Lesson Plan: African-American Enfranchisement in Wisconsin
Wisconsin Historical Society Citizen Petition and Access Project

Enduring Understanding
Citizens faced with challenges brought about by government actions use the petition process in order to draw attention to policies they either favor or wish to see changed without fear of retribution. Embedded in the First Amendment of the United States Constitution, the right to petition is seen as part of the foundation of any democratic system of government.

Essential Questions
● What were a few of the obstacles that people of color faced in Wisconsin in the 19th century?
● What were some of the opinions surrounding African-American freedom and suffrage in 19th century Wisconsin?

Language Note
Primary source materials such as petitions, letters, and diaries capture history as it happened, and many customs, terms, social mores, and attitudes that are considered offensive now were commonplace at the time. Please read through the primary source material before assigning it to your class.

Content Objectives
● Students will understand the obstacles African-Americans faced in 19th century Wisconsin related to voting, freedom, and protections for families of African-American soldiers.
● Students will be able to articulate the various concerns expressed in 19th century petitions as they relate to African-American enfranchisement.

Wisconsin Common Core Standards Addressed
● Grades 3-5
  ○ SS.Inq4.a.i Communicate conclusions from a variety of teacher provided presentation options.
  ○ SS.Inq4.b.i Evaluate the strength of a claim, evidence, and communication using criteria established by both teacher and student.
● Grades 6-8
  ○ SS.Inq3.c.m Analyze the extent to which evidence supports or does not support a claim, and if it does not, adjust claim appropriately
  ○ SS.Inq4.b.m Analyze and evaluate the logic, relevance, and accuracy of others’ claims, taking into consideration potential bias.
Vocabulary Building
Explicit vocabulary building will be conducted through instruction and a vocabulary list which will be distributed to each student.

Context Building
This lesson is designed to be built into a larger unit on the struggles of African-Americans in the United States and Wisconsin. Additional context is provided in the document titled “Important Information for Teachers to Address in this Lesson”.

Comprehensible Input
The language of the petitions has all been scaffolded to a more digestible vernacular. Students will be able to interact with copies of the original petitions as well as the adapted transcriptions. Working in groups will allow students to support each other in the learning process and come to collaborative conclusions. There are both audio (lecture, discussion) and visual (petitions, map) elements to this lesson.

Materials
- Indicated petitions
- Adapted petition transcriptions
- Handout: Vocabulary
- Handout: 19th Century Petition Questions
- Notebook paper
- Writing utensils
- Map of Wisconsin with indicated petition locations
- Answer Key

Lesson Summary
This lesson should take approximately 50 minutes and is designed for grade bands 3-5 and 6-8, but it can be adapted for other grade levels.

- Students will be asked to analyze seven different petitions from the 19th century that relate to the struggles of African-Americans in Wisconsin. They will work in small groups to come to their own conclusions and then they will have a full class discussion to synthesize their thoughts.
- Citizens faced with challenges brought about by government actions use the petition process in order to both draw attention to policies they either favor or wish to see changed without fear of retribution.

Procedure
- Warm-up: Start the class by asking students to respond to the prompt: *What do we mean when we talk about freedom in the United States? What are some rights that we have in America?*
- When students have finished writing their responses, ask willing students to share. Facilitate a discussion based on the responses.
- Transition into introducing the context-building materials from the document titled “Important Information for Teachers to Address in this Lesson”. Allow student input and discussion to create a working understanding of the context.
- Introduce the vocabulary and go through it with the students. Ask them to create their own sentences to demonstrate understanding of the words.
- Divide the class into seven groups and give each group the document titled “19th Century Petition Questions”.
- Position each of the seven petitions and their adapted transcriptions at a different table around the classroom. Each group will start at each of these tables.
- In their groups, students will answer the questions that correspond with that station. They will have 5 minutes at each station, rotating clockwise as the time expires. They will read the adapted transcription of each petition and answer the questions that correspond to it.
- After every group has gotten to every station, come back together as a class.
- As a class, go through their answers, asking what they came up with and leading critical discussion about their answers.
  - As you discuss, show the map of Wisconsin on the projector and indicate where each petition takes place. Have students indicate where they live in relation to the petition locations.
- Final discussion question: *Why is it important for everyone to be able to vote? What are some of the rights that everyone should have in America? What are some of the responsibilities?*
ADAPTED TRANSCRIPTIONS

STATION 1: Box 6, Folder 8

Petition of 58 inhabitants of the town of Salem praying for a repeal of so much of the law regulating general and other elections, as prohibits colored persons from exercising the right of suffrage

We, the citizens of Salem, ask that you **repeal** the act that **restricts** people of color from voting. We also ask that you repeal any related law that limits rights based on skin color.

