

## **Runaway Slaves: From the Revolution to the New Republic**

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**Grade Level:** Upper Elementary

**Duration:** 1-2 Sessions

### **Overview:**

At the beginning of the American Revolution, slavery was prevalent in the colonies. In the South, where the slave population sometimes outnumbered their free counterparts, slaves worked the fields growing a variety of crops including tobacco, rice and sugar cane. Further north, slaves worked as part of the skilled and unskilled labor force in factories and industry. Slaves that lived in the middle Chesapeake region made up about one-third of the population while they worked in the tobacco-based economy.

With the outbreak of the American Revolution, many slaves took advantage of the unprecedented opportunity to escape their bondage. Slave owners were preoccupied with preserving their way of life and preparing for the war. In 1775, the royal governor of Virginia promised freedom to slaves who came to fight for the king, adding to the number of slaves that decided to risk fleeing their masters. Other escapees attempted to live off the land or fight the political system for their freedom.

Evidence of this massive increase in the number of runaway slaves can be found in the high number of slave advertisements that were published in local newspapers. Keeping in mind that these advertisements were written by slave owners, they provide a window into the jarring realities of slavery. In this lesson students will examine and interpret advertisements from *The Maryland Gazette* to gain insight into the characteristics and probable values of runaway slaves during the American Revolution.

### **Content Standards:**

#### **Era 3: Revolution and the New Nation (1754 - 1820's)**

**Standard 2:** The impact of the American Revolution on politics, economy, and society.

### **Historical Thinking Standards:**

#### **Standard 2: Historical Comprehension**

A. Identify the author or source of the historical document or narrative and assess its credibility.

E. Read historical narratives imaginatively.

· Students will reconstruct the literal meaning of a historical document by rewriting a selected runaway slave advertisement.

· Students will read slave advertisements imaginatively, taking into account what the ad reveals of the humanity of the individuals and groups involved—their probable values, outlook, motives, hopes, fears, strengths, and weaknesses.

· Students will draw upon selected visual sources including paintings to clarify, illustrate, or elaborate upon information presented in the historical narrative.

### **Content Narrative**

Slavery was well established in all of the colonies by the outbreak of the American Revolution. Africans were forcefully captured and shipped to the American colonies starting in the early 1600s. Those that managed to survive the harsh journey were sold at auction as slaves and distributed throughout the colonies. In the 1700s the slave population increased rapidly as the demand for labor grew particularly in the south with the establishment of large plantations. Most plantation slaves in the lower south worked in the fields growing cash crops including rice, tobacco, indigo, and sugar cane. In South Carolina and Georgia slaves made up a majority of the population at this time. In the Chesapeake region where tobacco ruled the economy, slaves accounted for more than a third of the population. Although slaves only made up 5% of the population in the northern colonies, slavery was a valuable part of the labor force. In the north slaves worked as skilled and unskilled laborers in the industries and factories of the developing cities, in the shipyards and on the fishing and trading ships of the busy ports, as well as on farms.

As historian Billy Smith has summed up:

Urban slaves generally worked in more diverse capacities than their rural counterparts. Domestic duties defined the work world of most black women in Philadelphia, and their owners sometimes hired them out to wash clothes, wait tables, and help out in taverns and inns. Males likewise labored around their masters' homes as cooks, coachmen, and personal attendants, but a great many worked as sailors, longshoremen, day laborers, and artisans.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Billy G. Smith, "Runaway Slaves in the Mid-Atlantic Region During the Revolutionary Era." The Transforming Hand of Revolution: Reconsidering the American Revolution as a Social Movement, ed. Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 204.

Throughout the colonies the slaves served to promote the various economies of the different regions as well as a symbol of their owners' status.

