



Battles for Freedom: John Jasper White

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What different meanings did the fight for freedom have for different people during the Revolution?

Standards

Social Studies

I.1.1, I.1.3, I.1.4, I.1.5, I.1.6, I.1.7, I.1.8, I.1.9, I.1.10
3&5.B.1.1, 3-5.B.1.2
3.C&G.1.1, 3-4.C&G.1.2, 5.C&G.2.1
5.E.1.2
3&5.G.1.1, 3-5.G.1.2, 3.G.1-.3
3-5.H.1.1, 3-5.H.1.2, 3-5.H.1.3, 4-5.H.1.4, 3-5.H.1.5, 3-5.H.1.6

English Language Arts

RI.3-5.1, RI.3-5.2, RI.3-5.3, RI.3-5.4, RI.3-5.5, RI.3-5.10
RF.3-5.2, RF.3-5.4, RF.3-5.5
W.3-5.1, W.3-5.2
SL.3-5.1, SL.3-5.2
L.3-5.1, L.3-5.2, L.3-5.3, L.3-5.4, L.3-5.6

Objectives

- Analyze the unique story of an enslaved man who became free based on actions during the Revolutionary War as presented in original documents
- Design an appropriate memorial with historical knowledge

Lesson Contents

Patriot calls for liberty and freedom during the Revolutionary Period were at odds with the system of slavery upon which North Carolina's cash crop economy depended. An early act of the new state's

General Assembly was to prevent emancipation of enslaved people. Exceptions needed to be approved by county courts. The case of John Jasper White, later known as “Currituck Jack,” involved a physical battle during the Revolutionary War and a legal battle afterward to gain freedom.

In 1780, a schooner (a ship with multiple masts) named *Polly* and owned by Henry White of Currituck headed out to break the British Blockade with a crew of three—Henry White’s son Caleb White, Caleb’s brother-in-law Samuel Jasper, and Jack—a man White enslaved. The *Polly* was soon captured by five British privateers, who chained the *Polly*’s crew. Jack convinced his captors that he was loyal to Great Britain and could help them. Once freed from chains, he assisted his crew mates in fighting to recapture the ship. Though wounded, the crew then sailed to Annapolis, MD, and turned the British sailors over to the Continental Congress.

After more than a decade of Samuel Jasper’s efforts to emancipate Jack, the North Carolina General Assembly granted the request in 1792 and added the story of his loyalty and heroism to the session records. Jack named himself John Jasper White, was a respected community member, and later owned his own ship, married, and had two children.

Primary Sources

“An Act to prevent domestic Insurrections, and for other Purposes,” *Acts of Assembly of the State of North Carolina*,” April 1777, p. 17, State publications collection, State Library of N.C., digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/acts-of-assembly-of-the-state-of-north-carolina-1777-april/3691851?item=4230227.

Petitions Concerning Emancipation, General Assembly Session Records, Nov. 1792-Jan. 1793, box 3, State Archives of N.C., digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/session-of-november-1792-january-1793-petitions-concerning-emancipation/648126?item=648133.

Assignment Options

(files on thumb drive)

- **An Account of Our Engagement at Sea**
- **Memorial Examples**
- **Activity: Design a Memorial**
- **Exit Ticket**

Supplies Needed

- Projector (optional)
- Basic art supplies—crayons or colored pencils, etc.

Lesson Preparation

- There are many options with this lesson. Please review the primary sources, activities, and related materials to choose the options that are best suited for you and your students.
- Choose whether to project or distribute the glossary terms necessary to understand the lesson. Consider creating your own vocabulary exercise with more relevant words.

gale	a strong wind
irons	shackles for the hands or legs, like handcuffs and chains
marlinspike	a tool made of wood or iron that comes to a sharp point and is used for working with ropes on board a ship
memorial	something that keeps a memory alive
meritorious service	acts worthy of honor
privateer	a privately-owned ship that has been given a license by the government to attack enemy ships
schooner	a ship with sails
quarterdeck	part of a ship's upper deck

- Prepare for your students to work with John Jasper White's story. If choosing to work with handouts, make enough double-sided copies of [An Account of Our Engagement at Sea](#) for students to use in either pairs or small groups.
- Choose whether to share the sample memorials via slides or prints to pass around class and how students will work with the [Design a Memorial](#) project. Consider whether they will work individually, in pairs, or in small groups. Make the appropriate number of copies of [Activity: Design a Memorial](#) and prepare any art supplies.
- If using [Exit Ticket](#), print the necessary copies and cut into quarters.

