

Religion and American Colonial Slavery

Teacher's Guide

Lesson II. Enslaved African Muslims in America

Learning Objective

In this lesson, students will explore the stories of African Muslims enslaved in America.

Lesson Summary

1. Ayuba Suleiman Diallo was a Muslim man enslaved in colonial America. After years of enslavement, he was able to write a letter to his father, which was intercepted by a powerful English man who purchased his freedom. On his journey home to Guinea, he stopped in England where William Hoare, a famous English portraitist, painted his portrait.
2. Yarrow Mamout was a Muslim man captured in slavery in Guinea and sold to a planter in Maryland. His enslaver allowed him to earn money on the side. He was able to save and eventually purchase his freedom, the freedom of his son, and a home in Georgetown, Washington, D.C.. The famous portraitist of the American Revolution, Charles Willson Peale painted a well-known portrait of him.
3. Omar ibn Said was a Muslim man captured in a military conflict in Futa Toro and sold as a slave. He eventually lived in North Carolina. He is well known for writing his life story, which is the only known Arabic autobiography written by a slave in America. He lived to be 94 years old and was still enslaved at the time of his death in 1864. An Ambrotype image, which is an early form of photography, exists of him.
4. Abdul Rahman was a Muslim man and military leader. The men in his army were ambushed, captured, and sold to a slave ship. He ended up enslaved on a plantation in Natchez, Mississippi. He was freed twenty years later after an extended public relations campaign. He returned to West Africa with his wife and two of his eleven children but died soon after arrival.
5. Many enslaved Muslims lived on Sapelo Island off the coast of Georgia during the American colonial period. Some of the descendants of these enslaved people still live on the island and remember stories of their great-grandparents and the ways they practiced their Muslim faith.

For Students to Begin the Lesson

Visit the [Student Learning Hub](#) to begin Lesson II of the *Religion and American Slavery* series. At the bottom of each online step, students will find a button to proceed to the next step. Individual steps are also listed below with hyperlinks, which can be accessed if viewing this document on a digital device. In the steps that follow, students are prompted to answer questions to prepare for class discussion.

Questions to Check for Understanding

[Step 1. Enslaved African Muslims in America](#)

In the Step 1 module, students are prompted to answer questions. The answers below are drawn from the YouTube video transcript.

1. How were African Muslims usually trapped into slavery and sold to America?

Muslim students and teachers in African countries were required to travel a great deal in order to reach schools and other places of education. Muslims were also expected to travel on religious pilgrimages to faraway lands. Traveling away from their homes and communities left people vulnerable to bandits who would often steal people away to sell them into slavery. There were also many disputes between tribes and small countries which led to war. Often, the losers – which included men, women and children – were captured and sold into slavery. These were the main circumstances by which African Muslims were enslaved in America.

2. How did enslaved African Muslims seek to still express their religion while enslaved?

For many Muslims, their religion served as their defense against the personal humiliation, disgrace and suffering of slavery. This helped them through the horrors of the Middle Passage, as well as the difficulties they faced in their lives of enslavement. There are many examples of Muslim slaves who held to their religious beliefs and practices during their enslavement in America. Many continued to wear clothing expressing their religion and culture, including men who wore turbans or hats that symbolized the turban, and women who fashioned veils to wear over their faces. Many refused to eat pork or to drink alcohol which were rules central to Muslim beliefs. This must have been especially difficult for them because slaves, generally, did not get much to eat in the first place, so refusing any kind of food would have been a sacrifice. Muslims also traditionally pray five times throughout the day. Some enslaved Muslims continued this practice during their enslavement.

Students Record Their Observations

Step 2. Explore These Historical Portraits

In the Step 2 module, students are directed to choose a portrait to analyze. Students are prompted to make observations about the portrait. The students have the questions below as prompts for analysis.

- What stands out to you about his clothing?
- Does he look rich or poor?
- What guesses can you make about his place in society?
- Who do you think created the portrait?
- What other observations can you make about the portrait?

Step 3. Learn About the Men in the Portraits

In the Step 3 module, students can read the biographies of all the men featured in the portraits. They are then prompted write down one highlight from each of the lives of the men in the portraits.

- Omar ibn Said (Portrait 1)
- Abdul Rahman (Portrait 2)
- Ayuba Suleiman Diallo (Portrait 3)
- Yarrow Mamout (Portrait 4)

Step 4. Family Memories of Enslaved Muslims in America

In the Step 4 module, students read about Salih Bilali who was born in 1790 in West Africa. He was kidnapped from his home and enslaved on Sapelo Island off the coast of Georgia. There was a large population of enslaved Muslims on this island. Bilali and others were able to practice their Muslim faith while enslaved. In 1930, descendants of Bilali were interviewed and could tell stories about their ancestors practicing their Muslim faith. Today, some of Bilali's descendants still work to preserve these memories.

Students are prompted to answer these questions:

1. What did you learn about the enslaved Muslim Salih Bilali?
2. What did you learn about Salih Bilali's descendants in Georgia?

Write About Your Family Traditions

Students are prompted to write down something interesting about their grandparents, great-grandparents, or other relatives. This could include family traditions, recipes, or stories.

Prepare Students for Class Discussion

Step 5. Prepare for Class Discussion

In the Step 5 module, students are prompted to write down their answers to the questions below in preparation for a class discussion.

1. Write down 3-4 ideas you learned about African Muslims enslaved in America.
2. Be ready to share with the class some interesting things about your grandparents, great-grandparents, or other relatives.
 - How were these family memories passed to you?
 - How do you think memories were passed down from the family of enslaved Muslim, Salih Bilali?