**Link to petition:**
https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/petitions/id/2848/rec/1

STATION 2: Box 7, Folder 5

Petition of Benjamin A. Hughes and 12 other colored men inhabitants of Racine County praying that color shall not be the test of the right of suffrage

As people of color, we feel that the laws that restrict our voting rights based on the color of our skin are **unjust, oppressive**, and in **violation** of Democracy. We ask that everyone, regardless of skin color, be allowed to vote.

**Link to petition:** https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/petitions/id/3679/rec/4

STATION 3: Box 41, Folder 10

The Petition of Heuston and 168 others to extend the Business of Sec. 1 of Chapter 117 of the annual laws of 1864 to the Families of Colored Soldiers who have been credited to the state

We request that the Volunteer Aid Fund be **extended** to the families of African American soldiers so that their families have **access** to the same protections as white soldiers.

**Link to petition:** https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/petitions/id/7543/rec/2
STATION 4: Box 19, Folder 5

Petition of Sundry persons praying for an extension of the right of suffrage to Colored Citizens

We, the people of Lansing Outagamie County, request that the right to vote be extended to the African-American population.

Link to petition: https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/petitions/id/6191/rec/12

STATION 5: Box 24, Folder 6

Petition of M.D. Holbrook and 167 others

We, the people of Waukesha, ask that you vote against Douglas’ Nebraska Bill. This bill seeks to break up the Missouri **Compromise** and allow enslavement in free **territories** in the United States. Please vote against this and any other bill that would seek those outcomes.

Link to petition: https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/petitions/id/6783/rec/17

STATION 6: Box 25, Folder 11

A Petition of Hiram Taylor and 45 others praying for a prohibitory liquor Law - The same Petitioners ask this body to pass resolutions instructing our representatives and senators in Congress to use their best endeavor to secure the repeal of the Fugitive Slave Law

We, the people of Sugar Creek, believe that the **fugitive** slave law is **immoral**. It violates **Habeas Corpus** and the right to a fair trial by jury. Additionally it attempts to take away the rights of an entire population. We ask that you do all you can to repeal this law.

Link to petition: https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/petitions/id/6857/rec/1

STATION 7: Box 42, Folder 9

A Petition of S.P. Jones and 101 other Colored Citizens of the State of Wisconsin asking for the right of suffrage

We, the African-American citizens of Wisconsin, request to be **granted** the right to vote for people of color over the age of 21 in the next general election. We pay taxes and we sign up for military duty like everyone else so it seems fair that we should be allowed to decide how our taxes are spent and how our services are used.

Link to petition: https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/petitions/id/7905/rec/4
Vocabulary

1. Access - Permission
   a. She was granted access to the computer files she needed to complete the work.

2. Compromise - Agreement
   a. Instead of fighting, the two sides agreed to a compromise.

3. Extended- Opened up for more participation.
   a. In 2020 the Boy Scouts of America extended membership to girls.

4. Fugitive - Escapee
   a. Freedom seekers were wrongfully seen as criminal fugitives in 1850s America.

5. Granted- Allowed
   a. He asked to be granted permission to go home after he was wounded in battle.

6. Habeas Corpus- the requirement that someone under arrest be brought before a judge for a fair trial.
   a. Her immediate arrest without a trial was a violation of Habeas Corpus.

7. Immoral – Wrong, evil
   a. The soldier felt he was participating in an immoral war.

8. Oppressive- creating hardship through government control
   a. The refugee immigrated to America to escape her oppressive government.

9. Petition- a written request to the government
   a. A petition was written asking for a new bridge.

10. Repeal- To get rid of
    a. The law was repealed after the people protested.

11. Restricts- Limits, does not allow
    a. The Constitution restricts anyone under the age of 18 from voting.

12. Territories - Governed geographic area
    a. The Minnesota and Wisconsin territories would eventually become states.

13. Unjust- Not fair
    a. The student thought that it was unjust they were punished and no one else was.

14. Violation - offensive; wrong
    a. His criminal behavior was in violation of society’s laws.
Petition Questions

STATION 1
1. Who wrote the petition?

2. What are they asking for? Why?

STATION 2
1. Who wrote the petition?

2. What are they asking for? Why?

STATION 3
1. Who wrote the petition?

2. What are they asking for? Why?

STATION 4
1. Who wrote the petition?

2. What are they asking for? Why?

STATION 5
1. Who wrote the petition?

