

# African American Voices Lesson Plans

**Lesson Plan:** Dred Scott Decision

**Subject:** Civics

**Grade:** 7

**NGSSS-SS:** **SS.7.C.3.12-** Analyze the significance and outcomes of landmark Supreme Court cases.



**Description/  
Abstract of Lesson:** The students will learn about Dred Scott's struggles to become free and the Supreme Court decision that ultimately denied him his freedom. The students will write editorials in response to the Supreme Court decision, taking opposing positions.

**Objective(s):**

- Cite examples of cases brought before the Supreme Court which established precedents for future court decisions; e.g., Dred Scott.
- Discuss the issues involved in the Dred Scott case.
- Explain and discuss the reasons why Dred Scott took his case to the Supreme Court.
- Discuss the effects the Dred Scott decision had on African Americans during this time period.

**Materials:**

- Textbooks/workbook/handouts
- Handouts/reading on Dred Scott Decision
- Library/Media Center pre-selected materials
- Internet

**Duration:** One Class Session

**Lesson Lead In/  
Opening:**

1. Have the students envision a scenario where their teacher (and all other adults) have the right to treat all young people under the age of 18 as they please because they are not adults yet and can not vote as yet.
2. Ask the students what problems they may experience growing up as young people if this were to be true. Engage in discussion and make the connection that by law slaves, like Dred Scott, did not have any rights and were frequently mistreated by their owners as well as others.

**Activity:**

1. Either the teacher will read to the class or the students will read aloud a text or an internet-based biography on Dred Scott.
2. Discuss the biography.
3. Have the students carefully read the Supreme Court decision on Dred Scott's case. Have the students outline the arguments delivered by

Chief Justice Taney (included with this lesson). Afterwards, discuss as a class.

4. Have the students write 2 editorials in response to the Dred Scott decision; one from a pro-slavery Southern perspective, the other from an anti-slavery or abolitionist Northern perspective. Make sure the students entitle their editorials with headlines phrased similar to how newspaper articles are titled.

**Assessment:**

- Check assignments for accuracy of information and neatness.
- Editorials should include headlines and state a position.

**Higher Order**

**Thinking Questions:**

1. What problems would you possibly experience if you had no rights?
2. After 10 years of seeking his freedom through the courts, how do you believe Dred Scott felt when the Supreme Court ruled against his case?
3. Why do you believe this particular court case was being closely monitored by a great number of people living in the United States, both in the North and the South?
4. How do you believe many Northern abolitionists responded to the case?
5. How do you believe many Southern slave owners responded to the case?
6. In Chief Justice Taney's delivery, he referred to a line that was not supported by the Constitution. What line do you believe this was?

**Suggested Books  
In Lesson:**

Finkelman, P. (1997) Dred Scott v. Sandford: A Brief History with Documents, Bedford Books.

**Web Resources:**

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p2932.html>

[http://americancivilwar.com/colored/dred\\_scott.html](http://americancivilwar.com/colored/dred_scott.html)

# Dred Scott Decision

**Delivered by Chief Justice Taney**

It is true, every person, and every class and description of persons, who were at the time of the adoption of the Constitution recognized as citizens in the several States, became also citizens of this new political body; but none other; it was formed by them, and for them and their posterity, but for no one else. And the personal rights and privileges guaranteed to citizens of this new sovereignty were intended to embrace those only who were then members of the several State communities, or who should afterwards by birthright or otherwise become members, according to the provisions of the Constitution and the principles on which it was founded. It was the union of those who were at that time members of distinct and separate political communities into one political family, whose power, for certain specified purposes, was to extend over the whole territory of the United States. And it gave to each citizen rights and privileges outside of his State which he did not before possess, and placed him in every other State upon a perfect equality with its own citizens as to rights of person and rights of property; it made him a citizen of the United States...

In the opinion of the court, the legislation and histories of the times, and the language used in the Declaration of Independence, show, that neither the class of persons who had been imported as slaves, nor their descendants, whether they had become free or not, were then acknowledged as a part of the people, nor intended to be included in the general words used in that memorable instrument...

And upon a full and careful consideration of the subject, the court is of opinion, that, upon the facts stated...Dred Scott was not a citizen of Missouri within the meaning of the Constitution of the United States, and not entitled as such to sue in its courts...

... It is the consideration of the court that the Act of Congress which prohibited a citizen from holding and owning property of this kind in the territory of the United States north of the line therein mentioned, is not warranted by the Constitution, and is therefore void; and that neither Dred Scott himself, nor any of his family, were made free by being carried into this territory; even if they had been carried there by the owner, with the intention of becoming a permanent resident ... [From Dred Scott v. Sanford, 1857]