

The Dred Scott Decision
Grade 8 and above
Barbara Fowler, McLaughlin Middle

I. Lesson Plan Summary

A. Using the Dred Scott Case decision from the document based questions research, the implications and results of the case will be reviewed and discussed. The website suggested by Holt's *Call to Freedom* will be shared in the discussion. See below.

B. Objectives: Explain why Dred Scott sued for his freedom and how the Supreme Court ruled on his case.

Sunshine State Standards Benchmarks: SS.A.1.3.3; SS. B.1.3.3; and LA.B.2.3.3.

C. U.S. History event/time period: Pre-Civil War, Dred Scott Case, 1857.

D. 8th grade and above

E. Materials needed

1. *Call to Freedom*, Chapter 15, p.464.
2. Print out of website, <http://www.watson.org/~lisa/blackhistory/index.html>
3. Large manilla drawing paper
4. Markers

II. Lesson Procedures and Activities:

A. Review what has been discussed from the textbook.

B. Give the students the handout "Impact of Dred Scott" from the website ([see copy below](#)) and discuss briefly.

C. Have students read and highlight important details.

D. In groups of 4 working on 1 large sheet of paper, have the students each take a corner of the sheet and decide on the mapping of the review, putting all ideas and events together through words and /or drawings. Use the markers to make colorful and readable. (CRISS strategy)

E. Students will share their mappings.

F. Group students in pairs and give each a copy of the Document Based Question. (see www.polk-fl.net/tah DBQ's for Fowler's Dred Scott DBQ.

G. Have each pair answer the scaffolding questions for each document in the DBQ.

H. Discuss the documents with the students and review the ideas presented in the mapping activity.

III. Assessment

Students will go on to Part 2 of the "Dred Scott" Document Based Question and will write their DBQ essay individually as the final assessment.

IV. Resources

A. *Holt's A Call to Freedom* textbook, page 464 in student and also the TM.

B. Holt's CD listing websites for research for the handout.

C. Documents included in the DBQ activity.

D. Additional resources may be added to enhance the assignment by individual teachers.

Below is the copy of the handout from the African American History website, given on the Holt CD for *Call to Freedom*:

Impact of Dred Scott

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The Dred Scott decision served as an eye-opener to Northerners who believed that slavery was tolerable as long as it stayed in the South. If the decision took away any power Congress once had to regulate slavery in new territories, these once-skeptics reasoned, slavery could quickly expand into much of the western United States. And once slavery expanded into the territories, it could spread quickly into the once-free states. Lincoln addressed this growing fear during a speech in Springfield, Illinois on June 17, 1858:

Put this and that together, and we have another nice little niche, which we may, ere long, see filled with another Supreme Court decision, declaring that the Constitution of the United States does not permit a *State* to exclude slavery from its limits. . . . We shall lie down pleasantly dreaming that the people of Missouri are on the verge of making their State free, and we shall awake to the reality instead, that the Supreme Court has made Illinois a slave State. [\[32\]](#)

For many Northerners who had remained silent on the issue, this very real possibility was too scary to ignore. Suddenly many Northerners who had not previously been against the South and against slavery began to realize that if they did not stop slavery now, they might never again have the chance. This growing fear in the North helped further contribute to the Civil War.

Four years after Chief Justice Taney read his infamous *Scott v. Sandford* decision, parts of the proslavery half of the Union had seceded and the nation was engaged in civil war. Because of the passions it aroused on both sides, Taney's decision certainly accelerated the start of this conflict. Even in 1865, as the long and bloody war drew to a close with the Northern, antislavery side on top, a mere mention of the decision struck a nerve in the Northern Congress. A simple and customary request for a commemorative bust of Taney, to be placed in a hall with busts of all former Supreme Court Chief Justices, was blocked by the Republican-controlled Congress. Charles Sumner, the leader of those who blocked the request, had strong words on the late Chief Justice and his most notorious decision:

I speak what cannot be denied when I declare that the opinion of the Chief Justice in the case of Dred Scott was more thoroughly abominable than anything of the kind in the history of courts. Judicial baseness reached its lowest point on that occasion. You have not forgotten that terrible decision where a most unrighteous judgment was sustained by a falsification of history. Of course, the Constitution of the United States and every principle of Liberty was falsified, but historical truth was falsified also. . . . [\[33\]](#)

Clearly *Scott v. Sandford* was not an easily forgotten case. That it still raised such strong emotions well into the Civil War shows that it helped bring on the war by hardening the positions of each side to the point where both were willing to fight over the issue of slavery. The North realized that if it did not act swiftly, the Southern states might take the precedent of the Scott case as a justification for expanding slavery into new territories and free states alike. The South recognized the threat of the Republican party and knew that the party had gained a considerable amount of support as a result of the Northern paranoia in the aftermath of the decision. In the years following the case, Americans realized that these two mindsets, both quick to defend their side, both distrustful of the other side, could not coexist in the same nation. The country realized that, as Abraham Lincoln stated, "A house divided against itself cannot stand." . . . This government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free." [34] Scott's case left America in "shocks and throes and convulsions" that only the complete eradication of slavery through war could cure.

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