

**SEQUENCING OF EVENTS IN THE SLAVE NARRATIVE OF HENRY "BOX" BROWN**

A LANGUAGE ARTS LESSON PLAN

GRADES 3-5

**Overview**

Henry "Box" Brown was born into slavery and used a variety of strategies to craft his own freedom. These included careful planning before taking action, seeking the assistance of friends and members of the anti-slavery society, and relying on personal qualities such as determination, perseverance, and his belief in God. This lesson highlights the importance of the order or sequence of events and how they give meaning and interest to a story. This sequence must not only make sense, but should engage the attention of the audience so they want to know what happens next. As students follow along as a chapter of Brown's narrative is read aloud, they will expand and refine vocabulary skills, understand techniques of sequencing events to create a compelling story, learn about the hardships of slave life, and improve analysis and comprehension skills when reading a historical work of non-fiction. As a final assignment, students will write a letter describing the escape of Henry "Box" Brown and the ways that he "crafted his own freedom."

**Learning Objectives**

Upon completion of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Recall who Henry "Box" Brown was and why he is a significant American.
- Provide examples of some of the great hardships of slavery.
- Describe Brown's daring escape from slavery in a box.
- Recall the events in at least one chapter from Brown's own narrative.
- Describe the sequence of some of the important events in the life of Henry "Box" Brown.
- Explain why the order of events in a story is important.
- Describe methods used by Brown to craft his freedom.

**Guiding Questions**

Why did Henry "Box" Brown risk his life by shipping himself from the South to the North in a box? Would the story be the same if critical events in Brown's life were reordered?

**Suggested Time**

1-2 class periods

## Preparing to Teach the Lesson

1. Review Teacher Tool 1, which provides a brief overview of Henry “Box” Brown’s life. You may read a longer biography of Brown at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/brownbox/menu.html>.
2. View the short video, *One Noble Journey: A Box Marked Freedom*, about Brown and his daring escape from slavery. Be prepared to show this video to your class using a projector or individual computers.
3. For information on the structure of a typical North American slave narrative, you can visit the Documenting the American South website at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/intro.html>.
4. Review and print Teacher Tool 2, which contains all seven chapters of Henry “Box” Brown’s narrative.
5. Review and print Student Handout 1, which contains chapter seven of Henry “Box” Brown’s narrative.
6. Review and print Student Handout 2, which defines difficult vocabulary in chapter seven of Brown’s narrative.
7. Review and print Student Handout 3, which provides instructions for students to follow in writing a letter describing Brown’s escape from slavery. As an optional step to gather more information, you can review the Edsitement website for another example of a lesson plan related to the writing assignment at [http://edsitement.neh.gov/view\\_lesson\\_plan.asp?id=294](http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=294). The Edsitement lesson plan features a similar writing assignment focused on letter writing with emphasis on documenting history through the use of personal letters and journaling.

## Teaching the Lesson (Suggested Steps)

1. Open this lesson plan by showing *One Noble Journey: A Box Marked Freedom* to students to engage their interest in his story and the actions he took to “craft his freedom.” Before showing the video, tell students to pay attention to the important events and actions that take place because there will be a discussion and later assignment based on this important information.
2. After students view the video, ask them what steps Brown took to make sure his escape was successful. Record the responses on a flip chart or blackboard.
3. Tell your students that they will next find out why Brown was so determined to escape slavery. They will discover what events occurred in his life and what actions he took in response.
4. Using Teacher Tool 2, provide students with an overview of chapters 1-6 of Brown’s narrative.
5. Distribute Student Handout 1, which contains chapter seven of Brown’s narrative, and Student Handout 2, which provides the definitions for the difficult vocabulary in that chapter.
6. Before you begin to read Brown’s narrative aloud to students (or have them read it aloud), be sure to explain why they might see typographical errors, misspellings, and the use of United Kingdom English spellings for certain words within the narrative. Remind them to consider the time period and the limited resources that printing houses and individual writers had and not to assume that any errors in spelling are reflective of Brown’s intelligence.
7. Read chapter seven (or the bold selection) of Brown’s narrative aloud and ask students

to follow along or have different students read paragraphs from the chapter aloud. You may choose to read only the bold selection in chapter seven as the first few paragraphs provide a lot of background information about an experience at church that motivated Brown to escape. This opening could be skipped and students can begin with the bold selection that follows. Explain that the language in the narrative might be challenging, but it is not important that they understand every word. What is important is for them to understand the main events and actions and the overall story that Henry "Box" Brown recounts in his narrative.

8. After reading chapter seven, ask the class to identify the most important events that occurred in the chapter. Write down their answers as students call them out, then work with the class to get them in the correct order.
9. Lead a discussion about the sequence of events that took place in chapter seven of Henry "Box" Brown's narrative. To illustrate the importance of sequence, shift some of the events and actions around and ask students how the story is changed. For example, if Brown shipped himself to Philadelphia in a box before his wife and family were sold, how would this change the story? If the order of events were thus changed, the story would be about a man who selfishly deserted his family in order to gain freedom for himself. The location of the sale of his family in Brown's story is important to understanding the sequence of events in his life as well as one motive for why Brown escaped.
10. In preparation for the writing assignment, review the important sequence of events that led to Henry "Box" Brown's daring escape from slavery in a box. Be sure to cover the events that led him to plan and execute his escape. Distribute Student Handout 3 and discuss the letter-writing assignment with your class.

### **Assessment (Optional)**

Review the Assessment and if you decide to use it, print the document for distribution to your students. The Assessment provided asks students to sequence eight statements about the life and escape of Henry "Box" Brown. Students may either cut and paste the statements on another sheet of paper or rewrite the statements in order. An answer key is provided.