



SLAVE AUCTION ARTICLE LESSON

Purpose: This lesson is designed to both broaden the students' understanding of slavery as well as teach them to recognize point of view in a newspaper story.

Timeframe: 1 class period

Materials:

- Slave Auction Article Student Handout from *Liberator* 21 April 1954
- Slave Auction Article Questions

Procedure:

1. Before reading the article have students determine the date, publication and origin of the article. Discuss the purpose or mission of *The Liberator*.
2. Read the article carefully and complete the questions on the Student Handout.

Extension: Read contemporary newspaper articles and try to determine point of view. Is it easier in some publications than others?

Answers:

- 1) age, health, attractiveness, strength
- 2) age, industriousness, health
- 3) The auctioneer suggests that the little boy would be a very careful worker.
- 4) He was being sold away from his grandmother.
- 5) Yes, it is propaganda. The boy being sold away from his family; he listing of ages and prices of the slaves confirms the abolitionist contention that slaves are treated like animals and not humans; he irony of the auctioneer trying to comfort Billy at the same time as he is raising his price in the auction; 6) Student answers will vary, but should try to reflect the beliefs of slave holders about why slavery was justifiable (they are providing homes for the slaves and civilizing them, slaves are children that need to be taken care of because they can't take care of themselves, etc.)

Person	Ages	Price
Woman and small	Not given	\$1050
Man	19	\$950
Man and wife	18 and 17	\$2000
Boy	14	\$640
Girl	10	\$525
Man	24	\$860
Boy (white)	11	\$585
Boy (white)	11	\$625
Woman	25	\$900
Man and little boy	50	\$1020
Woman	46	\$395
Man w/ disease	19	\$700
Man (perfect)	40	\$1600
Woman and girl	40 and 8	\$600
Man	27	\$1410
Boy	12	\$725
Girl	4	\$400
Girl (good-looking)	14	\$855
Girl (blacker)	15	\$845



SLAVE AUCTION ARTICLE

This excerpt is from a reprinted article found on page 61 of the 21 April 1854 edition of William Lloyd Garrison's "Liberator." The original article was printed in the "Cleveland Leader" as a report from Montgomery, Alabama.

New Orleans, March 24th, 1854

SOUTHERN LIFE – PRICE OF SLAVES

"...most of them were sold on 12 mo. approved paper.

Woman and small child, \$1050; man aged 19, \$950; man and wife aged 18 and 17, \$2000; boy aged 14, \$640; girl, aged 10, \$525; man aged 24, \$860; boy aged 11, white, \$585; boy aged 11, white, \$625; woman, aged 25, \$900; man and little boy, aged 50, \$1020; woman, aged 46, \$395; man, with the *gravel** aged 19, \$700; man, perfect, aged 40, \$1600; woman 40, girl 8, \$600; man, aged 27, \$1410; boy aged 12, \$725; girl aged 4, \$400; girl good looking, aged 14, \$855; girl, a little blacker, aged 15, \$845.

There were four auctioneers crying at a time, (not for sorrow, but for money,) and the darkies were showed up, turned about, and the women *felt of*, and asked questions of their capacity and health. One boy brought about \$50 more for having a row of pins stuck on his coat sleeve. The auctioneer got him up to a point, where he stuck. He praised the Negro, reiterated his good qualities, and yelled a-going till he was red in the face, and no advance. All of a sudden he discovered the row of pins, 'Why, gentlemen,' said he, 'this "nigger" is worth his weight in gold. Some "boys" will waste more in a year than they are worth, but this "feller" is the most careful, saving hand in the world. A nigger that will pick up such little things as pins, and save 'em, why, gentlemen, you can't give too much for him. Only look here,' [sic] and he showed the proof of his saving *propensity*, and he soon run up \$50 higher. ...One little boy, when they stood him on the box, cried and sobbed as if his heart would break. An old black woman (his grandmother) tried to comfort him. He clung to her neck and hid his face in her bosom. 'Come, come, Billy,' says the auctioneer, 'don't cry, we'll get you a nice place. Going at only 575—75—75. 80, thank you sir. 80—80, hold up your head, Billy, you shall have a good place. Who'll give 85? Just going at 80,' &c., till he was at last struck off at \$585, but if he got a 'nice place,' I don't think the auctioneer's *promise* had much to do with it."

* *gravel* - disease affecting kidneys and gall bladder; kidney and gall stones



1. What made the value of a slave (the price) more or less?
2. What qualities were considered advantages in a slave?
3. Why did the auctioneer make a big deal out of the pins that the young boy was carrying?
4. Why was the little boy crying?
5. Is this propaganda? This article appeared in *The Liberator* which had the interest of showing how horrible slavery was. Which details in this report show indications of the evil of slavery?
6. How would an article sound different if it appeared in a pro-slavery newspaper?

Assignment: Rewrite this article as if you were a reporter for a pro-slavery southern newspaper. What details would you emphasize and which would you not emphasize? Remember, the facts of the auction must remain the same. It is your description of the facts that will change.