated brutally, and families were often torn apart
- know that enslaved Africans resisted in a variety of ways
- realize that it is important to understand truths about our country's past so that we can better understand today

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Article for parents is “It's Not So Black and White: Discussing Race and Racism in the Classroom” by Dr. Beverly Tatum from <https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/its-not-so-black-and-white/>

LESSON-AT-A-GLANCE

Opening	5 minutes
Activity 1: Develop web “What do we know about slavery?”	10 minutes
Activity 2: Read beginning of book	10 minutes
Activity 3: Small groups, then presenting to whole group	20 minutes
Closing	5 minutes

LEADER PREPARATION

Slavery is a very difficult subject for both white and black Americans. It’s important to tell the truth of our history to begin to understand our present. Please read these articles before teaching this lesson:



Teaching Tolerance added to their website in the summer of 2019 a detailed framework about how to teach elementary school children about slavery. Be sure to read as much of this as possible, especially about topics you are not as familiar with.

<https://www.tolerance.org/frameworks/teaching-hard-history/american-slavery/k-5-framework>

TED talk by Dr. Beverly Tatum, “Is My Skin Brown Because I Drank Chocolate Milk?”:

<https://tedx.stanford.edu/lineup/beverly-daniel-tatum> (13 min.)

Some key ideas: We often teach young kids to be “color-silent” and they learn it’s not OK to talk about race. She gives examples of conversations about race with very young children. She starts talking about slavery at approximately minute 8:30. She thinks young children need to know a) slavery was a very long time ago, they don’t need to worry about it now, b) many enslaved people resisted, c) there were some White allies who also resisted slavery. Then she relates the explanation about slavery that she gave to her own preschool son.

“It’s Not So Black and White: Discussing Race and Racism in the Classroom” by Dr. Beverly Tatum. <https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/its-not-so-black-and-white/> See Handout 2 below.

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“The Disturbing ‘Monkey Business’ of U.S. Black-White Race Relations,” from Teaching Tolerance. Representations of black people as animals is both a past and present manifestation of the United States’ complicated history with race.

<http://www.tolerance.org/blog/disturbing-monkey-business-us-black-white-race-relations>

MATERIALS FOR LESSON

- Bryan, Ashley. *Freedom over me: Eleven slaves, their lives and dreams brought to life by Ashley Bryan*. NY: Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2016. Print.
- Extra copy of above book or photocopies of pages about Jane (including Jane dreams) and John (including John dreams)
- Very large area of easel or butcher paper that is low enough for the students to write on, too, but not flat on the floor. One way to do this would be to cover a rectangular folding table with butcher paper and tip it on its side on the floor.
- If possible, homemade “hoecakes” and napkins. See Leader Resources at end of lesson for simple recipe and information.
- Copies of “Taking it Home” for this lesson and copies of article, “It’s Not So Black and White: Discussing Race and Racism in the Classroom” by Dr. Beverly Tatum. (Plan to email it to all families after the session.)
- Chalice and LED/battery-operated candle or matches and candle

LESSON PLAN

WELCOMING AND ENTERING

Preparation for Class

- Set up a circle area with a chalice plus another area, so the class can divide into at least 2 small groups.
- Arrange a very large paper to write on that is low enough for the students to write on, too, but not flat on the floor. One way to do this would be to close a rectangular folding table, cover it with butcher paper, and prop it up on its side against a wall.
- If possible, make “hoecakes.” These are very simple.

OPENING (5 MINUTES)

Description of Activity

Sit in a circle and follow the class’s usual opening procedures (check in, chalice lighting, listen to chime until silence for centering, opening words, sharing joys and concerns, etc.).

**NOTE: ACTIVITIES 1-3 FORM A UNIT –
THEY NEED TO STAY TOGETHER.**

ACTIVITY 1: WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT SLAVERY? (10 MINUTES)

Description of Activity

Say, “We are learning today about slavery in the United States. When Europeans came to North America, they enslaved many Indigenous peoples/Native Americans. Today, though, we are concentrating on another kind of slavery – the enslavement of Africans by the English colonists and by white Americans in the first nearly 100 years of the United States. Both kinds of slavery were terrible. It is hard to talk about it, but if we don’t, we can’t really understand where we are today.”

