

# Slavery vs. Freedom: Content of their Character

U.S Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

Nicodemus  
National Historic Site



*Tragic Prelude* by John Steuart Curry. Courtesy Kansas State Historical Society.

This lesson plan is a part of a thematic unit for grades K-1. It was developed for Nicodemus National Historic Site as a portion of a Teacher Ranger Teacher project by Sarah Rhodes of Fort Hays State University. Additional resources may be found at [www.nps.gov/nico](http://www.nps.gov/nico).

Teacher resources will be highlighted in **red**.

Student resources will be highlighted in **blue**.

# Nicodemus, KS: Black Town in the American West

Nicodemus, Kansas was established in late-1877 as a precursor to a large outmigration of former African American slaves from the southeastern United States. Faced with limited economic opportunities and the reality of post-Reconstruction systematic oppression, they took advantage of the opportunity to relocate to the “promised land” of northwestern Kansas, a place where they would truly be free to live, worship, do business, commune, and govern as they saw fit. By the mid-1880s, Nicodemus was home to between 600-700 former slaves from across the south. Through storms, oppressive heat, bitter cold, drought, adverse living conditions, and economic hardship, the community persisted, and to this day it retains an active descendent population.

Nicodemus stands as a monument to the African American role in the settlement of the American West, and as a memorial to the indomitable American spirit. Rather than bowing to the forces of oppression, these brave individuals determined to seek a life that would allow the freedoms promised them at the close of the Civil War. Nicodemus National Historic Site preserves, protects, and interprets this, the only remaining Reconstruction-era African American settlement west of the Mississippi River.

**All Colored People**  
THAT WANT TO  
**GO TO KANSAS,**  
On September 5th, 1877,  
**Can do so for \$5.00**

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**IMMIGRATION**

WHEREAS, We, the colored people of Lexington, Ky., knowing that there is an abundance of choice lands now belonging to the Government, have assembled ourselves together for the purpose of locating on said lands. Therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED, That we do now organize ourselves into a Colony, as follows:— Any person wishing to become a member of this Colony can do so by paying the sum of one dollar (\$1.00), and this money is to be paid by the first of September, 1877, in instalments of twenty-five cents at a time, or otherwise as may be desired.

RESOLVED, That this Colony has agreed to consolidate itself with the Nicodemus Towns, Solomon Valley, Graham County, Kansas, and can only do so by entering the vacant lands now in their midst, which costs \$5.00.

RESOLVED, That this Colony shall consist of seven officers—President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, and three Trustees. President—M. M. Bell; Vice-President—Isaac Talbott; Secretary—W. J. Niles; Treasurer—Daniel Clarke; Trustees—Jerry Lee, William Jones, and Abner Webster

RESOLVED, That this Colony shall have from one to two hundred militia, more or less, as the case may require, to keep peace and order, and any member failing to pay in his dues, as aforesaid, or failing to comply with the above rules in any particular, will not be recognized or protected by the Colony.

Handbill advertising Nicodemus, 1877.  
Retrieved from Kansas Historical Society  
Digital Collection.

# Selected Bibliography

## Print Resources:

- Athearn, R.G. (1978). *In search of canaan: Black migration to kansas, 1879-80*. Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas.
- Crocket, N.I. (1979). *The black towns*. Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas.
- Hamilton, K.M. (1991). *Black towns and profit: Promotion and development in the trans-appalachian west*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Hamilton, K.M. (Winter 1982). The origins and early promotion of nicodemus: A pre-exodus, all-black town. *Kansas History*, 5, 220-242.
- National Park Service (1986). *Promised land on the solomon: Black settlement at nicodemus, kansas*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Schwendemann, G (Spring 1963). Nicodemus: Negro haven on the solomon. *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, 29, 10-31.

## Web Resources:

- Nicodemus National Historic Site: [www.nps.gov/nico](http://www.nps.gov/nico)
- Nicodemus, Kansas: <http://www.nicodemuskansas.org/>
- Kansapedia: <http://www.kshs.org/kansapedia/nicodemus-graham-county/12157>
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicodemus,\\_Kansas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicodemus,_Kansas)

# Standards

**Grade Level:** Kindergarten-1st Grade

**Social Studies Theme:** Civics and Government

## **Kansas HGSS Standards:**

Standard 3- Societies are shaped by beliefs, ideas, and diversity

Benchmark 3.2- The student will draw conclusions about significant beliefs, contributions, and ideas, analyzing the origins and context under which these competing ideas were and the multiple perspectives from which they came.

## **Common Core State Standards:**

Kindergarten ELA/ Literacy Standards:

RL.K.3- With prompting and support, identify characters, settings, and major events in a story.

SL.K.1- Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about kindergarten topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

SL.K.2- Confirm understanding of a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media by asking and answering questions about key details and requesting clarification of something is not understood.

## Grade 1 ELA/ Literacy Standards

RL.1.3- Describe character, setting, and major events in a story using key details.