The transatlantic slave trade supplied slaves to the Chesapeake region in great numbers during the colonial period. According to historian Lorena S. Walsh recent research indicates that between 13,000 and 20,000 slaves were shipped into Maryland and Virginia in the years from 1619 to 1698 with an additional 96,000 slaves imported to the area between 1698 and 1774.<sup>2</sup> Some of the slaves transported to the Chesapeake region in the eighteenth century arrived directly from Africa on large cargo ships owned and financed by British merchants. But most of the British slavers stopped over briefly in the Caribbean for supplies before proceeding to the Chesapeake. Although many ships owned by West Indian slave traders brought their human cargo into the Chesapeake region, these ships tended to be smaller and held fewer slaves. British-owned vessels transported recent captives from Africa and carried on the average over one hundred slaves each.

Although slavery was a well-established institution throughout the colonies in the 1770s, the outbreak of the American Revolution provided a significant opportunity for slaves to revolt from their bondage. An estimated 100,000 slaves took advantage of the great disruptions caused by the war and escaped from their masters during this time. As historian Ira Berlin explains, revolutions tend to benefit those "who have the least to lose and the most to gain." [At the onset of the American Revolution] "few had less to lose and more to gain than the black men and women held as slaves in the American colonies." [So] "when the simmering dispute between imperial Britain and its American colonies flared into open warfare and that war began to

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<sup>2</sup> Lorena S. Walsh, "The Transatlantic Slave Trade and Colonial Chesapeake Slavery," Magazine of History 17 (April 2003): 11.

unravel the fabric of colonial life, they seized the moment.”<sup>3</sup> This time of war resulted in a massive increase in runaway slaves as evidenced by the jump in runaway slave advertisements printed in colonial newspapers. In Philadelphia seven runaway slave ads were printed annually in local newspapers prior to 1750. This figure “exploded to 102 annually during and immediately after the Revolution, and then declined to 53 each year after 1785.”<sup>4</sup>

Slaves found a variety of ways to protest their situations during the Revolutionary era. On November 15, 1775, Lord Dunmore, the royal governor of Virginia, promised freedom for slaves of patriot masters who would fight for the cause of the king. This announcement in Virginia increased the fear of slave insurrections in Virginia as well as in Maryland because of its close proximity. A report in Dorchester County, Maryland, expressed the growing fear among the white gentry of the possibility of lower class whites joining in the slave protests.

The insolence of the Negroes in this county is come to such a height, that we are under a necessity of disarming them which we affected on Saturday last. We took about eighty guns, some bayonets, swords, etc. The malicious and imprudent speeches of some among the lower classes of whites have induce them to believe, that their freedom depended on the success of the Kings troops. We cannot therefore be too vigilant nor too rigorous with those who promote and encourage this disposition in our slaves.<sup>5</sup>

The prospect of freedom in exchange for fighting with the British forces certainly was one of the factors which increased the incidence of runaway slaves during the Revolutionary War period.

Many enslaved men and women recognized that the divisions and confusions among the white colonists, the heightened tensions, and the actual outbreak of war provided a momentous occasion to rebel. Historian, Sylvia Frey, points out “most of the slaves who wished to challenge

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<sup>3</sup> Ira Berlin, “Foreword,” Epic Journeys of Freedom: Runaway Slaves of the American Revolution

and their Global Quest for Liberty by Cassandra Pybus (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), ix.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, “Runaway Slaves in the Mid-Atlantic Region,” 224.

<sup>5</sup> Ronald Hoffman, A Spirit of Dissension: Economics, Politics, and the Revolution in Maryland (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 148.

the slave regime did so by fleeing to the British.”<sup>6</sup> Although smaller in number, some bondpeople ran away to join the patriot militias or Continental army. As the war dragged on and recruitment of fresh manpower became a problem Patriot lawmakers drafted free blacks and authorized slave enlistment. Also enslaved males could be hired or used as substitutes for their masters. An estimated 5,000 enslaved and free black men joined the Continental Army which represents ten percent of the total force. During the Revolutionary War some runaway slaves when captured were used as bounties “to recruit white soldiers and compensate loyal slaveholders for their losses.”<sup>7</sup>

While quite a few fugitives, male and female, ended up in the American and British militaries, others fugitives avoided the war altogether and choose to take their chances living off of the land. The maroon population of the Great Dismal Swamp on the border of North Carolina and Virginia as well as other backwater areas increased at this time. Many challenges awaited the fugitives making this choice including finding suitable food and shelter, navigating the physical landscape, avoiding populated areas, and difficult weather conditions. These challenges explain the frequency of escapes during the warm seasons. Harsh winters make travel difficult and food scarce. During summer and early fall the forests, fields, and rivers provide nuts, berries, small game and fish, which assured runaways that they would not starve.

