

Lesson Plan

Persuasive Essay Practice

Book: *John Brown and the Harpers Ferry Raid*

Series: The Civil War

Level: Voyager

Objective

To help students practice writing a persuasive essay that includes a debatable thesis supported by evidence and reasoning.

Supplies

- *John Brown and the Harpers Ferry Raid* book
- Whiteboard
- Paper and pencils

Before the Activity

Read *John Brown and the Harpers Ferry Raid* as a class, or assign it to students to read on their own.

Activity

John Brown believed that slavery was wrong and should be abolished. He spent much of his life working to support this cause. Sometimes, he chose to use violence. His attack on Harpers Ferry is one example. Brown believed that slavery in the United States would not end without violence. This belief was very controversial. In fact, people today continue to debate whether violence can be an appropriate way to make change.

To explore this concept further, have students reread the book's two "Voices from the Past" features: pages 38–39 about John Wilkes Booth and pages 44–45 about Frederick Douglass. Then, write the following prompt on the whiteboard:

- Is violence ever an appropriate way to support a cause? Why or why not?

Students should write a five-paragraph persuasive essay in response to this prompt. They should state an opinion and use facts and reasoning to convince readers that it is correct. Each essay should include the following elements:

- An introductory paragraph that grabs readers' attention and includes a debatable thesis statement clearly expressing the student's viewpoint
- 3 body paragraphs providing reasoning and evidence to support the thesis
- A concluding paragraph that wraps up the argument in a compelling way

Evaluation

Use the following scoring system to give each student up to 40 points:

- 5 points for grabbing readers' attention with an introductory paragraph
- 5 points for including a thesis statement that is clear and debatable
- 5 points for each body paragraph that supports the thesis
- 5 points for a concluding paragraph that wraps up the argument in a compelling way
- 5 points for using organization that is clear and easy to follow
- 5 points for writing that is relatively free from errors in spelling and grammar

Standards

This lesson may be used to address the Common Core State Standards' reading standards for informational texts, grade 7 (RI 7.8), and writing standards, grade 7 (W 7.1).