

# The Civil War in Art

TEACHING & LEARNING THROUGH CHICAGO COLLECTIONS



## Lesson Plan

### The Resurrection of Henry Box Brown at Philadelphia *and the Uses of Art to Convey Political Messages*

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**Grades/Subject:** Middle School/Language Arts and Social Studies (The Underground Railroad and the Abolitionist Movement)

**Schedule:** 5 sessions (class periods or days)

**Lesson Summary:** By studying a lithograph and an engraving and reading primary sources, students learn about Henry Box Brown and his incredible escape from slavery in 1849. Students also consider how the depictions of Brown's escape were used politically.

#### Artworks on Which Lesson is Based



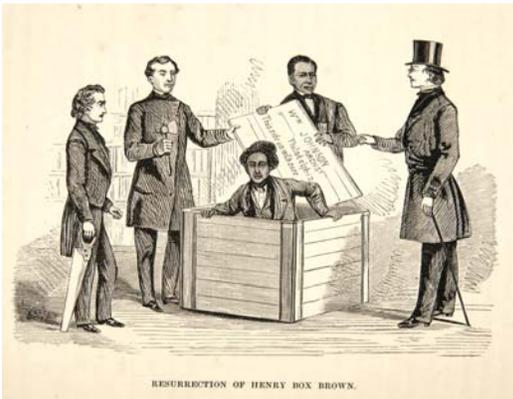
Samuel W. Rowse

[\*The Resurrection of Henry Box Brown at Philadelphia\*](#) (1850)

Lithograph

Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, VA

2005.149



Artist Unknown

[\*Resurrection of Henry Box Brown\*](#) (1872)

Engraving in William Still's *The Underground Railroad: A Record of Facts, Authentic Narratives, and Letters*. Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1872, Page 83.

Newberry Library, Chicago, IL

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## Guiding Questions

- Who was Henry Box Brown and why is his story important?
- Why is art often used to convey important political ideas?
- How does the portrayal of a particular event in art differ from the actual event?
- Should an artist always attempt to be true to the actual facts and events of the story he or she is attempting to portray? Why might an artist stray from the facts?

## Key Information for Understanding the Artwork

### Historical Background

Henry Box Brown was arguably one of the most well-known escaped slaves of his time, and the story of his flight to freedom became instrumental in the anti-slavery movement in the United States. Brown was born into slavery in Virginia around 1815 and lived in Richmond where he was forced to work in a tobacco factory. Brown later “married” (under the law at that time slaves could not legally marry, but some slaves lived together as husband and wife) a woman named Nancy who lived on a neighboring plantation; they had three children. Unfortunately Nancy and the children were sold in 1848 and Brown never saw them again. After losing his family to the slave trade, he made up his mind to escape from slavery.

With the help of a free black man, James C. A. Smith, and a white shoemaker, Samuel A. Smith, Brown devised a plan in which he mailed himself to freedom. He hid in a sealed wooden box, and the two Smiths had the box sent to James Johnson in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (although both works of art show the box addressed to Wm Johnson). According to Brown’s narrative, “there being no time to be lost, the store-keeper, Dr. Smith, and myself, agreed to meet next morning at four o’clock, in order to get the box ready for the express train. The box which I had procured was three feet one inch wide, two feet six inches high, and two feet wide: and on the morning of the 29th day of March, 1849, I went into the box.”

After 26 hours, during which he was at times upside down, Brown arrived inside the box in Philadelphia. There he was warmly welcomed by members of the Anti-Slavery Society who had helped with the escape. Brown soon became a symbol for the Underground Railroad. About a year later, however, he fled to England to avoid recapture after the Fugitive Slave Act passed, accompanied by James C. A. Smith, the same man who had helped him escape. Brown eventually remarried while abroad and toured Britain, giving performances about his life in slavery and his eventual escape. He remained in England for 25 years before returning to the United States. The exact time and place of his death are unknown.

**Sources:** Jeffrey Ruggles’ short biography of Henry Box Brown on the Library of Virginia’s “Virginia Memory” website is especially helpful: [http://www.virginiamemory.com/online\\_classroom/union\\_or\\_secession/people/henry\\_box\\_brown](http://www.virginiamemory.com/online_classroom/union_or_secession/people/henry_box_brown). For additional information about Brown, see “Resources” at the end of the lesson.

### About the Artworks

The two artworks here show the moment when Brown emerged from the box that he was enclosed in during his 26-hour trip from Richmond to Philadelphia in 1849.

This lithograph by American artist Samuel Worcester Rowse was made in 1850, shortly after Brown’s successful escape. Its caption reads, “The Resurrection of Henry Box Brown at Philadelphia.” It was used to help raise money for abolitionist causes before and during the Civil War.