Some enslaved people sought to self-emancipate using the political process, rather than extra-legal means such as running away. An example of such political protest occurred in Boston in 1777. Historian Edward Countryman notes that eight black men (presumably free

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<sup>6</sup> Sylvia R. Frey, Water From the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age (Princeton, New

Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991), p.156.

<sup>7</sup> Ira Berlin, Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 261.

men) petitioned the government of Massachusetts to abolish slavery. These men mark “the beginning of a very long list of black Americans who have demanded that the republic live up to its own rhetoric.”<sup>8</sup>

Black rebellion was rampant during the Revolutionary era in America. From protesting the institution of slavery to actually escaping the bonds of slavery and joining up with British or American forces, slaves were resisting the oppression forced upon them. How successful was the Revolutionary War in terms of being a revolution for the slave population? In the North by 1784 nearly all of the states passed emancipation laws that freed the slaves through a gradual process. However, slavery was not abolished officially for fifteen more years in New York and two more decades in New Jersey.<sup>9</sup> By 1810 there were still 30,000 slaves in the “free” North. In the South there was a temporary easing of manumission laws that made it easier to free slaves. But with Eli’s Whitney’s invention of the cotton gin in 1793, which quickly made cotton the number one export in America, slavery in the South became seen by whites as a “necessary evil.”

The framing of the Constitution also reveals insights into the outcome of the Revolutionary War in terms of a revolution for slaves. Although the Constitution never used the terms slave or slavery, it protected the institution of slavery, which became an even stronger institution in the south. Compromises were accomplished in the writing of the Constitution between such diverse states as Massachusetts that had abolished slavery and South Carolina where the importation of slaves flourished. One compromise allowed for three-fifths of a state’s slaves to be included in the population figure that would determine the number of state

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<sup>8</sup> Edward Countryman, The American Revolution (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003), 227.

<sup>9</sup> Billy G. Smith and Richard Wojtowicz, Blacks who Stole Themselves: Advertisements for Runaways in the Pennsylvania Gazette, 1728-1790 (Philadelphia: University of PA Press, 1989), p. 11.

representatives. Also, Congress would not be allowed to interfere with the slave trade for twenty years and a clause was added to assist masters of runaways. As Countryman explains, even the phrase “ensure domestic tranquility” could be interpreted as a protection for the institution of slavery and provide justification to put down slave uprisings. Countryman notes “As the Constitution was understood, it guaranteed that slavery would be as firmly entrenched in the national policy as it was in the economy and society of the southern states.”<sup>10</sup> Although the Constitution gave slaveholders the right to continue the institution of slavery, the Continental Congress also adopted the Northwest Ordinance that prohibited slavery north of the Ohio River.

Yet, the outcome of the American Revolution provided a partial breakup of slavery and an emergence of a free black population. Slavery became a sectional institution that divided the new republic into the mostly free North and the slaveholding South.

In presenting the topic of colonial slavery to elementary students, primary documents in the form of runaway slave advertisements provide a starting point. Slave advertisements were printed in newspapers throughout the colonies. In studying the contents of runaway slave advertisements much can be learned about slavery during the Revolutionary era. A typical runaway slave advertisement included the location of the place the person left, his or her name, a physical description including age, height, color, scars and clothing worn as well as any skills. A subjective assessment of personality traits using adjectives such as “impudent,” “bold,” “complaisant” and “cunning” were often used. The amount of the reward offered and the name of the owner usually closed the ad. Runaway slaves were most frequently men between the ages of twenty and forty.<sup>11</sup> Fewer women were willing to abandon their children and escaping with children posed additional difficulties. Also the possibilities of harsh punishments such as severe

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<sup>10</sup> Edward Countryman, The American Revolution (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003), 229.

