“Stealing a Little Freedom”
Slave Runaways in North Carolina

Overview
Students often have the misconception that those enslaved were passive beings who accepted all that was dealt to them, from harsh punishment to cruel restrictions. In this lesson, students will explore the perspective that in actuality, those enslaved were resilient in many ways, some by making the risky choice to run away. Through the exploration of runaway ads from the 1700s, students will gain an understanding of the individual lives affected by slavery during the 1700s as well as the skills and characteristics possessed by such individuals.

Grade
5

North Carolina Essential Standards for 5th Grade Social Studies
• 5.H.1.3- Analyze the impact of major conflicts, battles and wars on the development of our nation through Reconstruction.
• 5.H.2.3- Compare the changing roles of women and minorities on American society from Pre-Colonial through Reconstruction.

Materials
• “Slave Runaways” Power Point accompaniment (optional), available in the Database of K-12 Resources (in PDF format)
  o To view this PDF as a projectable presentation, save the file, click “View” in the top menu bar of the file, and select “Full Screen Mode”
  o To request an editable PPT version of this presentation, send a request to CarolinaK12@unc.edu
• Warm Up Image, attached & available on Slide 3 of the Power Point accompaniment
• Great Dismal Swamp images (samples available on Slides 6-7)
• Exploring Primary Sources-Runaway Slave Ads, worksheet attached
• Copies of runaway slave notices, attached
• Slave outline, attached
• “Slave Runaways” and/or “28 Fugitives Escaping”, art work available in the PPT
• Optional teacher resource: A History of African Americans in North Carolina, by Jeffrey Crow, Paul Escott, and Flora Hatley. (All quotations within this lesson derive from this source.)

Essential Questions:
• For what reasons did those enslaved choose to runaway?
• What were the risks and benefits associated with running away?
• What can we learn about those enslaved through primary sources such as runaway ads?
• What were the various skills enslaved people possessed?
• Why is it important to focus on the fact that each enslaved person was an individual?

Duration
60 minutes
Student Preparation

Students should have a basic knowledge of the colonial period and slavery. Prior to this lesson, teachers may want to teach the lesson “Slave Resistance During Colonial Times,” for an overview of all types of slave resistance.

Procedure

An Introduction to Runaway Ads

1. As a warm-up, hold up a local newspaper (or project Slide 2 of the Power Point accompaniment) and discuss the following with students:
   - What is this that I’m holding? What types of information does a newspaper contain?
   - What types of advertisements might I find in a newspaper?
   - If I was looking for a new job, to which section would I go? (Once students have identified the “classifieds,” hold up that section.) What other types of announcements might I find in the classifieds? (homes, vehicles, pets, legal notices, etc.)
   - If this newspaper were from 200 years ago, what differences might we find? (Allow students to brainstorm before continuing to #2.)

2. Project Slide 3 of a runaway ad and discuss:
   - What do you see here?
   - What does the document appear to be? What do you think its purpose was?
   - Where might this ad have been found? (Ensure students make the connection that just as items such as homes and vehicles are advertised in the paper today, so were human beings advertised in papers during slavery.)
   - When and where was it written?
   - What does this document tell us about “Jack?”
   - What additional inferences can we make about Jack based on the information provided?

   * The ad is also attached if teachers prefer to copy it and hand it out to students for examination.

