

# Was Illinois Truly a Free State?

Strategic Lesson Plan

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## Abstract:

This series of lessons examines Illinois' status as a free state. Students will examine primary source documents from national, territorial, and state laws to formulate a well reasoned opinion. Using NARA's Written Document Analysis Worksheet, students will analyze the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, the Missouri Compromise of 1820, Illinois census returns, territorial, and state laws to determine exactly how free Illinois was indeed.

## Enduring Understandings/Essential Question:

### Content:

- Was Illinois a free state?
- How do people and societies resolve political, economic, or social conflict? What methods of conflict are most effective?
- How do groups or institutions enhance and/or limit the rights of individuals?

### Process:

- Analyzing primary documents to create a historical context and form a well-reasoned opinion.

## Illinois Learning Standards:

- 14.F. Understand the development of United States political ideas and traditions.
- 16.A. Apply the skills of historical analysis and interpretation.
- 16.B. Understand the development of significant political events.
- 16.D. Understand Illinois, United States and world social history.

## Assessment:

### Content:

- Students will research the impact of national, territorial, and state laws regarding slavery in Illinois and write an essay forming an educated opinion as to Illinois' status as a free state.

### Process:

- Students will organize information using graphic organizers and document analysis sheets as pre-writing tools.

### **Content:**

- [Northwest Ordinance of 1787](#) and [Missouri Compromise of 1820](#)
- [Illinois Census information](#) from the Illinois State Archives
- [Illinois Constitution 1818](#), [Territorial and State laws of Illinois](#) from the Illinois State Archives

## Preparing for Understanding:

Using the [Introduction Activity](#), have students respond to questions followed by classroom discussion.

## Engaging with Primary Sources:

Students will analyze [Article 6 of the Northwest Ordinance](#) as a class and other primary source documents as individuals and in groups.

## Classroom Discussions/Activities:

1. Beginning with the introduction activity and discussion, analyze [Article 6 of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787](#) using the [NARA Written Document Analysis Worksheet](#). (1 class period)
2. Divide students into small groups and assign the remaining documents as homework. Depending on the groups' experience the teacher will assign documents or allow the groups to divide the documents among themselves.
3. Have students break into their groups and review individual document analysis sheets with each other. Groups will then begin organizing documents using the [graphic organizer](#). (2 or 3 class periods)
4. After completing the graphic organizers, students will form the outline of an essay addressing the following question: *How free was the state of Illinois in the early 1800's?* Once again, depending upon students' experience the teacher may guide the outline activity or allow students to work independently or in groups. (2 or 3 class periods)

## Teacher Background Information:

Under the Articles of Confederation, the national government established the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 for the organization of the territory northwest of the Ohio River and east of the Mississippi River. This territory was to be divided into 3 to 5 states that would be free of slavery. These states include the modern states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin. By passing this and other ordinances, the national legislature with representatives from both free and slave states demonstrated its ability to regulate slavery in U.S. territories. Although Illinois was a free state, the laws and ordinances as well as census returns indicate that slavery did exist in Illinois. Furthermore, laws regarding African Americans restricted their ability to move and immigrate freely, where they could work, etc. The Illinois Constitutional Convention indicated their division on the issue of slavery by their votes on Article 6 of the Illinois Constitution of 1818. Congress usually tried to resolve conflict over the slavery issue through compromise, such as the 3/5ths Compromise and the Missouri Compromise, giving concessions to each side in an effort to maintain the peace and a balance of power. This issue would continue to be divisive in American society, eventually erupting into Civil War in 1861.

## Further Lesson Opportunities:

Students may examine census information to determine how many slaves were registered in Illinois. Using the [1818 map of Illinois](#), they could further determine where the slaves lived by county.

By examining the letters of transmissal from various states, students could examine how the issue of slavery divided the states of the union. This could help them further understand the effects of the Missouri Compromise and the desire of states to maintain the balance of power in Congress.