

# WHITNEY PLANTATION

## Re-Imagining the South: Using Whitney Plantation to Teach Antebellum America

Curriculum Plan  
English/Language Arts, US History, Social Studies  
High School, Grades 9-12

### Introduction:

Discussing the institution of slavery in American history can seem like a difficult and complex conversation to have in the classroom. The challenge to educators is how to present this topic in both a meaningful and authentic way. The relevance of this part of American history in our contemporary conversations of the past, is demonstrated by the passions this topic arouses.

Using the Whitney Plantation Museum as the entry point to the discussion of this topic, students will learn about the history of those who were enslaved on plantations in the American South and whose labor helped build this country.

### Essential Questions:

- 1). What were the historical, economic, and social implications of the plantation system?
- 2). How do we confront this painful, yet defining facet of our shared experience?
- 3). How is the treatment of memory and the physical manifestations of memorialization indicative of a society's values?

### Outcomes:

By the end of this unit, students will be **able to understand**

- the underlying economics of the plantation system in the American South,
- its foundational relationship with the rise of the United States, and
- the necessity of slavery as an institution to maintain the entire system.

They will also **analyze and interpret**

- primary and secondary sources detailing life in slave holding Louisiana,
- personal testimonies of the enslaved,
- visual evidence of the plantation system, and
- how Heritage Tourism can both solidify and challenge systems of oppression.

Additionally, students will have **used critical thinking to examine**

- the legacy of slavery,
- its present-day impact on the national conversation, and
- how memorialization itself extends and promotes necessary conversation.

### Time Span:

This curriculum is intended to be adaptable according to the needs of individual classrooms; teachers should feel free to tailor the activities and individual portions of the unit. The time spent should range from six to ten 45-minute classes, with a final project of variable length, depending on how the instructor chooses to focus the research and final project.

### **Standards:**

We have aligned our curriculum with Common Core Standards in Literacy in History/Social Studies, but there is significant overlap with English/Language Arts Standards. Because our unit is meant to be flexible and applicable in either an English or a Social Studies classroom, we've listed applicable standards in both fields. Additionally, this curriculum is adaptable and able to be implemented in grades 9-12, those separate standards are also given.

### **Social Studies/History Standards Grades 9 & 10**

Key Ideas and Details:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2](#)

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

Craft and Structure:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.5](#)

Analyze how a text uses structure to emphasize key points or advance an explanation or analysis.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.6](#)

Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.7](#)

Integrate quantitative or technical analysis (e.g., charts, research data) with qualitative analysis in print or digital text.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.8](#)

Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author's claims.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.9](#)

Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

### **Social Studies/History Standards Grades 11 & 12**

Key Ideas and Details:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2](#)

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.3](#)

Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

Craft and Structure:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.5

Analyze in detail how a complex primary source is structured, including how key sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text contribute to the whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6

Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.8

Evaluate an author's premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9

Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

## Day One

### Invitation to Think Critically about Our Shared History

#### Outline and Goals

The overall purpose of the lessons on the first day will be to introduce the unit, and to prompt the students to begin thinking about the deeper issues which will be addressed over the course of the lessons. Taking as its theme the ideas of memorialization and the impact of history on the lives of the students, they will be analyzing history, and drawing connections between the history of our country and their personal stories.

#### Anticipatory Set

Have you ever participated in heritage tourism by visiting a historic site? A monument, museum, or battlefield? Describe what you did, describe what you saw. What were your feelings when you were there? What does the term heritage tourism mean to you?

#### Activity 1: Group Task

Put students to work in groups of two or three. Ask them to take out a sheet of paper and divide it into three columns, titled: local, state, and the national. During this activity students are to brainstorm together and make a list of historical sites for each column. Ask them to think about things that have either happened in their own backyard (local), things that their state is famous for, such as national parks or battlefields (state), and then lastly symbols or places which identify with the whole country, ex: The White House (national).

You may prompt them with questions about field trips, travels, or famous sites, such as the Statue of Liberty. Once they have spent 5 - 10 minutes on this list, ask them to share out some of the different sites they wrote down.

#### Debrief: Ask Primary Questions

- 1) What is the purpose of historic sites?
- 2) What do monuments do?
- 3) What does this say about society and the way we think about the past?

#### Activity 2: Group Work Follow-Up

In the same groups, students will analyze a set of 3-5 historical markers. Using the worksheet provided, have the students answer the questions about the provided historical markers. Some are given here, but if you would like to take pictures and use any of the historical markers in your local area, that is a great alternative.