*The Resurrection of Henry Box Brown at Philadelphia* (1850)

Rowse’s image inspired other pictures of the event. This illustration from “The Civil War in Art” website appears in the 1872 book *The Underground Railroad*, published by abolitionist William Still. (Still also published another book that featured the image, *The Underground Railroad Records* in 1879 and 1883.) The artist who made the 1872 image is unknown and most likely was an illustrator for the publisher.



*Resurrection of Henry Box Brown (1872)*

Brown’s story was probably especially meaningful to Still, who was present when Brown emerged from the box. In the 1872 illustration from Still’s book, he is shown standing behind Brown and holding the lid. Three other abolitionists were at the scene too. The man standing next to Still and holding a hatchet that might have been used to remove the lid is probably James M. McKim, a leader in the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society. The man holding the saw is thought to be Lewis Thompson, who printed Anti-Slavery Society newspapers; and Charles D. Cleveland, who directed a school for girls, is assumed to be wearing the top hat.

The 1850 lithograph by Rowse includes Frederick Douglass, the famed abolitionist who was born into slavery and later escaped and went on to write one of the most influential slave narratives of his time, *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. But in the 1872 image, Douglass is not present. There is no evidence that Frederick Douglass was at the scene. This later illustration is thought to be more accurate in representing who was present.

## National Standards and Lesson-Specific Objectives

Common Core English Language Standards	Objectives—Students will...
<p><b>RI.6.2</b>—Determine a central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.</p> <p>(Core Literacy Standards for Reading Informational Text 6<sup>th</sup> Grade—Key Ideas and Details)</p>	<p>Read about Henry Box Brown and identify key themes and ideas in the text, citing supporting details.</p>
<p><b>RI.6.3</b>—Analyze in detail how a key individual, event, or idea is introduced, illustrated, and elaborated in a [work of art].</p> <p>(Core Literacy Standards for Reading Informational Text 6<sup>th</sup> Grade—Key Ideas and Details)</p>	<p>Analyze works of art about Henry Box Brown’s escape discussing details and what they convey.</p>
<p><b>RI.6.9</b>—Compare and contrast one author’s presentation of events with that of another.</p> <p>(Core Literacy Standards for Reading Informational Text 6<sup>th</sup> Grade—Integration of Knowledge and Ideas)</p>	<p>Analyze works of art and written text and compare how these two mediums portray an historical event.</p> <p>Consider the accuracy of the images and why artists might not always faithfully portray events as they are reported to have happened.</p>
<p><b>RL.8.3</b>— Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.</p> <p>(Core Literacy Standards for Reading Literature: 8<sup>th</sup> Grade—Key Ideas and Details)</p>	<p>Plan and present a Reader’s Theater using an account of Henry Box Brown’s escape from slavery.</p>

## Classroom Activities

### **DAY 1, Focus: Introduction to the Story of Henry Box Brown**

There are a number of ways to approach telling the story of Henry Box Brown. One is to have students read Brown's account from his narrative, which is well told and a good primary source. A letter describing the event by abolitionist J. M. McKim is also an excellent primary source, as is William Still's account in his book *The Underground Railroad*. Finally, Ellen Levine's Caldecott Honor Book, *Henry's Freedom Box*, is a modern-day retelling of the story. While the book is for younger readers, the illustrations by Kadir Nelson are excellent and the story provides a vivid account of Brown's life in slavery and his escape. (These and other helpful resources are cited on the final page of this lesson.)

Ask students to describe the theme and main ideas of the story with specific supporting details from the text, and to summarize it.

### **DAY 2, Focus: Examination of artworks**

Students examine the 1872 engraving [The Resurrection of Henry Box Brown](#) on "The Civil War in Art" website as well as the 1850 lithograph [The Resurrection of Henry Box Brown at Philadelphia](#) by Samuel Rowse, and answer the following questions:

1. Which moment in Brown's story did the artists represent? Why do you think different artists chose to show that particular moment?
2. How are the artists' representations of that moment different from or similar to the writers' representations?
3. Describe the clothing and the expressions of the men in each of the prints. What might the artists' decision to represent *all* of the men—including Brown—in the same type of clothing tell you about their views of slavery?
4. The caption for these images is "The Resurrection of Henry "Box" Brown."
  - What is meant by the word "resurrection" and how does it relate to Brown's story?
  - What does the caption tell us about slavery and why Brown and other slaves chose to escape?
5. Because we live in a digital age, it is sometimes hard to imagine a world in which images of events weren't available until days, weeks, months, or even years after the events happened.
  - After reading one of the accounts of Brown's escape, explain how you might choose to depict the event. What would you include or exclude?
  - Would your depiction change if you were an abolitionist or a Southerner living in Brown's time?
  - Do you think that *The Resurrection of Henry Box Brown at Philadelphia* is an accurate depiction? What additional information would you need in order to answer this question?
6. Why might the image, *The Resurrection of Henry Box Brown at Philadelphia*, have been used to raise money for abolitionist causes? How might it have helped abolitionists argue against slavery?
7. Working in groups, students use a Venn diagram to compare the 1850 lithograph and the later 1872 engraving from "The Civil War in Art" website and chart similarities and differences. A discussion should follow allowing students to share their observations with the class. Discuss as a group why there might be differences in the two artists' depictions.

