

Charting Social Issues: Urban Planning at Natchez

Grade Level: 7, 8, 9

Subject Areas: World History, Geography, Social Studies, Urban Planning

Lesson Summary:

In this lesson, students will study the relationship between Natchez, an early European settlement along the lower Mississippi River, with the concurrent slave trade within the context of the United States. Focusing on the changes within Natchez between the 1800s and today, students will investigate trends in urban planning and societal inequalities as a direct result of riverside slave market and auction towns.

Common Core Standards:

Grades	7-8	9
Mathematics	7.RP.A, 7.NS.A, 7.EE.A-B, 7.SP.A-C, 7.G.A-B 8.EE.A-C, 8.G.A-C, 8.G.A-C, 8.SP.A	HSN.Q.A HAS.CED.A HSG.MG.A HSG.GPE.A-B HSS.ID.A-C HSS.IC.A-B
English Language Arts	W.7.1-10, SL.7.1-6, L.7.1-6 W.8.1-10, SL.8.1-6, L.8.1-6 RH.6-8.1-10, RST.6-8.7-10	W.9-10.1-10, RH.9-10.1-10, SL.9-10.1-6, L.9-10.1-6, RST.9-10-7-10

Learning Objectives:

After completing this lesson, the student will be able to:

- discuss the history of Natchez, Mississippi and its ties to slavery and the slave trade in the United States.
- articulate the physics and mechanics of river transport, examining the Mississippi River as a specific case study.
- illustrate the process of urbanization, specific to the urban planning of Natchez, defining key social and cultural elements such as neighborhood development, transportation of materials needed for urbanization, accessibility of resources, and the growth of information and communication transfer.
- analyze concurrent historical events north of the Mississippi River and across the United States in relation to Natchez.
- connect his or her own experiences with those of enslaved individuals, understanding that these stories are of both our past and present world.

Lesson Description:

Natchez is one of the earliest European settlements in the lower Mississippi River Valley. The origins of the city date back to 1716 when French settlers established Fort Rosalie atop the bluffs of the river. In 1789, the Spanish governor Manuel de Gayoso ordered the survey and creation of the street grid and the city was born. Today, Natchez is well-known for its unique collection of historic architecture, reflecting three centuries of its history which help to tell the human story of slavery from several different perspectives. The two antebellum homes at Natchez National Historical Park are like moments frozen in time. Built in the 1840s, the two homes served two very different masters — a white plantation owner and a free black barber — providing two distinct windows into life in the American South before the Civil War.

The Melrose 1800s Greek revival-style mansion represents the height of Southern prosperity and the "Cotton Kingdom." Sitting today on 80 lush acres maintained by the National Park Service, the Melrose house gives visitors a glimpse into the lifestyle of the pre-Civil War American South and helps them understand the roles that slaves played in an estate setting. By contrast, the William Johnson House complex located in downtown Natchez was the residence of William Johnson, a free black barber in Natchez. Renovated by the National Park Service, the Johnson House allows visitors to learn more about the life of free African Americans in the pre-Civil War South.

Alongside the stories of these two residences runs Natchez's deep connection to the slave markets and auctions that dotted the Mississippi River in the 1800s. With nearly 200,000 enslaved individuals passing through the Forks-of-the-Road market in Natchez, this city played an undeniably strong role in the American slave trade, and doubtlessly impacted the greater landscape of slavery in the United States.

In this lesson, students will embark upon a research project to better understand the growth of Natchez as a city and as a center for slave auctions and trading. Navigate the class to www.CyArk.org, and click on the Themes tab. Find the Atlantic Slave Trade Theme, and open the interactive map. This map visually connects heritage sites associated with the slave trade to each other and to the maritime routes between them. Encourage students to explore the map further, and especially the portal for the Natchez National Historical Park project in more detail.

As the students begin their research projects (individually or in groups), prompt the following questions:

- What has changed in the urban layout of Natchez between 1800 and today?
 - Which neighborhoods are more densely populated?
 - What is the socioeconomic breakdown of these neighborhoods?
 - How does Natchez interact with the Mississippi River?
- During this time period, what was happening further north along the Mississippi River? What about elsewhere in the United States?
- How has transportation to/from Natchez changed?
 - Think about transportation of people, material goods, and news/information.

Using their research, students will create a graphic representation displaying their observed changes. Options for these graphics include map comparisons using manual drawings, AutoCAD, SketchUp, or graphic designing programs such as Photoshop and Illustrator.

Students should be prepared to present their findings to the class, and provide the teacher with a complete bibliography.

Student Project:

Divide the class into groups of 4-5 students. Each student group will reflect on the journey of one enslaved individual, or family of enslaved individuals, in creating a fictional identity narrative. Collecting information from primary and secondary sources, students will put together a fictional, but rationalized, route of travel from western Africa to the Americas. The end result will be a storyline discussing the long journey experienced by an individual under the extreme pressures of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Topics to consider include:

- What routes of travel existed between which regions?
- Were there any opportunities for escape?
- In what ways does this journey affect your entire life, as well as those of your family?
 - Consider new language acquisition, the breakup of families, new cultures, music, and folklore.

Resources:

CyArk website: www.CyArk.org

The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database: <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/index.faces>

Natchez National Historical Park (National Park Service): <http://www.nps.gov/natc/index.htm>