## Project or Homework

On the reverse side of the worksheet is the outline of a standard historical marker. The students should brainstorm events in their lives, or the lives of their family, and should create a marker which memorializes a momentous event. They can finish this for homework, and a discussion of what the students have chosen to memorialize will be a great way to introduce the next day's activities.

There are a number of questions which can be asked about the students work, including:

- 1). Why did you choose this event?
- 2). Do you think that someone else would have a similar historical event? Why?
- 3). Out of all of the events in your family history, how did this one get chosen above all?

## **Day Two**

### **The Plantation Tour Critical Analysis**

#### **Introducing Whitney Plantation and the Mission**

#### Outline and Goals

The focus of the activities and discussions today will be to bring into focus WHAT the Whitney Plantation is, and WHY it exists. By contrasting this former plantation with many other former plantations in the United States, the students should be able to realize the differences in approach and presentation which makes the Whitney a unique, and necessary historical site.

#### Anticipatory Set

How does heritage tourism interpret Antebellum history? How does Whitney Plantation contradict this interpretation?

#### Class activity: Critical Source Analysis

For the introductory activity of the day, students will work to examine a cultural relic of the South, the plantation tour. Using either the links provided on the "Locating the Sources" page, or by looking up plantation tours in the American South, students will look to examine plantation advertisements: brochures, literature, and advertisements of plantations, and complete the accompanying worksheet. Students will look at the ways these historic sites are presented to potential tourists. Students may work individually, in pairs, or small groups as they look at each one of the documents. Students should ask themselves:

- 1). Who is the intended audience? How can you tell?
- 2). What interpretation of the past do you see being promoted?

## Debrief

After the activity and source analysis has been completed, lead the students in a short discussion.

1. What did you notice?
2. What are some things that these brochures have in common?
3. Do you think this is an accurate interpretation of a plantation?
4. Would you want to go on one of these tours? Why or why not?

## Activity 2: Situating Whitney Plantation

Now students will turn their attention to the Whitney Plantation, the nation's first museum on a former plantation, dedicated to the experience of the enslaved. There are multiple suggested resources to do this, dependent on what the goals of the class will be, and also on the amount of time available in the classroom.

Go to the Whitney Plantation website ([www.whitneyplantation.com](http://www.whitneyplantation.com)). On the home page, across the banner on the top is the tab "News," this will provide a drop-down menu with multiple sources of Whitney Plantation in the news. Read, watch, or listen to 1-2 reports on the Whitney Plantation.

## Homework

In a reflection of 3-5 paragraphs, based on your introduction to the Whitney Plantation, please explain:

Focus 1: What was the intent of the founder and research historian to open the Whitney Plantation as a museum on a former plantation focused on the history of slavery in the United States?

Focus 2: Comparing the plantation advertisements you looked at in class, what makes this approach to interoperating a former plantation revolutionary?

## **Days 3,4,5 and 6**

### **Life at Whitney Plantation in the Antebellum Period**

#### Teacher notes

After the initial introductory days, the main examination of Antebellum life, using the Whitney Plantation and the experience of the enslaved workers, will commence.

The way this has been set up is to ensure maximum flexibility on the part of the teacher. Depending on lesson goals, time availability, and even what type of course this is being taught in, whether in an English, an elective, or a social studies classroom, there will be plenty of opportunity to customize and allow the students to get the most out of these lessons. There are four modules and each of the four modules has a main theme:

1. Economy
2. Daily life
3. Danger

#### 4. Hope

Each module will use a variety of methods to help the students receive as full a picture as possible, calling upon different skill sets and presenting material geared toward a number of learning styles. For maximum flexibility, teachers can determine the number of materials students complete within each module. There is no order the modules must be completed, however, we recommend starting with module one “Economy.” The students will collect, analyze, and evaluate these sources as they follow along on their individual module worksheets.

#### Each Module Contains:

<p>A <b>Set of Videos</b> filmed on-site at the Whitney Plantation.</p> <p>The speakers are trained guides who will bring the students to different sites on the property, explaining what happened in each spot.</p>	<p>2-3 <b>Primary Sources either</b> from the historical collection of Whitney Plantation or a historical archive.</p> <p>These will be relevant artifacts culled from the research and documentation collection at the Whitney or a national archive such as the Library of Congress.</p>
	<p>A <b>Narrative</b> from an enslaved person held in bondage on a plantation in Louisiana.</p> <p>Collected by the Works Progress Administration in the 1930’s, these stories reflect the everyday realities of Antebellum life in Louisiana.</p>

#### Final Day

#### Tying it All Together

##### Anticipatory Set

Out of the four topics which we explored in-depth what are some of the things which strike you the most? Why?