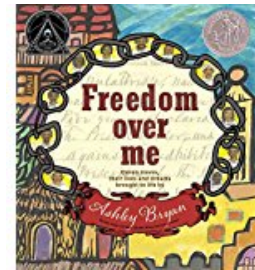
Ask class what they already know about slavery in the United States. Make a web, starting with at least three circles coming off “Slavery”: 1) Life as enslaved persons*, 2) Africa, 3) Resistance. Record what they say in a web-like format on large easel pad paper, leaving plenty of room for additions throughout the class time. Don’t let this activity go too long! (See photos in Leader Resources.)

*Explain that using the terms “enslaved persons” or “enslaved Africans” rather than “slaves” emphasizes that we are talking about people, not things.

ACTIVITY 2: READ BEGINNING OF *FREEDOM OVER ME* BY ASHLEY BRYAN (10 MINUTES)

Description of Activity

Read the book from the beginning through the end of the page “Peggy dreams.” **(If there are vocabulary words that any of the children might not know, consider replacing them with simpler alternative. For example, say “ship” instead of “vessel.”** Explain that the page that says “dreams” is colorful because it is it’s a dream/wish.)



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Discuss it. Ask class “Does anything from the book say something that we already have on our web? – if so, add a small checkmark next to it.

“Is there anything that doesn’t fit [contradicts] something on our web?” If so, put an X next to it.

“What can we add to our web from the book?” Add ideas.

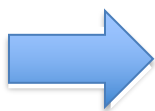
ACTIVITY 3: SMALL GROUPS ABOUT ONE ENSLAVED AFRICAN PERSON AND PRESENTATION TO CLASS (20 MINUTES)

Description of Activity

Explain that they will be divided into small groups. Each group will have information about a different African person enslaved on the Fairchilds' plantation. They are to get to know that person, add or change any information on the web based on what they learn (each group uses a different color marker), and create a way to introduce that person to the rest of the class.

Divide into groups of 2 – 4 children, each with an adult. Spend 10 minutes doing this activity, with the adult facilitating. Depending on the age of the group, the adult may read the two pages, asking the children to listen for two things: 1) facts to add to the web or cross off it, 2) ideas of how to tell this enslaved African's story to the full class. The group needs to quickly plan how to present the person's story to the others. One group will work with "John" and the other with "Jane."

Then return to big group, and each group presents an enslaved African person and mentions information they added to the web. **Show class the "Appraisal" of the estate – one of the last pages of the book.**



Feelings: (Don't skip this part!) Ask how children are feeling now. Encourage empathetic responses. Who could we talk to about our feelings outside of here? If children voice feelings about guilt or shame about slavery, consider explaining that many adults have those feelings, too, and that it is helpful to work our way past them to be able to work for justice today.

Taste hoecakes (see recipe and information in Leader Resources). The idea is to experience how plain the food the enslaved Africans had because they were generally given only cornmeal. Sometimes they could supplement it by growing some vegetables or trapping animals.

CLOSING (5) MINUTES)

Description of Activity

Gather children in a circle. Say, in your own words:

Today we talked about slavery – the horrible idea that people can own other people. We all know it was wrong to take people's freedom away, wrong to say that some people are better than others just because of the color of their skin, wrong to beat people and split up families. We also talked about ways enslaved people resisted.

We know that it's important for us to know the truth about American history so we can understand today. We also know that as Unitarian Universalists we believe in our ideas and act on them. We work for a more fair country and world.

Form a circle, hands over hearts, tap hearts in a heartbeat rhythm (duh, DUM, duh, DUM) in unison, feel that power of humanity.

Hand out Take it Home sheets and article as parents/caregivers arrive.

LEADER REFLECTION AND PLANNING

When class ends, please stop for a minute with your co-teacher to . . .

- Take a deep breath together and acknowledge that you have done one thing today for racial justice. Sometimes the problems seem so huge that we need to find specific actions we can take, and this is one of them.
- Discuss if any children weren't fully included in the lesson and how they might be in the future.
- Note any issues that you want to follow up on in the next class.
- Note any issues that you want to mention to your congregation's racial justice curriculum planners or your religious educator.

