

John Brown's Raid on Harper's Ferry
8th Grade U. S. History
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Directions:

1. First, read the essay question below, so you have the end goal in mind as you complete this assignment.
2. Second, read the historical background of John Brown's Raid and keep these facts in mind as you complete the third step.
3. Now look at each of the primary source documents and answer the questions that follow. Your answers to these questions will help you write your essay.
4. Finally, re-read the essay question and begin writing your response. Use examples from the background information and the information from the primary sources to prove your theory. The only wrong answer is one that is not supported with facts.
5. Use the rubric as a guide to understanding what is expected from this assignment.

Essay Question:

Was John Brown's Raid on Harper's Ferry a success? Do you feel he achieved his overall purpose? Why or why not?

Historical Background:

John Brown was an abolitionist, or someone who opposed slavery. Like many others during his time, Brown not only believed slavery to be wrong, but believed it to be abominable in God's eyes. He was a very religious man. He formed a plan to raid the United States Armory at Harper's Ferry, Virginia. He would gather men to help him take the arms and ammunition, then proceed with them through Virginia and much of the South, arming the slaves and urging them to fight their way northward. Brown expected hundreds of men, white and black alike, to join his crusade to end slavery. However, only sixteen white men and five black men followed him to Harper's Ferry.

On Sunday evening, October 16, 1859, Brown and his men entered the sleeping town of Harper's Ferry. Throughout the night, they spread out through the town taking hostages from their beds and taking them to a small engine house at the corner of the town. Not everything went as smoothly as planned. By Monday morning, several of the townspeople discovered what Brown and his men were up to, so they called a town meeting and sent a messenger to alert the militia in neighboring towns. News of an insurrection spread quickly, and by the time the news reached the president in Washington, the story had been blown out of proportion. The president sent the Marines under the leadership of Colonel Robert E. Lee (who would later break his ties with the United States and become General of the Confederate Army).

Meanwhile, the townspeople had collected squirrel rifles and any other weapons they could find and began to fight Brown and his men, trapping most of them in the engine house with their hostages. Several people from both sides lost their lives in the fighting. Then, early Tuesday morning, October 18, 1859, Colonel Lee sent Lieutenant J. E. B. Stuart to demand Brown's surrender. The town and the engine house were surrounded by militia and United States Marines. Despite the odds against him, Brown refused to surrender. It didn't take much effort for Colonel Lee and Lieutenant Stuart to capture Brown and his men. They used a ladder to ram the door to the engine house and swarmed it with soldiers.

Brown went to trial on October 27. The jury found him guilty of treason, conspiracy of slave rebellion, and murder on October 31. On November 2, 1859, John Brown was sentenced to death by hanging. His execution was carried out exactly one month later on December 2, 1859.

Document A:

"I believe that to have interfered as I have done, as I have always freely admitted I have done in behalf of His despised poor, is no wrong, but right. Now, if it is deemed necessary that I should forfeit my life for the furtherance of the ends of justice, and mingle my blood farther with the blood of my children and with the blood of millions in this slave country whose rights are disregarded by wicked, cruel, and unjust enactments, I say let it be done."

Address of John Brown to the Virginia Court

when about to receive the sentence of death

November 2, 1859

1. Does John Brown regret what he has done?
2. How does Brown justify his actions?
3. What does he mean by saying his blood will be mingled with the blood of his children and the millions whose rights have been disregarded?
4. Why does he say "...let it be done," when he's talking about his own death? Why would he be willing to die?

Document B:

"Did John Brown fail? He certainly did fail to get out of Harper's Ferry before being beaten down by United States soldiers; he did fail to save his own life, and to lead a liberating army into the mountains of Virginia. But he did not go to Harper's Ferry to save his life. The true question is, Did John Brown draw his sword against slavery and thereby lose his life in vain? and to this I answer ten thousand times, No! No man fails, or can fail who so grandly gives himself and all he has to a righteous cause."

"John Brown,"

An Address by Frederick Douglass

Harper's Ferry, West Virginia

May 30, 1881

5. What is Frederick Douglass' opinion of John Brown?
6. Understanding that Douglass was a former slave who saved enough money to purchase his own freedom, what impact do you think his comments about Brown had on abolitionism at the time?
7. Does Douglass feel that Brown died in vain?

Document C:



“The Last Moments of John Brown.”
Etching by Thomas Hovenden
1885

8. Who is shown surrounding Brown?
9. Why do think the artist shows him kissing a black baby?
10. Where is he being taken?
11. How does the artist portray John Brown – as a prisoner, a hero, or both?
12. What emotions do the men and women behind the soldiers seem to show toward Brown?

Essay Question and Instructions:

Write a five paragraph essay answering the question, "Was John Brown's Raid on Harper's Ferry a success? Do you feel he achieved his overall purpose? Why or why not?" Use the answers to the questions for each document and the information in the historical background to support your theories. Follow the rubric below as a guide.

Rubric:

A:

- shows a deep understanding of the impact of John Brown's Raid on abolitionism prior to the Civil War and its importance in our nation's history
- stays on topic throughout the essay, answering yes or no to the question presented
- supports all opinions with historical and primary source information

B:

- shows good understanding of the relationship between John Brown's Raid and abolitionism prior to the Civil War
- mostly stays on topic and answers the question presented
- supports most of the opinions with historical and primary source information

C:

- shows some understanding of the effect of John Brown's Raid on society in general
- strays somewhat from the topic and original question given
- uses some historical and primary source information to support his or her opinions

D:

- shows little understanding of any effects of John Brown's Raid
- frequently gets off topic and loses sight of the overall question
- uses only a few facts from the historical background or documents provided to support his or her opinions

F:

- shows no understanding of John Brown's Raid whatsoever
- does not answer the question given at all
- uses opinions only, does not support statements with any facts