<sup>11</sup> Smith, “Runaway Slaves in the Mid-Atlantic Region,” 211.

whipping or even death if caught were risks slaves must be willing to take in making the choice to run.

In examining runaway slave advertisements it is important to remind the students that the documents represent the perspective of the slaveholder and not of the enslaved. The objective description such as physical attributes and occupation can be viewed as accurate but the subjective description of personality traits, motivation for escape, and possible destinations reflect the slaveholder's point of view. Keeping this perspective in mind in studying runaway slave advertisements students can be led to examine the realities of slavery including such themes as slaves viewed as valuable property, the cruelty of slavery, and the great increase of fugitive slaves during the Revolutionary era. The mixed outcome of the Revolutionary War in terms of a revolution for slaves and the seeds for the conflicts that resulted in the Civil War can also be explored.

### **Bibliography:**

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- Frey, Sylvia R. Water From the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991.
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- Lord, Donald C. "Slave Ads as Historical Evidence." The History Teacher 5 (May, 1972): 10-16.
- Mason, Matthew and Rita G. Korman. "Complicating Slavery: Teaching with Runaway Slave Advertisements." Magazine of History 17 (April 2003): 31-34.
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Revolution and their Global Quest for Liberty. Boston: Beacon Press, 2006

Smith, Billy G. "Runaway Slaves in the Mid-Atlantic Region During the Revolutionary Era." The Transforming Hand of Revolution: Reconsidering the American Revolution as a Social Movement, ed. Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert, 199-230. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995.

Smith, Billy G. and Richard Wojtowicz. Blacks who Stole Themselves: Advertisements for Runaways in the Pennsylvania Gazette, 1728-1790. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989.

Walsh, Lorena S. "The Transatlantic Slave Trade and Colonial Chesapeake Slavery." Magazine of History 17 (April 2003): 11-16.

## **Vocabulary:**

**Breeches:** Short, close-fitting pants fastened just below the knees.

**Bow legged:** Having legs that curve outward near the knees and back in at the feet.

**Cooper:** The manufacturer of barrels, tubs, pails, and other containers

**Countenance:** The expression of the face.

**Cravat:** A cloth worn around the neck mostly by men, like a wide necktie.

**Gaol:** Jail.

**Guinea:** A British gold coin worth one pound and one shilling.

**Instant:** The current calendar month.

**Linen:** Cloth woven from fibers from the flax plant.

**Manumitted:** To set free from slavery.

**Mulatto:** The offspring of a black parent and a white parent. Eighteenth-century Americans freely called any person of mixed blood a mulatto if he or she resembled one.

**Osnabrig:** An inexpensive linen that received its name from Osnabruck, Germany.

**Pistoles:** Spanish gold coins often used in the American colonies. One pistole was equal to a little more than one Pennsylvania pound during the middle part of the eighteenth century.

**Plantation:** A large estate or farm on which crops such as cotton, tobacco, or sugar cane are grown and harvested, often using slave labor during the Revolutionary era.

**Roan:** Yellowish- or reddish-brown, sprinkled with gray or white.

**Rogue:** A tricky, dishonest, or worthless person.

**Small pox:** A very contagious disease with a fever and blisters on the skin that often leaves permanent scars shaped like little pits.

**Snuff colour:** A brownish color.

**Stockings:** A long sock usually made of wool or cotton.

**Tan-yard:** Tannery; a place where hides are made into leather.

**Tow:** The short fibers of flax or hemp which are separated from the longer ones.

**Trousers:** Pants worn by men and boys, that extend to the ankles or just below the knees.

**Visage:** The face or facial expression of a person.

**Waistcoat:** An underjacket or vest.

**Waiting-man:** One who waited on or attended to a master, a personal servant or slave.

**Wench:** A woman servant or slave.

**Wool:** Short, thick, curly hair.

## **Procedures:**

## **Motivation:**

1. Show students the print "An Overseer Doing His Work." (In a computer lab the print can be viewed on each monitor for close analysis. In a classroom it can be projected on a large screen for the whole class to see as a group).  
RS #1- Print "An Overseer Doing His Work."