TAKING IT HOME

(see Handouts 1 and 2)

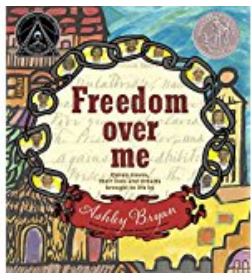
Take It Home!
(for 4th Racial Justice Lesson)

In our classes we are building on empathy and looking at unfair treatment of enslaved Africans in our history. We need to know about the past in order to understand the present.

Teaching Tolerance's website has a detailed framework about how to teach elementary school children about slavery. It is informative!

<https://www.tolerance.org/frameworks/teaching-hard-history/american-slavery/k-5-framework>

Our class explored the difficult topic of **slavery** in the English colonies and the first 85 years of the United States, starting by making a concept web of what the children knew already. We explained that we can't really understand the present without telling the truth about the past. We read parts of the book *Freedom over me: Eleven slaves, their lives and dreams brought to life* by Ashley Bryan to learn about three fictionalized enslaved people. Small groups of children created a way to tell the story of one enslaved African to the rest of the class. Parents: please read the article handed out today! This is way too big a topic for one class session, so please supplement it at home.



FOUR CORE GOALS OF ANTI-BIAS EDUCATION

From Louise Derman-Sparks & Julie Olsen Edwards, 2010. *Anti-Bias Education for Young Children & Ourselves*

1. Each child will demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive social identities.
 2. Each child will express comfort and joy with human diversity; accurate language for human differences; and deep, caring human connections.
 3. Each child will increasingly recognize unfairness, have language to describe unfairness, and understand that unfairness hurts.
 4. Each child will demonstrate empowerment and the skills to act, with others or alone, against prejudice and/or discrimination.
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It's Not So Black and White: Discussing Race and Racism in the Classroom

By Dr. Beverly Tatum

<https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/its-not-so-black-and-white/>

Discussing racial issues can make students and teachers uncomfortable. Here, educator and scholar Dr. Beverly Tatum shares her wisdom on teaching about slavery and race-related issues.

Classroom teachers across the country are faced with explaining the central paradox of a democracy that declared all men equal but enslaved and oppressed one group to provide independence and prosperity for another. The task is difficult because your audience is children.

Slavery is a topic that makes many of us uncomfortable. Yet, black-white race relations in the United States have been forever shaped by slavery and its social, psychological, and economic legacy. It requires discussion. How should we approach the topic with children?

Too often I hear from young African American students that they feel embarrassment in school when slavery is discussed. Ironically, slavery is one of the few ways the black experience is included in their schooling, even during Black History Month, a time of celebration. Uncomfortable with the portrayal of their group as helpless victims, students squirm as they feel the eyes of white children looking for their reaction to this subject.

In my professional-development work with white teachers, they sometimes remark how uncomfortable they, too, are with this example (and others) of the painful history of race relations. As one elementary teacher said: "It is hard to tell small children about slavery, hard to explain that young black men were lynched and that police turned fire hoses on children while others bombed churches, killing black children at their prayers. This history is a terrible legacy for all of us. The other day [another] teacher told me that she could not look into the faces of her students when she taught about these things. It was too painful, and too embarrassing. . . . If we are all uncomfortable, something is wrong in our approach."

Something is wrong. **While it is necessary to be honest about the racism of our past and present, it is also necessary to provide children (and adults) with a vision that change is possible.** Where can we find this vision? We can look for it in our history, we can create it with our colleagues, and we can demonstrate it in our classrooms.

The Africans who were brought here as slaves were not just passive victims. They found ways to resist their victimization. All whites were not bad, and some black resisters found white allies. Concrete examples are critical.

For young children, examples can be found in picture books. One of my favorites is Faith Ringgold's *Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky*. This story is told from the point of view of a young black girl who travels back in time and experiences both the chilling realities of slavery and the power of her own resistance and eventual escape. White people are presented in the story as enemies (slave owners) and as allies (hosts on the Underground Railroad). This dual representation is important for all children, regardless of color.

A white friend of mine often told her young son the story of how Rosa Parks refused to sit in the back of the bus in 1955 and sparked her whole community to take a stand against racist whites during the Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott. The story was one of the child's favorites when he was just four years old. Then one day he asked her, "Are all white people bad?" Now he was five, and already seemed to be feeling bad about being white.

