

COMPARING THE VIEWS OF DAVID WALKER AND JOHN DAY, TWO NINETEENTH-CENTURY FREE BLACKS

A SOCIAL STUDIES LESSON PLAN
GRADES 3-5

Overview

In 1829, David Walker, a free African-American, published his *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* in Boston, Massachusetts. In this document, he invoked the Bible, the Declaration of Independence, as well as other documents sacred to white Americans to challenge the brutal inequities of American slavery. Walker demanded that blacks, both slave and free, should confront the injustice. Using language far stronger than that of even the nascent abolitionist movement, he urged them to stand fast in defense of their American rights, to prepare for battle against those who supported racism and slavery. Walker died (of natural causes) shortly after this document was published, but he influenced both the southern black population as well as northern white and black abolitionists, who increasingly adopted his radical rhetoric. His belief that African Americans should assert their equality and rights as American citizens stands in stark contrast to the message of African Americans who supported emigration to Liberia, a colony founded on the west coast of Africa for African Americans. Members of the American Colonization Society, which supported Liberian colonization, argued that no African American would ever achieve equality with whites if he/she remained in the United States, and that the only peaceful and effective solution was to emigrate to the newly formed African colony. In this lesson, students will learn about Walker's *Appeal* and about the views of another free black man, John Day, who was an early colonist to Liberia and a great advocate of black colonization in Africa.

Learning Objectives

- Discuss David Walker's life and his *Appeal*.
- Read and analyze nineteenth-century primary source documents.
- Learn to compare and contrast two different perspectives.
- Deepen understanding of the realities and options for free African Americans in the nineteenth century.

Guiding Questions

What circumstances prompted David Walker to publish his *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*? What was radical about this document? How would it have influenced white Americans? How would it have influenced black Americans? How did Walker's perspective differ from those who proposed removal to Liberia? Which of these two perspectives, in your opinion, was a better choice for African Americans in the nineteenth century?

Suggested Time

1-2 class periods

Preparing to Teach the Lesson

1. Read and review Teacher Tool 1, a brief biography of David Walker.
2. View the short video, *Excerpts from David Walker's Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, and be prepared to show the video to your students.
3. Review Teacher Tool 2, which provides a brief overview of role of abolitionism in American politics and society from 1820 through the 1850s.
4. Review Teacher Tool 3, which is a summary of the origins and goals of the American Colonization Society and a brief description of John Day and his activity in the organization.
5. You may wish to learn more about Liberia by reviewing the information on one or more of the following websites:
 - Maps of the World, <http://www.mapsofworld.com/liberia/maps/liberia-location-map.jpg>
 - CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/graphics/maps/large/li-map.gif>
 - *The Liberian Senate*, Watercolor painting by Robert K. Griffin, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/awhhtml/awmss5/images/liberian.gif>

Decide if you wish to show any of these images to your students. If you choose to do so, be prepared to project in class if necessary.

6. Read Student Handout 1, which provides an excerpt from David Walker's *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*.
7. Review Student Handout 2, which provides a reproduction of a letter written by free black, John Day, and was published in the *Colonization Herald*.
8. Review Student Handout 3, which presents a series of scenarios that will help students explore the difficult decisions that nineteenth-century African Americans (like Walker and Day) faced in the question of colonization in Liberia.

Teaching the Lesson (Suggested Steps)

1. Using the information in Teacher Tool 2, provide students with a brief introductory overview of the origins of the abolition movement and its influence on politics, society, and the emerging sectional crisis from 1820 through the 1850s.
2. Show the short video, *Excerpts from David Walker's Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, which includes a performance of some words and ideas in the *Appeal*.
3. Using the information in Teacher Tool 1, provide students with a brief overview of the life of David Walker and his work, the *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*.
4. Using the information in Teacher Tool 3, provide students with background information on the American Colonization Society and John Day. Be sure to explain that both David Walker and John Day were free blacks who lived in the United States during the time of slavery. If you decided to show any of the images that reveal more about Liberia, show them along with this step.
5. Distribute Student Handouts 1 and 2 and ask students to follow along as you read aloud the excerpts from Walker's *Appeal* and the editorial letter by John Day.
6. Divide students into pairs and distribute Student Handout 3 to each pair. Ask each pair of students to work together to complete Student Handout 3. Ask students to write down their brief answers and/or be prepared to share their answers with the class.

Another option is for you to read the three scenarios aloud and ask students to work in pairs to answer the questions then ask some students to share their answers with the class.

7. Divide the class into several groups of 5-7 students. Assign each group the task of creating a convincing speech in support of Walker's view or Day's view. Urge students to cite the arguments and reasons that they support the position of either Day or Walker. Choose volunteers from each group who are willing to read their speech/appeal out loud to the class.
8. In a class discussion, ask students to assess which position was the better choice, in 1829? In 1854? Ask students to explain their choices, in the context of what was happening during each historical period, and then to consider the question ahistorically: In other words, is it best to stay and improve a difficult situation, or better to leave a difficult situation and start fresh somewhere else? Further discussions might include inquiries into what life was like in Liberia in the nineteenth century, and what it is like today. *Note: Students may need some prompting on historical circumstances in both eras and in both places.*

Assessment (Optional)

Review the Assessment. If you decide to use it, print the document for distribution to your students. Students are asked to compare and contrast the points of view of David Walker and John Day. An answer key is provided.

Extending the Lesson

Ask students to write a lengthy paragraph explaining which view (either that of Walker or Day) they personally supported and why. Encourage them to be specific about the reasons within the historical context of race relations in nineteenth-century America.