The Reality of Running Away

3. Remind students that when studying slavery, we often make the mistake of assuming enslaved individuals were passive beings who simply accepted all that was dealt to them, from harsh punishment to cruel restrictions. This view is incorrect. In truth, those enslaved were truly resilient in the ways they carved out areas of freedom in their lives, even in the midst of danger and oppression. One of the most risky choices an enslaved person could make was to run away (“steal their freedom.”) Discuss with students:
   - Why do you think some slaves chose to flee?
     - Explain that the reasons for running away were often complex. Some slaves understandably desired freedom no matter what the risk. Some slaves sought to reunite with families, whereas others wanted to escape brutal treatment. During Colonial times, some slaves found not only the institution of slavery unbearable, but also the cultural differences in the new land they had been forced upon. For example, “…before the Revolution, Africans comprised perhaps half of the runaways. Shocked and bewildered by their enslavement, Africans defected at the earliest opportunity. They were the least acculturated slaves, still bearing the marks and scars of African rituals. Few could speak English.”
   - What did slaves risk by running away?
     - Discuss with students how often, we make the uninformed conclusion that were we enslaved, we would runaway. But we make this claim from a modern perspective, without truly considering what was at risk for those who ran away. There were enslaved individuals with immense courage and fortitude who attempted to steal their freedom – some survived and others were brutally slain or re-enslaved. However, those who chose not to runaway were no less brave or courageous. Rather, they were weighing their options and making the best decision for their own survival.
Running away could result in capture, mutilation, torture, whipping, irons and chains, re-enslavement under harsher conditions, or death.

Runaway slaves during Colonial times also risked being attacked by Native Americans. Primary sources from North Carolina allude to Natives assisting Whites in tracking down runaways and tormenting enslaved people when caught. A group of Cherokee’s were said to hold the title of “slave catcher.”

- “The Negroes sometimes make use of...advantages in the Woods, where they will stay for Months together before they can be found out by their Masters, or any other Person; and great Numbers of them would act after the same manner (which would be detrimental to the Planters) were they not so much afraid of the Indians, who have such a natural aversion to the Blacks, that they commonly shoot them whenever they find them in the Woods or solitary parts of the country.” John Brickwell, 1730

4. To deepen the conversation, project an image for students to get a visual sense of what those enslaved would be escaping into, such as the Great Dismal Swamp images on Slides 7-8. Discuss:
   - Consider the actual act of running away. What would be difficult regarding this decision? (Encourage them to respond to what would be difficult traversing such terrain in Colonial North Carolina.)
   - Encourage students to consider the actuality of running away in the 1700s. If they succeeded in running away, where exactly would they go, how would they get there safely, and what would they do once there?
   - Ensure students consider that the landscape of North Carolina was completely different than what they know today. There were no paved roads; only rustic paths, or “corduroy roads” existed. Even if some type of path or road was available, an escapee typically had to stay off of it, instead making their way through untouched woods and underbrush in order to stay hidden. An escaping slave would not have the modern luxury of a flashlight to provide visual guidance during the thick woods at night. They might not have any sort of weapon for protection, even though there were physical dangers such as wild animals, snakes, slave catchers, etc. There were also additional nuisances such as mosquitoes, extreme heat or cold, poisonous plants, etc. Escaping slaves also had to consider how and where they would attain food, clean drinking water, and shelter.
   - In addition, there were often psychological and emotional difficulties, such as fear for the safety of family a runaway may have left behind.
   - Given the great danger and difficulty in running away, what skills would an enslaved person need to have?

5. Additional information to share with students:
   “Many slaves took the freedom ideology of the prerevolutionary period and applied it to their own situation in order to obtain their own freedom. They began to petition for freedom, run away, rebel, and many joined the American or, more often, the British Army which promised freedom after the war. The Revolution period saw an increase in such forms of self-emancipation. Historians estimate that, between 55,000 and 100,000 (9% -17% of all slaves), emancipated themselves by running away during these years, including larger numbers of women than in prerevolutionary times. The war years brought more opportunities to men and women to run away successfully and they took advantage of them in order to make personal statements about the institution of slavery. While many ran off to join family members and friends in various cities, others ran to the British line in hopes that they would be set free. Some even ran off to form maroon communities where they could live freely among themselves. The decision to flee was not an easy one for most slaves. Often times slaves fleeing for their freedom were caught and either executed, forced to work hard labor or deported to the West Indies. Even those who successful in escaping to British lines were forced to take shelter in refugee camps that were poorly equipped to handle so many people. Here women and children often met starvation, disease and death. They risked starvation due to their lack of ability to support themselves. Slaves who ran away also risked harming family and friends who stayed behind.
Many plantations suffered due to the lack of workers and thus starvation and hard times were present throughout the southern regions. Even when slaves were able to achieve their freedom there was a constant threat that they would be recaptured, their dreams of freedom ripped away, and returned to their masters or worse.” (Source: ://www.umbc.edu/che/teahlessons/pdf/The_Untold_Story_The_Black_Struggle_for_Freedom_PF.pdf)