2. What are they asking for? Why?
STATION 6
1. Who wrote the petition?

2. What are they asking for? Why?

STATION 7
1. Who wrote the petition?

2. What are they asking for? Why?

3. What are the reasons they give for why they should be allowed to vote?

CONCLUSION
1. Which petition was the most interesting to you? Why?

2. What is one thing you learned from these petitions?

3. Why is it important for everyone to be able to vote? What are some of the rights that everyone should have in America? What are some of the responsibilities?
Petition Questions Answer Key

STATION 1

1. Who wrote the petition?
   The citizens of Salem

2. What are they asking for? Why?
   Repeal the act that restricts people of color from voting.
   Why? It injust/unfair

STATION 2

1. Who wrote the petition?
   People of color

2. What are they asking for??
   That everyone, regardless of skin color, be allowed to vote
   Why the laws that restrict voting rights based on skin color are unjust, oppressive, and in violation of Democracy

STATION 3

1. Who wrote the petition?
   Heuston and 168 others

2. What are they asking for?
   That the Volunteer Aid Fund be extended to the families of African American soldiers
   Why? So that their families have access to the same protections as white soldiers

STATION 4

1. Who wrote the petition?
   The people of Lansing, Outagamie County

2. What are they asking for?
   That the right to vote be extended to the African-American population
   Why? It would be fair/equal

STATION 5

1. Who wrote the petition?
   The people of Waukesha

2. What are they asking for?
   To vote against Douglas’ Nebraska Bill
   Why? The bill sought to break up the Missouri Compromise and allow enslavement in free territories in the United States
STATION 6
1. Who wrote the petition?
   The people of Sugar Creek

2. What are they asking for?
   Repeal the Fugitive Slave Act
   Why? It is immoral. It violates Habeas Corpus and the right to a fair trial by jury.
   Additionally it attempts to take away the rights of an entire population.

STATION 7
1. Who wrote the petition?
   African-American citizens of Wisconsin

2. What are they asking for?
   Request to be granted the right to vote for people of color over the age of 21 in the next general election.
   Why? It would be fair/equal

3. What are the reasons they give for why they should be allowed to vote?
   They paid taxes and signed up for military duty like everyone else

CONCLUSION
1. Which petition was the most interesting to you? Why?

2. What is one thing you learned from these petitions?

3. Why is it important for everyone to be able to vote? What are some of the rights that everyone should have in America? What are some of the responsibilities?
Important Information for Teachers to Address in this Lesson

- **What is a Petition?** A formal written request presented to a civic authority or organized body (such as a territorial legislature or a municipal court), signed by petitioner(s) to show support for a cause or a concern.

- **Language:** The titles of these petitions refer to African-Americans as “colored”. This is an unacceptable term to use. Although “African-American” is still widely accepted, there has been a recent push to stress the person before the identifier (Examples: People of color, people with disabilities etc.). This type of language continues to change as society changes so be sure to use the accepted language at the time you are teaching this lesson.

- **African-American Suffrage:** The 1846 constitution would have created a referendum on the matter of African Americans suffrage in Wisconsin, but it was rejected when put before voters the next year. The 1848 constitution remained silent on this and other controversial issues, so following its ratification a special referendum was held in 1849. This article explains how, despite a majority of voters approving Black suffrage in 1849, the right to vote was consistently denied until 1866, when Ezekiel Gillespie carried the issue to the state Supreme Court. Not until the Wisconsin legislature ratified the 15th amendment to the U.S. constitution in 1869 were the voting rights of African American men finally assured. Black women, like all women, were denied the right to vote until 1920.
  - Taken from: https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints/search.asp?id=991
  - Although every citizen over the age of 18 now legally has the right to vote, voting access continues to be an issue for many low-income citizens who do not have access to the necessary identification or proof of address.

- **Fugitive Slave Act:** The case of Joshua Glover brought the issue of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 to the fore in Wisconsin. For their assistance in helping Glover seek freedom in Canada, abolitionists Sherman Booth and John Rycraft were taken into custody for violation of the Fugitive Slave Act. In 1854, the Wisconsin Supreme Court declared the act a violation of the constitution, clearing Booth and Rycraft of charges. The main reasons for the decision are summarized on the second page of the transcript.
  - Taken from: https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints/search.asp?id=170
  - For variation in the lesson, the Sherman Booth papers are available online at: https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/999464067702121
● For more context building:

[link to Wisconsin History website]
https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS502#later
*Station 3 and Station 7 are unspecified*
To the Honorable Legislative Assembly of the State of Mississippi: The undersigned citizens of Saline would respectfully petition your honor-able body to repeal so much of section 13 of the Act entitled an act to provide for and regulate General Election as is prohibitory of the colored man's exercising the elective franchise, and all other laws that limit a man's right only the color of his skin, and your petitioners are in duty bound will ever pray.

