

Lesson Plan

An Advocate's Newspaper

Book: *Black Soldiers in the Civil War*

Series: The Civil War

Level: Voyager

Objective

To help students examine how the title, motto, and content of the *North Star* contributed to its focus on speaking against discrimination, and to brainstorm similar choices for a newspaper that would focus on discrimination today.

Supplies

- *Black Soldiers in the Civil War* book
- Excerpt from the Encyclopedia Britannica article about the *North Star* (attached)
- Computer or projector
- Paper and pencils

Before the Activity

Read *Black Soldiers in the Civil War* as a class, or assign it to students to read on their own.

Activity

Throughout the history of the United States, black Americans have faced injustice and discrimination in many areas of life. *Black Soldiers in the Civil War* describes some of these experiences, such as the Union army's initial refusal to accept black recruits and the unfair treatment black soldiers experienced after this ban was removed.

Abolitionists and other advocates spoke out against these unfair practices. For example, open the book to page 21 and have students look at the image of the *North Star*. Frederick Douglass began creating this antislavery newspaper in December 1847. Project the excerpt from the Britannica article about the *North Star* on a screen at the front of the class. After reading the excerpt out loud, discuss the following questions as a class:

- What was Douglass's reason for starting this newspaper? (Answer: He wanted to create a paper where black Americans could use their own voices to call out injustices.)
- How does the newspaper's name reflect this aim? (Answer: Its name comes from a star that people used as a guide when escaping from slavery.)
- What was the newspaper's motto? (Answer: "Right is of no sex—Truth is of no color—God is the Father of us all, and we are brethren.")

- How does this motto reflect the newspaper’s aim? (Answer: It relates to the newspaper’s aim to help achieve equality for all people.)
- What kind of content appeared on each of the newspaper’s four pages? (Answer: Page 1 described current events. Pages 2–3 had articles, letters, reviews, and creative writing. Page 4 had advertisements.)
- How did this content help achieve the newspaper’s aim? (Answer: Page 1 kept readers informed about what was happening. Pages 2–3 showcased people’s opinions and voices. Page 4 helped the paper make money so it could continue being printed.)

According to this excerpt, Douglass used the paper to “comment on discrimination in American society,” especially noting the gap between what many leaders said they believed and how they acted. Have students gather in groups of four or five. Students in each group should discuss the following question:

- What experiences or practices in the United States today are sources of discrimination and/or injustice?

Students in each group should choose one main idea to focus on. Then, they should create a plan for a newspaper that would focus on this idea. Students should answer the following questions in their groups, writing their answers on a separate piece of paper:

- What will be the newspaper’s aim and focus?
- What will be the newspaper’s title?
- How will this title reflect the newspaper’s aim or focus?
- What will be the newspaper’s motto?
- How will this motto reflect the newspaper’s aim or focus?
- What kind of content will the newspaper feature?
- How will this content reflect the newspaper’s focus?
- How will this content help achieve the newspaper’s aim?

Remind students to write the name of each group member at the top of the group’s paper.

Evaluation

Give students 1 point for each question they answer, for up to 8 points. For a longer activity, have students in each group work together to create a front page for their newspaper, making choices about content and layout that reflect the paper’s focus and aim.

Standards

This lesson may be used to address the Common Core State Standards’ reading standards for informational texts, grade 6 (RI 6.1, 6.6), and the National Council for Social Studies’ standard 2.

The North Star (Encyclopedia Britannica)

“First published on December 3, 1847, using funds Douglass earned during a speaking tour in Great Britain and Ireland, *The North Star* soon developed into one of the most influential African American antislavery publications of the pre-Civil War era. The name of the newspaper paid homage to the fact that escaping slaves used the North Star in the night sky to guide them to freedom. It was published in Rochester, New York, a city known for its opposition to slavery. The motto of the newspaper was, ‘Right is of no sex—Truth is of no color—God is the Father of us all, and we are brethren.’

In the first issue of *The North Star*, Douglass explained his reasons for establishing an African American-owned newspaper. He emphasized that he did not want to seem ungrateful to people such as William Lloyd Garrison, a white abolitionist who published the antislavery paper *The Liberator*. However, he claimed that it is common sense that those who suffer injustice are those who must demand redress and, thus, African American authors, editors, and orators must have their own paper with which to share their voices.

Published weekly, *The North Star* was four pages long and sold by subscription at the cost of \$2 per year to more than 4,000 readers in the United States, Europe, and the West Indies. The first of its four pages focused on current events having to do with abolitionist issues. An occasional feature, ‘The Den of Villany [sic],’ was a forum for Douglass to comment on discrimination in American society. Pages two and three included editorials, letters from readers, articles, poetry, and book reviews, while the fourth page was devoted to advertisements. In the paper, Douglass wrote with great feeling about what he saw as the huge gap between what Americans claimed to be their Christian beliefs and the prejudice and discrimination he witnessed. Douglass was also a staunch supporter of education for African Americans and equal rights for all, including women.”

Source:

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-North-Star-American-newspaper>