Exploring Primary Sources - Runaway Slave Ads
6. Place students into partners or small groups, distribute a copy of the attached “Exploring Primary Sources-Runaway Slave Ads” worksheets, and hand out copies of the attached runaway slave notices. There are ten different notices attached. Teachers should determine how many notices to have each pair or group examine. Instruct students to closely examine these notices, reminding them of the harsh reality that these words were actually printed in various papers during the 1700s. Go over the instructions on the worksheet with students, ensuring they understand the difference in evidence and inference. Instruct them to elect a spokesperson who will share what their pair/group learned from the ad(s) with the remainder of class once finished. Spend time focusing on the various skills those enslaved possessed, as well as the adjectives students used to describe those who were enslaved (likely responses should include brave, resilient, intelligent, etc.)

7. After students have discussed their runaway ad with the remainder of class, post an outline of a slave on a wall or on the floor where students can comfortably write on it. (Ideally, teachers will recreate a larger version of a slave outline, such as that on slide 7 of the accompanying PPT, on a piece of bulletin board or butcher paper.) Tell students to consider all of the stereotypical thoughts people often assume of slaves and remind them that all of those forced into this institution were human beings with individual lives that they were living and fighting for each day. Instruct students to consider all of the attributes they have learned regarding enslaved people. As a culmination to studying the runaway ads, instruct students to fill up the inside of the outline with the various skills, qualities, emotions, hopes, dreams, etc. that those enslaved had. Students can write words or phrases, or sketch symbols that they feel represent the humanity of those enslaved. Keep this posted in class as a visual reminder that those enslaved were not just stereotypical archetypes; rather they were real people.

Culminating Activities
8. As a culminating creative writing activity, project one (or both) of the attached images, “Slave Runaways” or “28 Fugitives.” (Show the image without the numbers first.) Ask students to silently examine the image and consider the following:
   o Where are these people coming from?
   o What have they been through?
   o Where are they going?
   o How are they feeling right now?
   o What are they hopeful of? Fearful of?
   o What are they risking?
   o What do you notice about the setting? Where are they? What is the weather like? How are they dressed?

While students ponder the image, have them draw a numbered slip of paper from a receptacle. (The slips should contain a numbers from 1-4 if using “Slave Runaways” and 1-8 if using “28 Fugitives”.) Once all students have a number, project the image that is numbered. Tell students that based upon the number they drew, they will assume the character of the person in the image labeled with the corresponding number and write a first-person response to what they are thinking, feeling, seeing, hearing, etc. in the moment the image represents.
Once students have had time to formulate and write down their thoughts, have 4 (for “Slave Runaways”) or 8 (for “28 Fugitives”) student volunteers who represent each figure to come to the front of the classroom and take the same position as the people in the image. In numerical order, have the students read their first-person monologues.

Additional Activities
• Have students complete the following writing assignment:
  o Imagine that you are an Englander visiting family in colonial North Carolina prior to the Revolutionary War. Write a 1+ page letter home describing your observations on slavery. Be sure to include the following topics:
    ▪ The types of skills slaves possess
    ▪ The attitudes and treatment of the slave owners toward the slaves
    ▪ The types of resistance exhibited by the slaves in general
    ▪ Your observations of a runaway slave and his/her outcome (describe in creative yet realistic detail whether he/she was caught or successful)

Warm Up Image
Exercising Primary Sources – Runaway Slave Ads

Directions: Review the runaway ad provided to you and answer the following questions.