I recommended talking more about what white people had done to oppose injustice. Jeanette Winter's book *Follow the Drinking Gourd* highlights the role of a white man and other white allies who offer assistance along the Underground Railroad.

When discussing a sensitive topic such as slavery, make sure all are treated respectfully as individuals. Follow the rule yourself, and don't allow children to be treated as if they represent an entire racial group.

When you feel uncomfortable or notice students squirming, acknowledge the discomfort. Let them know it is normal. You can say, "It is hard to talk about the time when there were slaves. It can make us all feel bad. Sometimes I feel ____." You can fill in the blank yourself; feelings of guilt or anger are common.

Let students see themselves as agents of change and healing. Although slavery ended a long time ago, we still face racism today. By treating one another with respect, students are fighting racism.

Encourage them to **note examples of bias and stereotypes** in their reading. Children can learn to question whether derogatory depictions of other people are stereotypes. They can learn to ask who is doing what in the story's plot, and why; who is in the role of leader and who is taking the orders; and who has been left out of the story altogether.

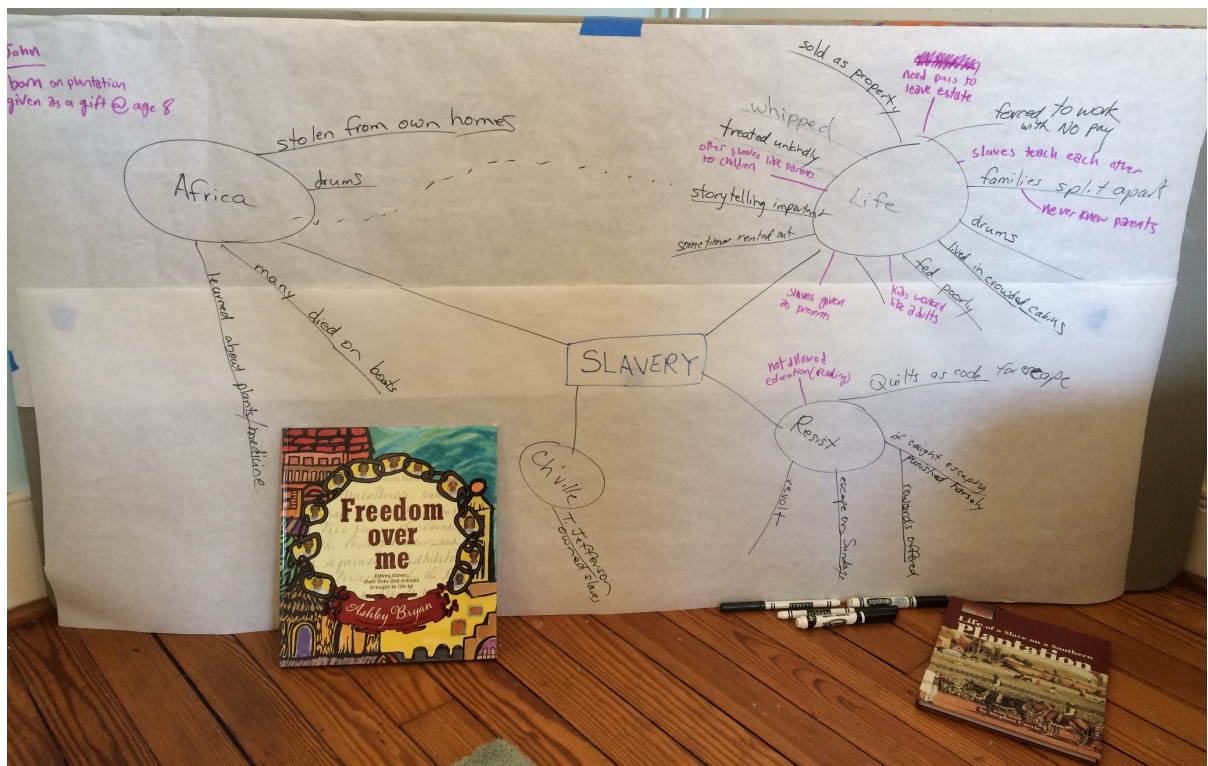
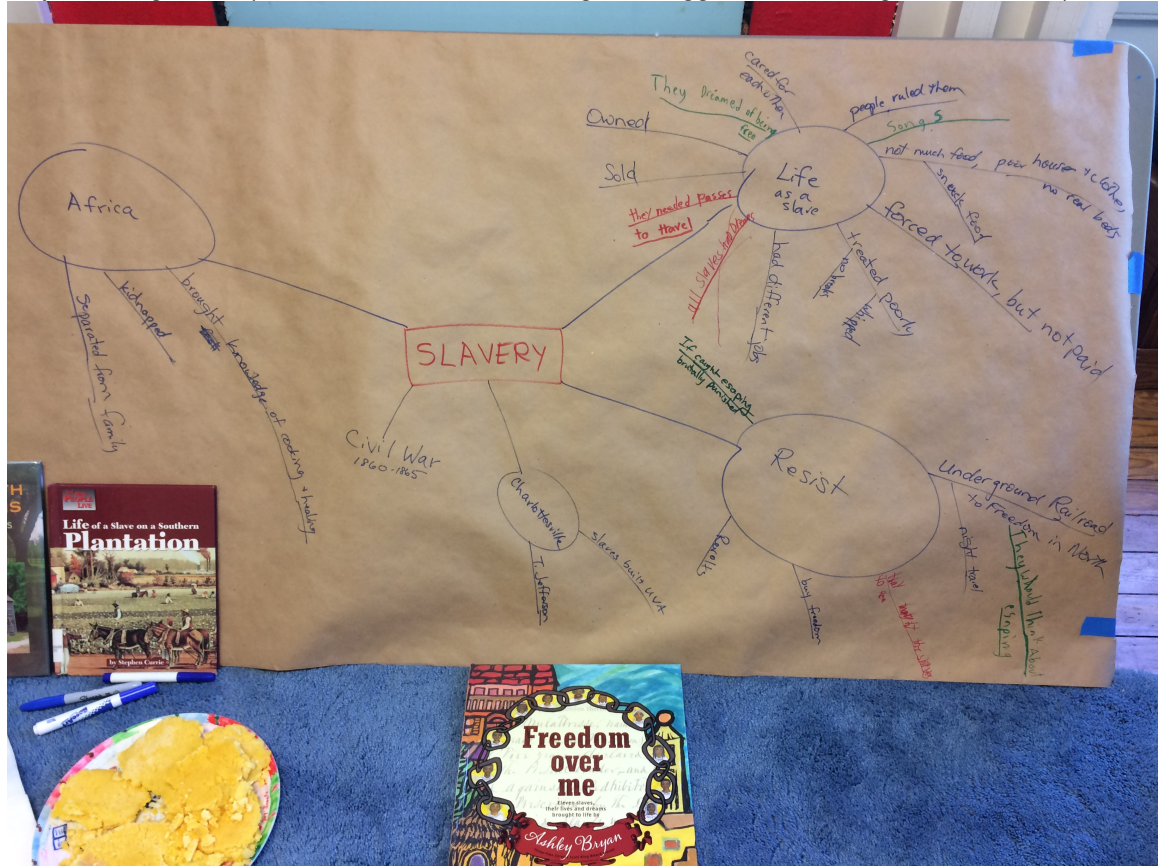
Social studies and history curricula rarely emphasize examples of black or white resistance to slavery or racism. You're not alone in your discomfort with the topic, or your search for solutions. Share your concerns, frustrations, success stories, and resources with colleagues and friends.