### **DAYS 3 & 4, Focus: Reader's Theater**

Reader's Theater is a teaching strategy in which students read, sometimes write, and interpret texts for one another. It includes the performance of a literary work or narrative, wherein the text is read expressively, but not fully staged and acted out.

For this project, students read important passages from Brown's narrative or other accounts of Brown's escape and decide how to present them to their classmates. Through this process students gain a fuller, richer experience with the text and a deeper understanding of the related works of art.

#### **Steps**

1. Select excerpts for students to study from Henry Box Brown's narrative and J. M. McKim's letter describing the escape.
2. After explaining what Reader's Theater is, divide the class into groups of four or five students, with each group assigned to an excerpt.
3. Students read the assigned text silently and aloud and discuss with group members and the teacher words or aspects of the story they don't understand.
4. Next students prepare their presentations. They discuss the text and agree on the words, theme, or message that they would most like to share with the class. They should be given at least 45 minutes for this process.
5. Students then prepare and rehearse their presentation. Remind students that the goal is not to perform a skit, but to represent the underlying message of text. The power of the presentation is in the spoken word and its interpretation by the group. Students can use some creative license, but for the most part they should stick closely to what is written. They can read some or all of the selection in unison, in twos or threes, or as individuals. Movement and props should be kept to a minimum, though they can station themselves around the room or use body postures as they see fit. Every student should participate.
6. An important part of reader's theater is feedback, which can be given immediately after the performance. Examples of discussion starters are:
  - *It was powerful for me when...*
  - *The performance that helped me understand the text in a new way is...because...*
  - *It was interesting how...*
  - *One performance that stood out to me is ...because*
  - *I was surprised when...because...*
7. For more information about Readers Theater, visit the "Facing History and Ourselves" website: <http://dev.facinghistory.org/resources/strategies/readers-theatre-exploring-emo>. Evaluation: The assessment of the Reader's Theater depends largely on the instructor's goals; however, several criteria to keep in mind when evaluating students are: level of participation, ability to work in a group, the actual performance and readers' ability to connect to the audience, and the feedback given by other students. All of these can be a part of the overall assessment.

### **DAYS 5, Focus: Connecting Brown's Story**

In order to assess students' understanding of Brown's story and to help them relate it to the present day, students will be asked to read a contemporary immigration story and write a one-page essay in answer to the prompt below.

You may wish to use the story of Mohamed Munadi, available on the *San Francisco Sentinel* website: <http://www.sanfranciscosentinel.com/?p=124846>.

Munadi is a Tunisian immigrant who fled his village after the revolution in his own country and subsequent revolution in Libya. However, students can find their own stories or use one from their personal experience or from family members or ancestors who immigrated.

Ideally, students will understand that Brown's story is part of a larger human story of people throughout the world who leave their homes due to oppression, lack of economic opportunities, war, famine, and a host of other reasons. Some of these same factors drove Brown from Richmond, Virginia. Hopefully students will be able to see that individuals continue to take extraordinary risks to achieve what they feel is a better life. The result can be positive or negative depending on how one looks at it; however, this is something students should be able to discern themselves.

**Essay Prompt:**

Using information you learned about Henry Box Brown and from the story about immigration that you chose or the one you read about Mohamed Munadi, what are some of the main reasons people flee their homes to go elsewhere? Do you think that the risks that they take are worth it?

Additional Essay Prompt: Answer the guiding questions for a final essay exam.

1. Who was Henry Box Brown and why is his story important?
2. Why is art often used to convey important political ideas?
3. Should an artist always attempt to be accurate to the actual facts and events of the story he or she is attempting to portray? Why might an artist deviate from the facts?

**Resources**

Brown, Henry Box. *Narrative of Henry Box Brown, Written by Himself*. Manchester, England: Lee & Glynn Publishers, 1851. Available at "Documenting the American South," University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill University Library website: August 9, 2011, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/brownbox/brownbox.html>. (The account of Brown's escape begins on page 51.)

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