• If the question can be answered by specific statements/evidence written in the ad, check the evidence blank and note the evidence underneath.
• If the text of the ad does not specifically address the question, make an inference (educated guess) based on what you have learned regarding slavery and answer underneath, checking the inference blank.
• In some cases, your answer may be based on both evidence and inference.

What is the enslaved person’s name*? _____________________________________________________________
(*If more than one slave is sought in the ad, list all names)

What year was the ad placed?______________

1. What skills did the person possess? ___Evidence ___Inference ___Both

2. How did slave owners treat the person? ___Evidence ___Inference ___Both

3. How did the person escape? ___Evidence ___Inference ___Both

4. Why did the person choose to run away? ___Evidence ___Inference ___Both

5. Did the person resist in additional ways beyond escaping? ___Evidence ___Inference ___Both

6. Considering the ad and your interpretation, how would you characterize the enslaved person(s) described and why? (List at least 4 adjectives with your reasoning.)
   a.__________________________________________________________
      __________________________________________________________
   b.__________________________________________________________
      __________________________________________________________
   c.__________________________________________________________
      __________________________________________________________
   d.__________________________________________________________
      __________________________________________________________
England, James W. Runaway Slave Ad for Joshua, North Carolina, 1813

TWENTY DOLLARS REWARD.

RUNAWAY from the subscriber a few months ago, a Negro man called JOSHUA, about five feet ten inches high, round shoulders, and yellowish complected, between twenty and thirty years of age. He was raised in Essex co., Virginia, and carried from thence to Sneedesborough, by Mr. Lee, dec. and since sold by a Mr. Peter Benford, to me in this place. It is supposed that he has either made for the place he was raised, or to Sneedboro'. Any person apprehending the said fellow, and lodging [sic] him in any Jail & giving me notice so that I get him again, shall be entitled to the above reward, and if brought to me, all reasonable charges paid.

JAMES W. ENGLAND

Stop the Runaway.

RANAWAY from the subscriber living near Liberty Hill, in Iredell county, N.C., a negro man named PETER,

Formerly owned by James Cunningham. He is between forty and fifty years old; of a yellowish complexion — round face and small eyes. He is marked with a scar in one of his ears, which has not grown together; also with a scar on the underside of his heel; which has not ______; he has also a small scar on one of his cheeks and is about five feet, five or six inches in height.

Any one taking up this negro and lodging him in jail or delivering him to me, shall be reasonably compensated.

HUGH CUNNINGHAM.

Liberty Hill, Iredell co. N. C.

June 11th, 1836 — __47
Ten Dollars Reward.

RANAWAY on the 19th of February last, a Negro man named KIRT, between 20 and 30 years old, 5 feet 10 or 11 inches high, very black, cunning and artful, can write a tolerable good hand, it is probable he has a pass with a number of names counterfeited to it, and he may attempt to counterfeit the county seal, speaks quick, is a little hollow eyed, rather knock-kneed, had with him a pair of leather breeches, a black full lincey coat, other clothing not recollected—it is possible he will change his clothing and make use of many devices to deceive the people, as he has a great deal of assurance; he has no motive in running away, but to get free, and may attempt to go to Ohio or Delaware, or the lower end of this State. The above reward will be given by the subscriber, living in Guilford county, N. C. for the delivery or information of said runaway so that I get him again.

LEVIN AYDELOTT

March 30

From Carolina Watchman, January 7, 1837

$20 reward

RANAWAY from the subscriber on 19th of November, a negro man, named TIM about 45 years of age, black complexion, about five feet four or five inches high, has a stoppage in his speech. He professes to be a very devout Baptist. Having purchased him in Montgomery county, not far from Stokes’ Ferry, my opinion is, that he is in that neighborhood. I will give the above reward for his apprehension and delivery to me.