SIGNED:

James M. Binko
Ephraim Wilco
John Johnson
William Parker
Jane Brown
Catherine Laming
David Gray
James Story
James Dunbar
Missell Carraway
John Kelley
James W. Vandolin

Elizabeth Burns
Sarah Robinson
Jane Story
Margaret Wise
Catherine Carraway
Lorise M. Johnson
John McCullar
Joan W. Vandolin
To the Council and House of Representatives of the State of Wisconsin.

The undersigned inhabitants of Racine County, Wisconsin Territory, wish to be respectfully represented to your Honorable body, which we are bound to address, in regard to the state of the Government of the Territory. We are not without reason to suppose that the Government of the Territory is not conducted by efficient laws or measures, to exercise the true principles of the Constitution. We consider our position as one of the most important situations. We therefore humbly petition your Honorable body to consider the laws of said Territory, that the Colored people may be held, as the right of suffrage, and as our duty, and we will then pray.

Benj. T. Hughes
William Jones
James Young
James Johnson
James Johnson
James Brown
James Morton
Whitby S. Gooch
Wm. Brown

STATION 2
To the Hon. Senate and Assembly of the State of Wisconsin:

We, the undersigned, do most respectfully petition your Honorable Body to extend the benefits of what is familiarly called the Volunteer Aid Law to the families of the brave volunteers who have been sent into this State.

John H. Cooper
John H. Reynolds
Rochester, Wis.
Wm. B. White

J. D. McCormick
James J. Wofford
John J. Whitmore

S. B. Miller
John M. McDowell

A. H. Brown
J. E. Whitman

J. B. Smith
J. E. Atchley

J. W. Bishop
A. W. Allen

J. F. Reynolds
A. E. Herrod

J. H. Brown
A. W. Wilson

J. B. Martindale
J. W. Metcalf

J. A. White
J. H. B. King

J. W. W. McDowell
J. H. B. McLeod

J. W. Metcalf
J. H. B. King

J. W. W. McDowell
J. H. B. McLeod

J. W. Metcalf
J. H. B. King

J. W. W. McDowell
J. H. B. McLeod

J. W. Metcalf
J. H. B. King

J. W. W. McDowell
J. H. B. McLeod

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J. H. B. King

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J. H. B. McLeod

J. W. Metcalf
J. H. B. King
Station 4

[Handwritten text in English]
To the Honorable, the Senate and Assembly of the State of Wisconsin, at Madison Assembled.

The undersigned Colored Citizens of the State of Wisconsin, respectfully petition your Honorable Senate, and ask that the necessary legal steps be taken and provision made in accordance with the Constitution of this State, to admit the question of granting the right of suffrage to Colored Men of the age of twenty-one years, to the voters of this State at the next general election. We respectfully assure you that we have the interest and safety of the Military and all citizens here. It seems to us but justice that we should have a vote in determining how our taxes should be expended, and how and when our services shall be rendered.

Dated January 24th, 1855.

Signature

NAMES

W. A. Jones
J. A. Gray
B. Mission
J. Burns
O. Richardson
Robert Ellis
E. W. Cannell
Sam H. James
M. B. Platt
H. C. McCullough
J. A. Cunningham
J. A. Irvin
Samuel Anderson
James Hendley
George Smith
Charley Fargless
Alfred McVeigh

NAMES

W. W. Davis
J. T. Clay
C. Littlefield
W. Clay
Wm. S. Wilson
George Jones
Thomas Sanford
Allen Brook
Henry G. Hus
John Bleston
Mr. Webster
H. G. Anderson
Bryce Cole
Joseph Williams
Michael Witter
STATION 7 (CONT.)

James H. Burnett
C. D. Cowdrell
John Johnson
James Johnson
Charles E. Williams
Joses功效
Anthony A. Jones
Edward R. Wilson
Frank Merry
John Carter
Samuel Tompkins
Annie White
Andrew Justice
James W. Brown
H. B. Dixon
William Raines

Joseph Ollinor
John Bailey
J. W. Cline

Lemoyne Benjamin
David Thompson
Jack Leggett
R. Lee
Ben Barlow
Henry Colson
William F. Garfield

Martin Smith
William Clark

John Hackett
William Tinkham
William Graham
William Clark