Connecting to Background Knowledge

(5 minutes)

Lead a brief discussion about the term “meritorious service.” Discuss the definition, “an action deserving of honor.” Ask: *What would qualify as “meritorious service” to you?*

Procedure

Activity 1: John Jasper White’s Story

(30 minutes)

Share: *During the American Revolution, many people were afraid that enslaved workers would run away to the British. North Carolina passed a law making it illegal to free any enslaved person except for “meritorious services.”*

Project or distribute [An Account of Our Engagement at Sea](#).

- Explain that people wrote things differently in the 1700s. Spelling wasn’t standardized, so words were spelled many different ways. Sentences were often long, and in this document, the writer did not use much punctuation. Many sentences run together. Writing in the missing punctuation may make it easier to read. Reading it aloud and pointing to the words as you read them may also help. People often skipped writing the middle letters of a word and then wrote the last letter or consonant small and high, called “superscript.” Where this occurs in this document, that word has then been written out in brackets immediately afterwards. For example, “Feb^y [February].”
- Encourage students to make notes on their handouts—to add question marks, underline important points, or add other symbols. Have them write questions as they are reading.
- After giving students time to read it silently, work through it as a class. Read a sentence or phrase at a time, asking for students to share in their own words what’s happening in each one.
 - After reading the entire account, ask students to summarize John Jasper White’s story. Then discuss what happened to Jack and what actions he took afterwards.
 - In pairs or small groups, ask students to answer the questions on **Understanding John Jasper White’s Story**.
- Reflect on the requirement for “meritorious services.” Ask: *Samuel Jasper is petitioning for “Jack” to be freed on the basis of what action?*
- Use “**A Compleat Map of North Carolina**” to look more closely at the area where White lived.

Activity 2: Design a Memorial

(30 – 45 minutes)

Ask: *What is a memorial? What is a tribute?* Student answers will vary but should include that a memorial is an object intended to preserve memory and that a tribute is something created to show respect or honor.

Discuss that memorials can take on different forms, sizes, and shapes. They can be nearly anything. Examples can show how art is blended with the person's story. Project images or distribute **Memorial Examples** for small groups to review during discussion.

- Lead discussion with information on the back of each example. Ask: *What are elements that make up tributes and memorials and what is their purpose?* Ask the students to examine each picture for information about the size, building materials, shape, and meaning. Look also for words included in the memorial and what form they take.
- Discuss the effectiveness of these elements. Ask questions about what aspect of each memorial students like and why. Discuss what visual aspects help convey the story or have an effect on the viewer and why.
- Move students into pairs or small groups to design their own tributes or memorials to John Jasper White. Distribute the **Activity: Design a Memorial** worksheet or present directions for students to work on posterboard or another medium. When students are finished, ask each group to share their ideas with the rest of the class with a display and/or discussion.

Exit Ticket

(5 minutes)

Where in Jack's story did he have choices? Why do you think he made those choices?

Modifications

- Student pages could be shared with students needing to take notes individually, with vision issues, or who have issues focusing (even if the slides are being used collectively).
- Students could be paired with a higher-achieving or differently behaving student for extra support.
- Students could be given extension activities if they finish early or need more challenging or independent work. These can be done independently or collaboratively.
- Consider allowing students to take **Activity: Design a Memorial** home overnight to engage students with artistic talent. Rather than simply designing this on paper, they could use a much wider variety of materials to build a mini model of their idea.

Extension Activities

- For more elaborate end products of the Design a Memorial project, consider giving students more time, larger paper, and/or a wider variety of art supplies. For example, some students could use air-dry clay to make a simple mock-up of their design.
- Imagine you were given the opportunity to interview John Jasper White. Create a list of four to six questions you would ask.

- Barbara Snowden is a historian who has researched John Jasper White's life extensively and is actively working to make his story known by establishing a memorial in Currituck County. Write a letter to her to thank her for work in preserving John Jasper White's story. Or a letter to tell her about the memorial you have designed.
- John Jasper White's time on board the *Polly* is detailed and full of action. Transform his story from written accounts into a short graphic novel or zine. Consider color, words, and font carefully.
- Choose one of the example memorials or another memorial and research its history. Why was it built? What was the message it gave at the time it was built? How might the meaning have changed since that time? Find many examples here, docsouth.unc.edu/commland/explore/timemap/.

Recommended Resources

Thomas E. Baker, *The Monuments at Guilford Courthouse* (Greensboro: Guilford Courthouse National Military Park, 1979), npshistory.com/publications/guco/monuments.pdf.

"Monuments and Memorials are Conversation Starters," *Facing History and Ourselves*, facinghistory.org/ideas-week/monuments-memorials-are-conversation-starters.

America 250 NC, **"Sculpting History: The Untold Story of Currituck Jack,"** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aVldpa3M7g>, 1.5 minutes.