Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project

Arta Faye Hruby
Pennsylvania State Standards:

8.1.6.D. History
Describe and explain historical research.
- Historical events (time and place)
- Facts, folklore and fiction
- Historical questions
- Primary sources
- Secondary sources
- Conclusions (e.g., simulations, group projects, skits and plays)

1.4.5.B Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening
Write multi-paragraph informational pieces (e.g., essays, descriptions, letters, reports, instructions).
- Include cause and effect.
- Develop a problem and solution when appropriate to the topic.
- Use relevant graphics (e.g., maps, charts, graphs, tables, illustrations, photographs).

1.5.5.B Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening
Write using well-developed content appropriate for the topic.
- Gather, organize and select the most effective information appropriate for the topic, task and audience.
- Write paragraphs that have a topic sentence and supporting details.

1.6.5.E Reading Writing, Speaking, and Listening
Participate in small and large group discussions and presentations.
- Participate in everyday conversation.
- Present an oral reading.
- Deliver research reports.
- Conduct interviews.
- Plan and participate in group presentations.
- Contribute to informal debates.
Inquiry-Based Learning Model (IBLM) Used:

**Questioning:** The teacher will ask the students a question about slavery to generate their interest in the topic.

**Researching:** The teacher will provide the students with a primary source to explore, specifically, an excerpt from an interview with a former slave.

**Discussing:** The students will converse in small groups about the oral history they investigated and share their thoughts.

**Creating:** Each group will develop a two-paragraph journal entry based on what they learned about being a slave from exploring the oral history.

**Reflecting:** Each group will present their journal entries to the rest of the class.
Detailed Walk-Thru:

The lesson will begin by the teacher posing questions to the students in the class. The questions will be: “Imagine you are a slave, how does it feel?” and “How would you plan your escape to freedom?” This incorporates the Questioning phase of the Inquiry-Based Learning model. The students will write their responses on a piece of paper and hold onto them to refer to later when they are in their discussion groups. Next, the teacher will pass out a copy of a primary source oral history transcript to each student. This encompasses the Researching phase of the Inquiry-Based learned model. Specifically, the oral history is about a woman named Tempie Cummins, who is a former slave. This oral history was preserved from the Federal Writers’ Project. It can be found in the Library of Congress American Memory Digital Collection. Here is the direct link: [http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/connections/narratives-slavery/langarts5.html](http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/connections/narratives-slavery/langarts5.html)

Tempie talks about what it was like growing up as a slave and how she and her mother executed their escape. The students will read this independently and compare the excerpt to their original thoughts to the questions asked at the beginning of the lesson. Then, the students will get into small groups and talk about what they have just read. This incorporates the Discussing component of the Inquiry-Based learning model. The students will share the answers to the questions about how it feels to be a slave and how they would escape to freedom. The group would then work together to develop a journal entry about their life as a slave. This encompasses the Creating phase of the Inquiry-Based learning model. Specifically, the journal entry needs to be at least two paragraphs in length and each student in the group has to contribute ideas to it. The journal entry needs to explain both how the slave feels about their life and how
they are planning to escape to a life of freedom. After each group is finished writing, the class will get together and each group will present their work to the rest of the class. This represents the Reflecting phase of the Inquiry-Based learning model. To reinforce what was learned, the class will have a final discussion about how they would feel if they were slaves.

**Assessment Tool:** The students will take this five question quiz about the oral history that they researched:

1. Why wasn’t the slave able to learn how to read and write?
   a. She was always working.
   b. She was deaf.
   c. She was not interested in learning.
   d. She lived by herself.

2. What job did her mother have?
   a. She drove the car for the Master.
   b. She worked out in the fields.
   c. She took care of all the slave children.
   d. She worked in the house and cooked, too.

3. Where did her mother used to hide to listen to the white folks?
   a. The attic
   b. The chimney corner
   c. The roof
   d. The back porch

4. What did her mother hear one night as she was listening to the white folks?
   a. That it was going to rain the next day.
   b. That the United States was starting a war.
   c. That all slaves were now free.
   d. That the master found more slaves to come help them with their work.

5. What happened as she and her mother were escaping?
   a. Her mother fell and broke her wrist.
   b. The master shot a gun at them.
   c. A car came to pick them up.
   d. They decided to stay and live with the Master.