Ask students what the picture reveals about slavery in the colonies before the Revolutionary War. Answers may include: they were closely guarded, treated harshly, whipped and women worked in tobacco fields.

Pose the following lead questions:

**How do you think masters viewed their slaves in colonial America?** Slaves were bought and considered property.

**What options did slaves have to escape their bondage?** Some risked running away.

**What would a master do when he discovered a slave had runaway?** Advertise the runaway in newspapers throughout the colonies.

2. View the broadside “Advertisement for Fugitive Slave.”

Discuss the lead questions:

**What attitudes and values are reflected in the ad?**

**What does the runaway advertisement tell you about the relationship between master and slave?**

RS #2 - Advertisement for Fugitive Slave

### Day One:

1. Provide students with the following information:

Slavery was a well-established institution throughout the colonies in the 1770s. The outbreak of the American Revolution provided a significant opportunity for slaves to revolt from their bondage. An estimated 100,000 slaves took advantage of the disruption caused by the war and escaped from their masters during this time.

Examining runaway slave advertisements provides a window into the realities of slave life including the master-slave relationship, the cruelty of slavery, skills and trades that utilized slave labor, and possible destinations of slaves who escaped from Maryland owners.

2. Model the activity by using the broadside discussed in the motivation portion of the lesson. New Vocabulary terms will be defined. Note-taking expectations will be modeled by filling in the worksheet, “Runaway Slave Advertisement” using an overhead transparency.

RS #10 – Worksheet

3. Create small groups of two or three students and have each group select one runaway slave advertisement. Six advertisements are provided with this lesson. Highly able students are encouraged to view the documents from *The Maryland Gazette* in their original form. RS #3-8 are the transcriptions of the advertisements from the newspaper.
4. Ask each group to make a list of terms that are unfamiliar on the worksheet (RS #10). They will be given time to look up these words.
5. Instruct students to read the slave advertisements imaginatively, taking into account what the ad reveals of the humanity of the individuals and groups involved — their

probable values, outlook, motives, hopes, fears, strengths, and weaknesses. (This is the last question on RS #10).

After examining the ads, each student will fill in the remaining questions on “Runaway Slave Advertisement.” Ask students to think about the following lead questions before answering RS#10:

**What does the ad reveal about the life of this particular slave?**

**What hardships has the slave endured?**

**What may be the motivation for this slave to run away?**

**Where do you think the slave is trying to go?**

**Does the ad provide any clues that the slave planned their escape?**

**Why do you think most runaway slaves were men?**

6. Explain to the groups that they will reconstruct the literal meaning of the selected runaway slave advertisement by creating a poster or broadside that advertises the runaway and includes a picture. Tell students to use the physical description of the slave found in the ad to create the picture.

## **Day Two:**

7. During the next class session have each group share their poster. Distribute to each student the additional worksheet, “Runaway Slaves Presentations” to provide a focus for listening and note taking. Students are asked to record the slave’s age, sex, location of escape, month and year escaped, hardships endured, skills and trade experience, reward offered, possible destination, available motives, and any unusual aspect of the advertisement.  
RS #9 - “Runaway Slave Presentations” chart

RS #11 – Grading key for “Runaway Slaves Presentations”

## **Closure:**

At the conclusion of the group presentations, conduct a short discussion to review the information learned through this examination of primary documents. Students can refer to their graphic organizer notes (“Runaway Slaves Presentations”) during the question-answer-discussion period.

What can you tell about the naming of slaves in Maryland during the Revolutionary era?  
*Slaves were known by their first name. It was usually a common English name, or occasionally a name of a Roman or Greek god.*

Describe the average runaway slave in terms of age and gender.