HENRY S. GORMAN.

Concord, Dec 17, 1836 — 4w22

$50 reward

RANAWAY from the subscriber two negro slaves, viz TONEY and JOHN. Toney is about 35 years of age, five feet nine or ten inches high, dark complexion, square and stout build and had on when he left, a bright drab Petersham overcoat. He was purchased by me of Mr. Richard Brasley (sp?) of Wilmington, and calls himself
Toney Montague. John is about twenty years of age, of rather lighter complexion than Toney, about five feet 10 inches high, and is quite stout — he has a full round face, and has lost two front teeth above and below which is his most distinguishing mark. He had on when he left, a light grey woolen round Jacket and pantaloons.

The above slaves left the camp of the subscriber while on his way to the Western country, eight miles above Lincolnton, on 28t of last month, and will no doubt endeavor to make their way back to Wilmington. The above reward will be given for their apprehension, so that I get them again.

JAMES MOORE.
Dec 10, 1833

Virginia Gazette (Parks),
Williamsburg, April 14 to April 21, 1738.

Whereas a Negro Man, nam'd Berwick, of a middle Size, Yellowish Complexion, and has lost the middle Finger of his Right Hand, belonging to Mr. Thomas Mingham, Clerk of the Court of the County of Elizabeth City, was, on the 18th of this Instant April, committed to the Goal of said County, on Suspicion of Felony; and hath since made his Escape, and is suppos'd to be gone towards Carolina: Whoever shall apprehend the said Negro, and deliver him to the Sheriff of the said County, before the 20th Day of May next, shall have a Pistole Reward, paid by John Tabb, Sheriff.
after, near Manchester. The above reward with all reasonable expenses will be paid to whoever will deliver him at the said plantation or any goal in S. Carolina, N. Carolina, or Virginia.

W. Clarkson
Sept. 24, 1810

**Bertie County, April 4, 1745**

Maberrin, in Bertie County, North-Carolina, March 13, 1745.

Runaway from the Subscribers in Bertie County, North-Carolina, a likely Negro slave, named Tony, Virginia born, about Thirty Years of Age, middle sized, well-set, short Neck, and somewhat round Shoulder’d, yellow Complexion, and scar’d on his Shoulders by Correction. He pretends to making and burning Bricks, and is a good Sawyer. He ran away the 18th of June, 1743, and has been heard of in Pennsylvania Government. Whoever takes him up, and brings him to the Subscriber, in North-Carolina, shall be paid Ten Pistoles, or if delivered to Mr. Hugh Parker, in Philadelphia, shall receive Five Pistoles. Benjamin Hill.

**Virginia Gazette (Parks), Williamsburg, From July 29 to August 5, 1737**

Nansemond, July, 14, 1737. RAN away some Time in June last, from William Pierce, of Nansemond County, near Mr. Theophilus Pugh’s Merchant; A Convict Servant Woman, named Winnifred Thomas. She is a Welsh Woman, short black Hair’d, and young; mark’d on the Inside of her Right Arm, with Gun-powder, W.T. and the Date of the Year underneath. She knits and spins, and is suppos’d to be gone into North-Carolina, by the Way of Curratuck, and Roanoke-Inlet. Whoever brings her to her Master, shall be paid a Pistole, beside what the Law allows, paid by William Pierce.
Virginia Gazette (Dixon & Hunter),
Williamsburg, April 6, 1776.

RUN away from the Subscriber, in Halifax County, the 3d of March, in the Night Time, a Negro Fellow named DANIEL, about 35 Years of Age, straight made, talks plain, is blacker than common, bow-legged, has high Shins, a Scar on the Top of one of his Feet, occasioned by a Burn, is about 5 Feet 6 Inches high, and had on, when he went away, a German Serge Coat with white Shalloon Lining, white Russia Drill Breeches, and blue and white Stockings. As he is artful, I do not doubt but he has procured a forged Pass. He rode away a DARK BAY HORSE about 4 Feet 10 Inches high, 8 Years old, branded on the Shoulder with Something resembling Pq, only that the Bottoms of the Letters are joined together; and had on an old Saddle, with a Hog Skin Seat. Whoever will deliver the said Negro to me shall receive ten Pounds Reward, and fifty Shillings for Horse and Saddle. EVAN RAGLAND.

