John Brown, a deeply religious man, abhorred slavery and dedicated his life to the abolition cause. He gave land to fugitive slaves, participated in the Underground Railroad and helped create the League of Gileadites to protect escaped slaves from slave catcher. Despite his noble intentions, he brutally killed five unarmed proslavers in Kansas, fomented slave insurrections and led a takeover of a federal arsenal in West Virginia. He was tried and executed for the crime of treason in December of 1859.

Directions: You will be assigned one of two roles: a Prosecuting Attorney who see John Brown as a Murderer who needs to be tried and convicted for his crimes or a Defending Attorney who feels John Brown is a Martyr in the Abolition Movement who should be exonerated. You must then research John Brown, his life, his actions, and the law. You and your team of fellow attorneys must then formulate your legal presentation and arguments for presentation in our classroom courtroom.

John Brown – Murderer

Points for your case:
John Brown, a deeply religious man, abhorred slavery and dedicated his life to the abolition cause. He gave land to fugitive slaves, participated in the Underground Railroad and helped create the League of Gileadites to protect escaped slaves from slave catcher. Despite his noble intentions, he brutally killed five unarmed proslavers in Kansas, fomented slave insurrections and led a takeover of a federal arsenal in West Virginia. He was tried and executed for the crime of treason in December of 1859.

Directions: You will be assigned one of two roles: a Prosecuting Attorney who see John Brown as a Murderer who needs to be tried and convicted for his crimes or a Defending Attorney who feels John Brown is a Martyr in the Abolition Movement who should be exonerated. You must then research John Brown, his life, his actions, and the law. You and your team of fellow attorneys must then formulate your legal presentation and arguments for presentation in our classroom courtroom.

John Brown – Martyr

Points for your case:
Formulate your Argument:

Cite your research sources:

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Mulberry Senior High School
AP & Honors American History

I. Lesson Plan Summary
This lesson can be used for either Honors or AP US History. Students are researching John Brown and his role in the Abolition Movement. Students pull out of a bag, a role card that assigns them either to a Prosecuting or Defending Attorney. Create enough role cards for each student and ensure that each attorney has even number of teams. Depending on the size of the class you may wish to assign some students as Jurors as well. My classes have always been too small to do this and I have always played the part of Juror, making my decision based on the quality of the arguments presented. After a period of research and class time to formulate their plans, divide class in to sides, and begin the courtroom proceedings. You may make this as formal or loose as you’d like, depending on the type of students you have and size of your class.

**US History Time Period:** 1830-1860

**Grade Level:** Honors or AP Level

**Materials Needed:** Attached Handouts, Computers for research

**Lesson Time:** One week, one class period for debate, one class period for creating their arguments. Length of project can be modified for your specific needs. Classes are 90 minutes, in class use of three days.

**II. Lesson Procedures**

Day one: Students draw cards that assign them to their roles. Give the handouts and instructions. Using resources in class, including books and computers, students begin their research and formulating their arguments. Much discussion should happen.

Day two and three: They are doing at home research.
Day four: Students are using class time to write their formal opening arguments and their overall presentations.
Day five: Presentations to the class. They begin with opening arguments of ten minutes. Proper protocol is required, ie. Proper attire, language. After presentations usually 45 minutes or so, begin debriefing class. Take an informal poll – do they think John Brown should be convicted or exonerated. Lead this discussion further if possible.