

Lesson 8
Classwork

Name: _____
Date: _____

Read the information on the Gag Rule from the National Archives at http://www.archives.gov/exhibit_hall/treasures_of_congress/Images/page_10.html

From the time the Gag Rule was passed in the House of Representatives in 1836, John Quincy Adams began a campaign to have the ruling revoked. Nine years later, he succeeded and the Gag Rule was rescinded.

By the time the Gag Rule was repealed, John Quincy Adams would only serve three more years in Congress. He would pass away in February of 1848, but it is clear that even in his old age he continued to fight for justice.

Below is a portion of John Quincy Adams' diary entry from March 29th, 1841. Read the excerpt and answer the questions that follow.

(The underlines have been added by the creator of this worksheet to facilitate the activities in the lesson)

Washington, Mon. 29 March 1841

[. . .] I am yet to revise for publication my argument in the case of the Amistad Africans, and in merely glancing over the Parliamentary slave – trade papers lent me by Mr. Fox, I find impulses of duty upon my conscience, which I can not resist, while on the other hand, the magnitude, the danger, the insurmountable burden of labour to be encountered in the undertaking to touch upon the slave-trade. No one else will undertake it. No one but a Spirit unconquerable by Man, Woman or Fiend, can undertake it, but with the heart of Martyrdom [. . .] to put down the African Slave trade—and what can I upon the verge on my seventy-fourth birthday, with a shaking hand, a darkening eye, a drowsy brain and with all my faculties, dropping from me, one by one, as the teeth are dropping from my head, what can I do for the cause of God and Man? for the progress of human emancipation? for the suppression of the African slave-trade? Yet my conscience presses me on – let me but die upon the breach.

John Quincy Adams Diary. Vol. 41: 292, *The Diaries of John Quincy Adams: A Digital Collection*. Massachusetts Historical Society. <http://www.masshist.org/jqadiaries/>

To view a digital image of this document, go to: http://www.masshist.org/jqadiaries/doc.cfm?id=iqad41_292

1. Review the first underlined phrase. What do you think John Quincy Adams means?

2. In your life, do you feel a sense of duty? What do you feel obligated to do with your life?

3. What is John Quincy Adams considering as he writes the next phrase that has been double underlined?

4. From the diary excerpt, identify two reasons that John Quincy Adams may not get involved with the slave trade issue.

5. In the end, do you think John Quincy Adams will fight to eradicate the slave trade? Use a quotation from the diary entry to support your answer.

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The Transatlantic Slave trade was outlawed in 1807. Several countries, including America, Britain, and Spain, agreed to no longer travel to the coast of Africa, capture or buy Africans, bring them across the Atlantic Ocean, and sell the Africans as slaves. This law did not mean that slavery was over. Slavery continued to exist in America for over fifty more years. But after 1807, it was illegal to buy slaves in Africa and transport them across the ocean.

Even though the transatlantic slave trade was illegal, do you think people obeyed the law?

“Slavery was strictly a business”

Charles Martin, *The Amistad Affair* (London: Abelard-Schuman, 1970), 13.

1. What do you think about the above quotation? Why is it true? Why do you agree or disagree with it?

2. Review the expense reports from *The Amistad Affair* (pp. 13-15). Would you go against the law, and risk your life to make a three month voyage across the Atlantic Ocean, to become instantly wealthy? Explain your answer.

- If you could make \$40,000 after only three months of work, would you take the risk and trade slaves?
- What business would you practice today to become instantly wealthy?

The Africans who became known as the Amistad captives were from the West Coast of Africa. Many of them did not come from the same tribe or village. Most were probably from the Gallinas coast and the colony of Sierra Leone where an infamous Spanish slave trader named Pedro Blanco dominated slave trading. On an island in the Gallinas called Lomboko, Pedro Blanco loaded a ship with African captives and sent it off to the Americas.

Once the ship arrived in Havana, Cuba, a Spaniard named Jose Ruiz purchased forty-nine Africans and another Spaniard, Pedro Montes, bought four African children. They chartered Ramon Ferrer, the owner and captain of the *Amistad*, to take them along with their “property” to Puerto Principe on the other side of the Cuban island.

On June 30, 1839, as they were traveling to Puerto Principe, there was a mutiny by the Africans on the *Amistad*. Led by Sengbe Pieh (better known in U. S. history as Joseph Cinque), the Africans killed Captain Ferrer and his cook, and wounded Pedro Montez. Two Africans were also killed, and two white sailors escaped. Sengbe ordered the two Spaniards, Montes and Ruiz, to steer the ship back to Africa. They did as they were told during the day, but at night, they continued to sail west toward the United States, and away from the continent of Africa. Two months later, an American Navy ship under the command of Lt. Commander Thomas Gedney brought the *Amistad* into port in Connecticut. The Africans were put in jail on charges of murder and mutiny. The Spanish government and Commander Gedney sued for a percentage of the “lost property” that had been recovered, including the “slaves” and other cargo on the ship.