*The average runaway slave was a young adult male between the age of 20 and 35.*

Why do you think most runaway slaves were men?

*Women may be less likely to leave their children and unwilling to take the additional risk of attempting to escape with their children.*

What seasons of the year did most slaves choose to run away? Why?

*The summer months were the most frequent times that slaves attempted to escape, as well as late spring and early fall. Warm weather conditions made travel easier. Rivers were not frozen and they did not have to risk leaving footprints in the snow.*

What do the runaway slave advertisements reveal about the life of slaves in terms of the relationship between master and slave and the hardships endured by slaves?

*Slaves were considered valuable property and described in a negative and derogatory manner. The students can give many examples of insulting terminology. Scars from whippings and smallpox are noted. Also one slave was bow legged, which can be the result of poor nutrition. Slaves were often repeatedly sold and separated from their families and friends.*

What skills or trade experiences did the slaves in Maryland acquire in the Revolutionary era?

*A slave in Revolutionary Maryland could be a carpenter, cooper, shoemaker, waterman, plantation work, hatter, mill work, tan-yard worker, farmer, sailor, house servant, or blacksmith. Slaves worked in a variety of positions in colonial America and were not just field hands on plantations or domestic workers for the wealthy gentry.*

What motivated slaves to run away? Where do the masters think they are going?

*Some motivations include escaping from harsh treatment, attempting to reunite with family or friends, and realizing a life of freedom. Some of the slaves joined the army to fight in the Revolutionary War for both sides. Some headed north to Philadelphia or further, while some headed south to Virginia. Some masters believed their slave might board a ship and possibly leave the colonies.*

What do the runaway slave advertisements reveal about currency in Maryland during the Revolutionary era?

*There is no standard currency. Spanish gold coins (pistols), Spanish dollars, British gold coins (guinea), as well as pounds and dollars (British and American) were all accepted forms of money.*

What do you think might happen to the slave if he/she is caught?

*The slave would be returned to their owner and subjected to whippings or other cruel treatments.*

### Primary Source Annotations:

**Latrobe, Benjamin Henry. “An Overseer Doing His Work.” Sketchbook, III, 33**  
**Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore. Accessed in: *The Atlantic Slave Trade and Slave Life in the Americas: A Visual Record*. Retrieved (February 22, 2008) from**

<http://hitchcock.etc.virginia.edu/slavery/details.php?categorynum=7&categoryName=New%20World%20Agriculture%20and%20Plantation%20Labor&theRecord=54&recordCount=108>

This drawing in pen, ink, and watercolor depicts a white male overseer supervising two enslaved females working in a tobacco field. The scene was sketched from life near Fredericksburg, Virginia, March 13, 1798. While viewing this document, students will consider what the image reveals about slavery in the colonies. Students should notice that a well-dressed overseer is leisurely smoking while closely guarding two barefoot women toiling in tobacco fields. Other insights should include how masters viewed their slaves as property and often treated them harshly.

**Advertisement for fugitive slave, Maryland, 19<sup>th</sup> century. Chicago Historical Society.**  
**Accessed in: *The Atlantic Slave Trade and Slave Life in the Americas: A Visual Record*.**  
Retrieved (February 22, 2008) from

<http://hitchcock.etc.virginia.edu/SlaveTrade/collection/large/NW0305.JPG>

This broadside, offering a \$100 reward for the return of a runaway “Negro boy,” is a printed document that was posted or distributed to advertise the loss of a runaway slave. While examining the broadside, students should consider what the document reveals about slavery, particularly the attitudes and values reflected in the ad from the slave owner’s point of view. Students should focus on the demeaning physical description of Robert Porter and the monetary value attached to this human life. Students should then conclude that slaves were generally viewed as inferior pieces of property and not valued as individuals with basic human rights.