SL.1.1- Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 1 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

SL.1.2- Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.



*From an old print*

EDWARD STONE'S COFFLE GANG

*Edward Stone's Coffle Gang.* Retrieved from New York Public Library Digital Collections.

# Learning Progression

## Objectives:

*Knowledge/ Comprehension Objective:* Students will be able to recall 80% of the vocabulary definitions while completing a matching exercise.

*Application/ Analysis Objective:* Using a T-Chart, students will compare and contrast the Six Pillar Character Traits with the character traits displayed in a selected piece of literature.

## Time Needed:

Approx. 30 min

## Requisite Materials:

*Almost to Freedom* by Vaunda Micheaux Nelson (can be ordered for less than \$1 from any number of online retailers)

*Six Pillars of Character* poster

“Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” Youtube video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch/v=ljup8crRzlk>)

Computer

Elmo/Projector

## **Essential Question:**

What characteristics make someone a good person?

## **Vocabulary:**

*Historical:* big house, dear, make water, Massa, overseer, privy, skiff, slave catcher (definitions found at the back of the Read Aloud *Almost to Freedom*)

*Other:* trustworthiness, citizenship, respect, fairness, caring, responsibility

## **Procedures:**

- 1) Help students to create a chart that displays their understanding of the vocabulary by defining the terms in their own words
- 2) Draw a T-chart on the whiteboard.
- 3) Ask students to share what they feel are good character traits. Examine the Six Pillars of Character and write them on the left side of the T-chart as they are discussed.
- 4) Ask students to think about these traits as they listen to *Almost to Freedom*.
- 5) In small groups, ask students to discuss whether the characters in the story displayed any of the previously discussed character traits.

6) After students have had time to discuss with their groups, ask for volunteers from each group to share their group's thoughts with the rest of the class. As they are sharing, write down character names from the story on the right side of the T-Chart along with character traits each character displayed. Help students recognize the characters in the book that did NOT display these good character traits.

7) Explain to students that African Americans were not treated or thought of as human beings. Many white people thought blacks were no different than animals. Because of this, white slaveowners saw nothing immoral about the institution of slavery.

8) Play the YouTube video recording of "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" for the students to see and hear. Explain that this was the song from the story they just heard. Review the vocabulary and character traits from the story. Ask for volunteers to share something they remembered from the story, how it made them feel, etc.

# *Six Pillars of Character*

Developed by the Josephson Institute of Ethics, a nonpartisan and nonsectarian 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, dedicated to “improving the ethical quality of society by changing personal and organizational decisionmaking and behavior”, the *Six Pillars of Character* is a framework for teaching good character that is based upon six common values: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship.

**Trustworthiness:** Be honest • Don’t deceive, cheat, or steal • Be reliable — do what you say you’ll do • Have the courage to do the right thing • Build a good reputation • Be loyal — stand by your family, friends, and country.

**Respect:** Treat others with respect; follow the Golden Rule • Be tolerant and accepting of differences • Use good manners, not bad language • Be considerate of the feelings of others • Don’t threaten, hit or hurt anyone • Deal peacefully with anger, insults, and disagreements.

**Responsibility:** Do what you are supposed to do • Plan ahead • Persevere: keep on trying! • Always do your best • Use self-control • Be self-disciplined • Think before you act — consider the consequences • Be accountable for your words, actions, and attitudes • Set a good example for others.

**Fairness:** Play by the rules • Take turns and share • Be open-minded; listen to others • Don’t take advantage of others • Don’t blame others carelessly • Treat all people fairly

**Caring:** Be kind • Be compassionate and show you care • Express gratitude • Forgive others • Help people in need.

**Citizenship:** Do your share to make your school and community better • Cooperate • Get involved in community affairs • Stay informed; vote • Be a good neighbor • Obey laws and rules • Respect authority • Protect the environment • Volunteer.

### **Jigsaw Teaching Strategy** (suggested approach)

Defined broadly, Jigsaw is a grouping strategy in which the members of the class are organized into “jigsaw” groups. The students are then reorganized into “expert” groups containing one member from each jigsaw group. The members of the expert group work together to learn the material or solve the problem, then return to their “jigsaw” groups to share their learning. In this way, the work of the expert groups is quickly disseminated throughout the class, with each person taking responsibility for sharing a piece of the puzzle.

#### Jigsaw Groups (example):

<b>Expert Groups</b>	<b>Group One</b>	<b>Group Two</b>	<b>Group Three</b>	<b>Group Four</b>
Citizenship	Kathy	Susan	Jose	Jim
Fairness	George	Randy	Gail	Tom
Caring	Sara	Andy	Chris	Julie
Respect	Heather	Jessica	Phil	Karen
Trustworthiness	Bill	Joe	Angela	Leah
Responsibility	Michelle	Phyllis	Jessica	Tim

# *Six Pillars of Character Worksheet*

Six Pillars of Character

Story Characters