The purpose of this Educator Notebook is, primarily, to group together articles that were originally published in various issues of *Tar Heel Junior Historian* magazine over many years. The compilation is unique in its breadth of information and insight into the African American experience in North Carolina. As broad as this collection is, however, it is not complete—the stories and experiences of so many people over so many generations in so many settings could never be captured in any number of articles. Still, we have strived to provide a jumping-off place for student exploration and connection.

In addition to *THJH* articles, we have furnished lesson plans and suggested activities that can be used to complement many of the article topics. They are adaptable to different ages and meet curriculum goals set forth by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction; in addition, they can connect to classes in national and world history, geography, economics, and the arts and can be part of any unit of social studies.

The African American experience in the land that has become North Carolina began at the same time as the European experience here—over 400 years ago, when African people landed on the shores with European explorers to this New World. In that time, Africans and Europeans had to learn, together, to share land and resources with the native peoples who were already here. Together and separately, African Americans, American Indians, and European Americans formed communities. Over the centuries, African Americans faced the immense struggle of creating and maintaining community in the face of enslavement, war, segregation, and prejudice. They also fought and protested to continue that sense of community, which did endure and grow, and today African Americans across the state share their unique heritage with others.
A Note for Educators about Discussing Enslavement in the Classroom

The subject of enslavement is challenging to discuss. Regardless, it should be and needs to be discussed. Educators who teach North Carolina history work to share the rich and varied lives of all people who have contributed to that history—some of them have names we know and recognize; but many others, whose names and faces and actions have been lost even though they all made contributions to our state’s stories, are just as important.

When discussing the institution of slavery, it is important to help students understand not only the horrors of subjugation and the opportunities of the Underground Railroad and the Emancipation Proclamation but also to help them recognize the courageous, everyday experiences of enslaved people as they worked to create and maintain community and sought to retain and express their own history and culture. In addition, we should acknowledge the perseverance of enslaved people to live meaningfully and to oppose enslavement, as best they could, in their day-to-day lives.

When covering this topic, remember, too, that words matter. Calling or labeling a person a “slave,” indicates that the entirety of that person was about slavery, when, in fact, such a person was a multi-dimensional and complete human. “Slavery” was but one part of a person’s life; however, the situation of being enslaved did not define any person as a whole. So, today, preference is for use of the term “enslaved” or “enslavement” to describe that one aspect of a person’s life—not to label him or her in totality.

Self-awareness is another important consideration when discussing the enslavement of individuals. The subject is, and should be, an emotional one, so creating a space where students AND educators are comfortable and supported is essential to learning about that part of our history. To start that process, educators should take time to do a self-review—to seek out any biases they may have themselves and to acknowledge and diminish them before working with students on this topic.
DO’S AND DON’TS FOR EDUCATORS
DISCUSSING ENSLAVEMENT IN THE CLASSROOM

The Southern Poverty Law Center’s “Teaching Tolerance” project has issued the following list* to help guide educators when teaching about enslavement:

Don’t:
• Use role-plays. They can induce trauma and minimization and are almost certain to provoke parental concerns.
• Focus only on brutality. Horrific things happened to enslaved people, but there are also stories of hope, survival, and resistance.
• Separate children by race.
• Treat kids as modern-day proxies for enslaved people or owners of enslaved people.
• Make race-based assumptions about a child’s relationship to enslavement.

Do:
• Use primary sources and oral histories.
• Underscore enslaved people’s contributions—roads, towns, buildings, and crops would not have been possible without them.
• Use photographs that reflect activism, family life, and other daily activities.
• Choose texts that illustrate enslaved people as whole individuals. Try Henry’s Freedom Box by Ellen Levine or Minty: A Story of Young Harriet Tubman by Alan Schroeder.
• Organize field trips to historic sites that reflect enslaved people in a human and courageous light, as well as to places that reflect the lives of black people beyond slavery.
• Introduce stories about black and white abolitionists. Black abolitionists were present, from the beginning, as vocal and courageous advocates for their people.

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1 Thanks to the North Carolina African American Heritage Commission for timeline input and review. The timeline is a compilation from multiple sources.
2. “Looking at North Carolina through a Lens of Words” (excerpt), by Dr. Sally Buckner, excerpted from *Tar Heel Junior Historian*, Fall 2009.
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