

VIRGINIA RUNAWAY SLAVE ADS

LEVEL

Secondary

GUIDING QUESTION

What do Virginia’s runaway slave ads reveal about the social, economic, and cultural world of American slavery?

VIRGINIA STANDARDS AND HISTORICAL SKILLS

SOL: USI.5d, VUS.3

Analyzing and interpreting primary sources; questioning and using critical thinking skills; demonstrating comprehension.

LESSON OVERVIEW

Enslaved African Americans resisted their status in numerous ways, including running away. Runaway slave ads from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries provide a glimpse into the social, economic, and cultural world of American slavery. In this lesson, students will identify and analyze the impact of slavery on Virginia’s culture and economy and on slaves themselves, through the exploration of runaway slave ads.

MATERIALS

- [Newspaper ad of Thomas Jefferson’s runaway slave ad for “Sandy”](#) for warmup
- Recordings of 3 eighteenth-century Virginia runaway slave ads with [transcripts](#)
 1. [Runaway Slave Ad, 1736](#)
 2. [Runaway Slave Ad, 1738](#)
 3. [Runaway Slave Ad, 1737](#)

PROCEDURE

Warmup/Staging the Question

1. Provide students with individual copies of the [“Sandy” ad](#), or post the “Sandy” ad via a projector. Be sure to cover up Thomas Jefferson’s name at the bottom of the ad. Have students read through the “Sandy” ad by themselves or with a partner.

2. Prompt students to identify: When was it written? Where was it written? Why was it written? What do we know about the subject (Sandy)? Who wrote this?
3. Then, prompt students to infer: What is the author's perspective? What can you infer about the author of this ad? Students should pick up that the author is a slave owner.
4. Discuss student observations and answers to the above questions.
5. Show students the ad with the author's name visible, Thomas Jefferson, as well as the bibliographic information. Remind them that just 7 years after the ad is written, Jefferson writes the Declaration of Independence, and less than a century later, the United States finds itself in the Civil War, a central issue of which was slavery. Remind students to act as historians for this lesson, despite any personal bias on the issue.

Main Activity

1. Play the [first runaway slave ad](#) and instruct students to follow along with the [transcript](#). Tell students to just listen the first time. Play the first recording of the slave ad again, and advise students to take notes on the ad: "What observations or questions does the ad raise for you?" Some things they should pick up on would be the description of the enslaved person (gender, clothing, markings, skin tone, skills, etc.), when he/she ran away (if applicable), and what the reward for finding and returning the enslaved person was.
2. Repeat step 1 for the [second](#) and [third](#) recordings.
3. Have students pair up with a partner to discuss their findings.
4. As a class, students should then identify and discuss the similarities among the recordings, while the teacher records it on a board for all students to see. (Alternatively, this could similarly be a sticky note reflection activity for the individual ads, posted in three places around the room).
5. Students should then discuss and reflect with their partner on the overall tone and purpose of the ads, as well as infer what the ads can tell historians about that time period's conception of slavery and enslaved Africans and African Americans.
6. Have students reflect in writing on the lesson's compelling question: "What do Virginia's runaway slave ads reveal about the social, economic, and cultural world of American slavery?"

Extension Activity

Students could conduct online research on other slave ads in Virginia using the "Geography of Slavery in Virginia" website (<http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/gos/>), or compare Virginia slave ads to those found in other states, particularly the North.

RUNAWAY AD FOR "SANDY"



RUN away from the subscriber in *Albemarle*, a Mulatto slave called *Sandy*, about 35 years of age, his stature is rather low, inclining to corpulence, and his complexion light; he is a shoemaker by trade, in which he uses his left hand principally, can do coarse carpenters work, and is something of a horse jockey; he is greatly addicted to drink, and when drunk is insolent and disorderly, in his conversation he swears much, and in his behaviour is artful and knavish. He took with him a white horse, much scarred with traces, of which it is expected he will endeavour to dispose; he also carried his shoemakers tools, and will probably endeavour to get employment that way. Whoever conveys the said slave to me, in *Albemarle*, shall have 40 s. reward, if taken up within the county, 4 l. if elsewhere within the colony, and 10 l. if in any other colony, from

THOMAS JEFFERSON.

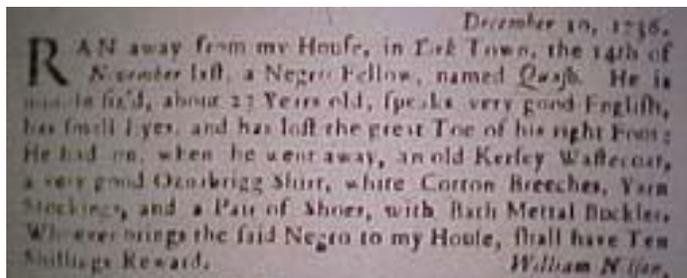
The Virginia Gazette, Williamsburg, September 14, 1769. Courtesy of Library of Congress.

<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/jefferson/images/vc37.jpg>

VIRGINIA RUNAWAY SLAVE ADS

1. Williamsburg, December 1736, *Virginia Gazette*

“December 10, 1736. RAN away from my House, in York Town, the 14th of November last, a Negro Fellow, named Quash. He is middle sized, about 27 Years old, speaks very good English, has small Eyes, and has lost the great Toe of his right Foot: He had on, when he went away, an old Kersey Wastecoat, a very good Oznabrigg Shirt, white Cotton Breeches, Yarn Stockings, and a Pair of Shoes, with Bath Metal Buckles. Whoever brings said Negro to my House, shall have Ten Shillings Reward. William Nelson.

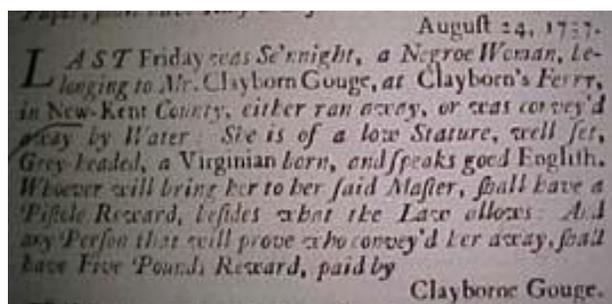


2. Williamsburg, August 1738, *Virginia Gazette*

RAN away the 15th of July last, from Crump's Neck, a Plantation belonging to the Hon. William Byrd, Esquire; in the County of Hanover, a whitish Mulatto Man slave, called Dick: He is about 24 Years old, and of a middle Size, with the Letter R branded on his right Cheek, and a large Scar on the Calf of his right Leg. Whoever shall take up the said Mulatto, and bring him to the Subscriber at the Falls of James River, be he Free Man or Slave, shall have Three Pistols Reward, Witness my Hand Nelson Anderson.

3. Williamsburg, August/September 1737, *Virginia Gazette*

August 24, 1737. LAST Friday was Sennight [a week], a Negroe Woman, belonging to Mr. Clayborn Gouge, at Clayborn's Ferry, in New Kent County, either ran away, or was conveyed away by water: She is of a low Stature, well set, Grey headed, a Virginian born, and speaks good English. Whoever will bring her to her said Master, shall have a Pistol Reward, besides what the Law allows: And any Person that will prove who conveyed her away, shall have Five Pounds Reward, paid by Clayborn Gouge.



Source: "The Geography of Slavery in Virginia," The University of Virginia, accessed from:

<http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/gos/search/search.php>