The remaining six primary documents are all from:

**Maryland State Archives. Education and Outreach. Teaching American History in Maryland: Documents for the Classroom. Runaway Advertisements from the Revolutionary War Era and Runaway Advertisements in the New Republic.** Compiled by: Nancy Bramucci, Maryland State Archives.

**Fugitive slave advertisement for TOM placed by James Jordan, Maryland.**

*Maryland Gazette*. January 16, 1775. MSA SC 2313, Maryland State Archives.

*Teaching American History in Maryland: Documents for the Classroom*. Retrieved (February 22, 2008) from

<http://www.teachingamericanhistorymd.net/000001/000000/000101/html/t101.html>

**Fugitive slave advertisement for NED BARNES placed by John Hanson.**

*Maryland Gazette.* July 12, 1781. MSA SC 2313, Maryland State Archives.  
*Teaching American History in Maryland: Documents for the Classroom.* Retrieved (February 22, 2008) from

<http://www.teachingamericanhistorymd.net/000001/000000/000101/html/t101.html>

**Fugitive slave advertisement for CAESAR placed by Richard Cowman.**

*Maryland Gazette.* November 14, 1782. MSA SC 2313, Maryland State Archives.  
*Teaching American History in Maryland: Documents for the Classroom.* Retrieved (February 22, 2008) from

<http://www.teachingamericanhistorymd.net/000001/000000/000101/html/t101.html>

**Fugitive slave advertisement for BILLY placed by John Horrell.**

*Maryland Gazette.* May 26, 1785. MSA SC 2313, Maryland State Archives.  
*Teaching American History in Maryland: Documents for the Classroom.* Retrieved (February 22, 2008) from

<http://www.teachingamericanhistorymd.net/000001/000000/000101/html/t101.html>

**Fugitive slave advertisement for WILL placed by Henry Plummer.**

*Maryland Gazette.* August 31, 1786. MSA SC 2313, Maryland State Archives.  
*Teaching American History in Maryland: Documents for the Classroom.* Retrieved (February 22, 2008) from

<http://www.teachingamericanhistorymd.net/000001/000000/000101/html/t101.html>

**Fugitive slave advertisement for BET placed by James Disney.**

*Maryland Gazette.* May 6, 1790. Maryland State Archives.  
*Teaching American History in Maryland: Documents for the Classroom.* Retrieved (February 22, 2008) from

<http://www.teachingamericanhistorymd.net/000001/000000/000097/html/t97.html>

Fugitive slave advertisements were printed in colonial newspapers as a means for slave owners to widely distribute information needed to secure the return of their lost property. A typical runaway slave advertisement included the name of the slave, the location the fugitive was last seen, a physical description including the age, height, color, scars, and clothing worn as well as acquired skills. Personality traits using adjectives such as “impudent,” “bold,” “complaisant,”

and “cunning” were often used. The amount of the reward offered and the name of the owner usually closed the ad.

The six fugitive slave advertisements selected are from *The Maryland Gazette* and were printed between 1775 and 1790. The slaves escaped from various locations in Maryland including two from Anne Arundel County. The advertisements describe the escape of five males and one female ranging in age from 23 to 50 years old. Each advertisement provides students the opportunity to examine the image of the actual document as well as view a transcription of the document. Students need to understand that the documents were written from the point of view of the slave owner and not of the slave. Keeping this perspective in mind these runaway slave advertisements provide a window into the realities of slave life including the master-slave relationship, hardships endured by slaves, various skills and trades which utilized slave labor in the colonial days and possible destinations of slaves who escaped from Maryland slave owners. Students should notice that one slave is missing a finger, has a swollen knee and walks with a limp. This description provides evidence of the physical abuse of slaves. Students should also focus on the trades acquired by these six slaves: carpenter, shoemaker, cooper, and waterman. Students should note the destinations and possible motives of the runaway slaves, which include seeking to find family and friends or to join the British troops or the Continental Army. In examining these fugitive slave advertisements students should conclude that runaways were frequently men in their twenties and early thirties with acquired work skills. Also, the motives and destinations of these six runaways varied in their hope to obtain freedom.