##### Activity 1: Answering the Essential Questions

The students should take out their worksheets from the previous days, and begin to look over them. Students should come to a deeper understanding as the essential questions of the unit are addressed. This activity can take multiple forms:

**Guided Discussion.** The teacher leads the students in a full class discussion.

**Writing Prompts.** Students use the questions to reflect on the themes of the unit.

**Small Group Discussion/Writing.** Students are placed into small groups and use the interactions and opinions of their peers to craft well thought out answers, which they then share out to the class or write down.

The most important points of this activity will be to help the students create answers to these questions which emphasize the lived experiences of the enslaved people on plantations in the United States and highlights the labor force which helped built the county.

Prompt/Question #1: What was the purpose of plantation economies in the American South before the Civil War? And how was the institution of slavery of critical importance in the operation of these economies?

Prompt/Question #2: How do we, confront this defining facet of American history?

Prompt/ Question #3: How is the treatment of memory and the physical manifestations of memorialization indicative of a society's values? Where does the Whitney Plantation fit into these ideas?

Prompt/ Question #4: Knowing what you do know now, how have your thoughts on historic sites changed? Has your answer to the question "What do monuments do?" changed? Why or why not?

## **Final Project**

### **Memorialization and Memory in Our Own Backyards**

#### Overview

Depending on how much time is available in classes, and how much more deeply into the materials the students are willing to go, there are a number of possible final projects which will be helpful in solidifying the knowledge that students have already gained. The purpose of these final projects is to use what the students learned in the modules, and from the mission of the Whitney Plantation, to impel the students to look within their own community for different methods of memorialization.

Any one of these possible final projects are flexible and customizable according the needs of the teacher and the amount of time available to the students.

#### **Option 1**

For this final project, the teacher should choose either an historical site or event which took place within their community. Dividing the students into small groups of three to five people, they should be tasked with researching the site or event, and providing an alternative narrative, to the history presented, to incorporate all the groups involved.

Students could use creative writing to retell a story of the event from an alternative viewpoint, and/or present as a group about the ways in which approaching this event with multiple perspectives results in a richer understanding of the participants involved.



## **Option 2**

If this is taking place in a state which once held people in bondage, look at the ways the institution of slavery has impacted the local community. The students should research and propose a historical marker, which makes reference to an event or site in the community and brings knowledge of the experiences of the enslaved within their locality.

## **Option 3**

If this curriculum project is being done in a place where the daily impact of slavery was not as pronounced as it was in the slave holding states, then students could be given the job of researching and finding links between the plantation economy of the South and their local economy. For example, many of the mills and textile factories of the north were dependent on cotton grown by the enslaved. Also, and more directly connected to the Whitney Plantation, the sugar that was grown by the enslaved workers along the Mississippi River in Louisiana was exported across the country. Local recipes and eating habits were greatly altered with the sudden availability of domestic sugar in the opening decades of the 1800s.

Students could create maps and/or posters which highlight the trade routes which tied their own community to the enslaved workers of the southern United States, paying special attention to the crops grown in the plantation economy (cotton, indigo, tobacco, rice, sugar) and their local experiences.

## **Option 4**

This final project would be the most involved, yet the most directly connected to the mission of the Whitney Plantation. The teacher can choose a local site, or one that is not very far away. The students should research this site, finding primary sources such as the ones they looked at in this unit: historical documents, photos or oral history narratives to provide an alternative narrative to the site.

Much as the Whitney Plantation Museum rethought the traditional southern plantation tour, students can use critical thinking to engage with sites of memory within their own community. Guided by the teacher, they should highlight alternative narratives dealing with the chosen site, and as a capstone project propose the creation of either a museum exhibit, a walking history trail or a public lecture on the topic which will educate others to rethink and critically examine sites of memorialization.

# WHITNEY PLANTATION

This curriculum was made possible by: Matt Arnold, Carolina Friends School, NC. Tiffany Darville, Whitney Plantation Guide and Dutchtown High School, LA. Caitlin Sheehan, Education Coordinator, Whitney Plantation Museum, LA.