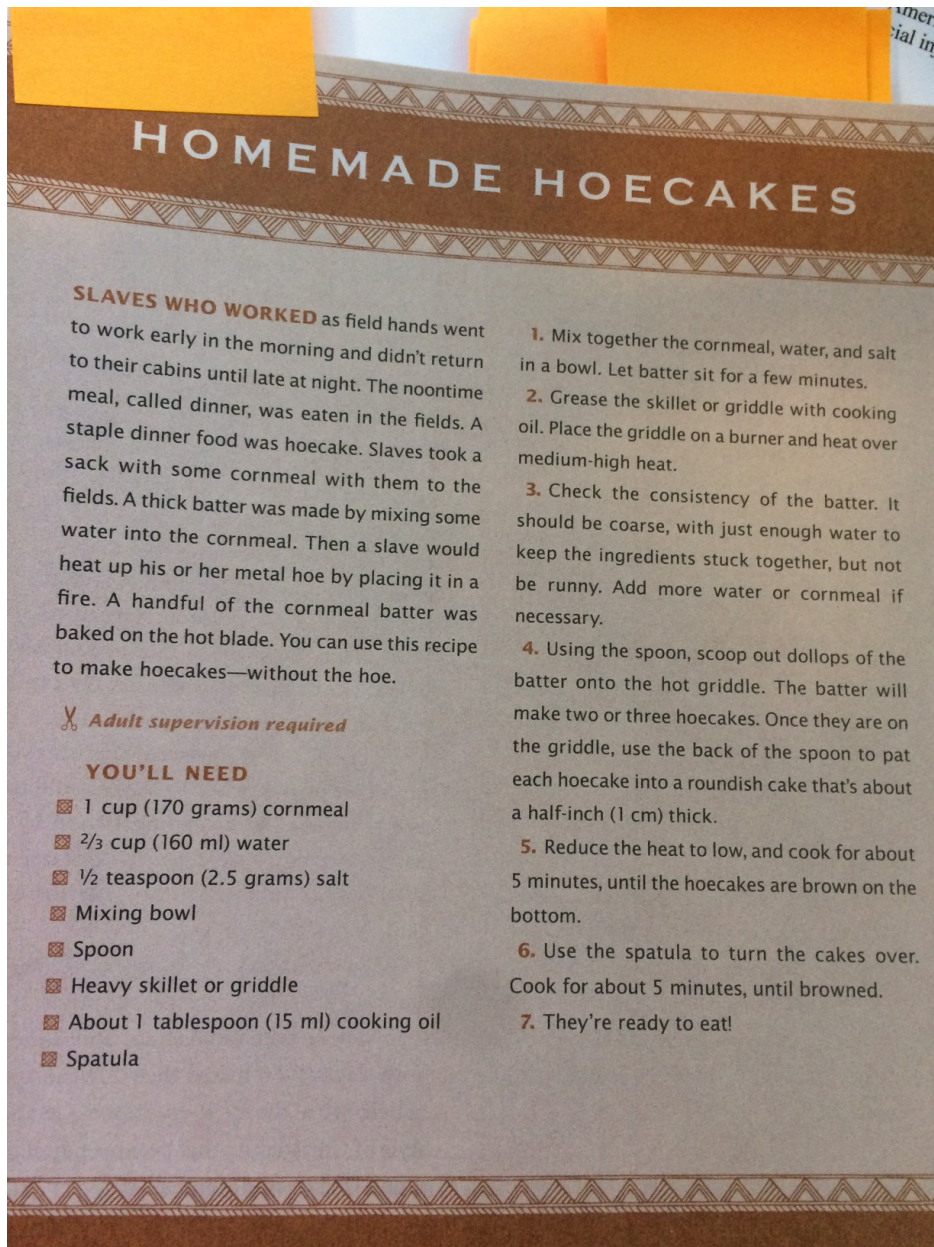
Coming to terms with past and present injustice is often cause for anger and guilt, frustration and despair. All children, regardless of color, need to find the hope in this history. We must not insensitively sanitize the pain of those caught in the bind of oppression. We need to celebrate the strength of the human spirit to go beyond the roles of victim and victimizer. In doing so, we may inspire one another to do likewise in the struggle against the contemporary injustices we face.

LEADER RESOURCES

Examples of webs developed by 2nd- 4th graders (adults did most of the writing and suggested the categories in circles):

Note corncakes (hoecakes) are pictured at bottom of photo.





Hoecakes recipe from
Carson, Mary Kay. *The Underground Railroad for Kids: from slavery to freedom*.
Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2005.

Other good books for children:

Armond, Glenda. *Twelve Miles Long*. Illustrated by Colin Bootman. NY: Lee & Low Books Inc., 2011.

Hill, Laban Carrick. *Dave the Potter: Artist, Poet, Slave*. Illustrated. By Bryan Collier. NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2010.

Smith, Charles R. Jr. *Brick by Brick*. Illustrated by Floyd Cooper. NY: Armistad, 2013.