VIRGINIA GAZETTE, 1766

May 2, 1766. Run away from the subscriber, in Mecklenburg county on Wednesday last, a fellow named Jack. It appears he has been principally concerned in promoting the late disorderly meetings among the Negroes, and is gone off for fear of being prosecuted for many robberies he has committed. He is a low squat made fellow, bow-legged, his eyes remarkably red, has been branded on the right cheek R, and on the left M, though not easily to be perceived. It is supposed he intends for Carolina or Georgia. Whoever apprehends the said slave, and will deliver him to me, shall receive 50s. If taken 50 miles from home and 6d [pence] a mile for a greater distance.

Robert Munford.
Run-Away from the Subscriber, (living in Stokes County, eight miles from Salem, and four from Shober’s Tavern, now occupied by Thomas Adams) on the 1st instant, a Negro man named PRINCE, about five feet eleven inches high, twenty-one years of age; had on when he went away a white furred hat, a light mixed cotton coat, cotton shirt, white & striped overalls, and walks with a halt which is occasioned by his having had his right thigh broke, and is shorter than the other. I expect he will change his name and pass for a free man, and probably may have obtained a pass of some person. From information he aims for Wilmington in this state. Any person who will apprehend said Negro and secure him in goal, so that I get him again, shall receive the above Reward; and if brought to me all other reasonable charges shall be paid. WILLIAM WALKER, September 10, 1810

--Virginia Gazette (Parks), November 2, 1739.
RAN AWAY ON THE 30TH OF SEPTEMBER LAST, FROM THE SUBSCRIBER, LIVING IN HANOVER COUNTY, TWO NEGROES, VIZ., A NEGRO MAN, NAM’D ROGER, BORN AT ANGOLA, A PRETTY TALL, WELL SET FELLOW, ABOUT 30 YEARS OLD: HE HAD ON, WHEN HE WENT AWAY, A NEW OZNABRIG SHIRT, AND AN OLD COTTON WASTECOAT, A PAIR OF VIRGINIA CLOTH BREECHES, STRIP’D BLACK AND WHITE, AND A PAIR OF COUNTRY-MADE SHOES.... MOLL, ABOUT 18 YEARS OLD, VIRGINIA BORN; IS WIFE TO THE ABOVE-NAM’D ROGER, AND IS VERY BIG WITH CHILD. SHE HAD ON, AN OLD OZNABRIG SHIFT, AND AN OLD COTTON WASTECOAT AND PETTICOAT. THEY BOTH SPEAK TOLERABLE GOOD ENGLISH. WHOEVER WILL BRING THE SAID NEGROES TO ME, AT MY HOUSE, IN HANOVER COUNTY, SHALL HAVE A PISTOLE REWARD FOR EACH OF THEM, BESIDES WHAT THE LAW ALLOWS. JOHN SHELTON.
Virginia Gazette (Purdie & Dixon), Williamsburg, May 24, 1770.

WILLIAMSBURG, May 13, 1770. COMMITTED to James City prison, a Virginia born mulatto slave named HENRY, about 21 years of age, 5 feet 4 inches high, has on an old brown duroy coat, blue cloth waistcoat, Negro cotton breeches, and white yarn stockings. He says he belongs to Daniel Nance, of Brunswick county, who is desired to send for him, and pay charges.

WILLIAM SEALY LANE.

Sources: http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/gos/browse/browse_main.php http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/subjects/runaways/ (link not working, however, this may the place to find some of these resources instead http://search.lib.virginia.edu/catalog/u646129)