

John Brown sources and follow up questions

Focus question:

Directions: Please view /read each source about John Brown (1800- 1859) below and respond to each follow up question, fully answering the question.

Source 1- Tragic Prelude mural (John Steuart Curry, Kansas State Capitol 1937)

1. List your observations about this painting. What do you see?

2. Based on your observations, what does this painting tell us about John Brown?

Source 2- John Brown letter to father (1849)

Background to source: Gerrit Smith set aside land at North Elba, New York, on which free African Americans and runaways could settle. When John Brown visited this place in the Adirondack Mountains he discovered its inhabitants [people] were unsure how to start their new lives. The settlers found the climate and farming conditions very different from what they were used to farther south. They also lacked the training and experience they needed to manage money and seek employment. Brown wrote this letter to his father about his desire to move to North Elba.

January 10, 1849

"I was on some of the Gerrit Smith lands lying opposite Burlington, Vermont last fall that he has given away to the blacks & I found no objection to them but the high Northern Lattitude in which they lie....I can think of no place where I think I would sooner go; all things considered than to live with those... Africans to try, & encourage them; & show them a little so far as I am capable how to manage."

3. What do we learn about John Brown's character from the above letter?

(turn over)

Source 3- John Brown letter to his wife Mary 1855

Background to source: John Brown left New York with 5 of his sons to go to the Kansas Territory while his wife Mary stayed behind in New York.

Osawatomie K.T., October 13, 1855 Saturday Eve

“We found our folks in a most uncomfortable situation with no Houses to shelter one of them; no Hay or corn fodder [food to feed livestock] of any account secured shivering over their little fires all exposed to the dreadful cutting Winds Morning & Evening, & stormy days. We have been trying to help them all....Last Tuesday was an Election day with Free State men in Kansas, & hearing that there [was] a prospect [chance] of difficulty we all turned out most thoroughly armed...but no enemy appeared...Indeed I believe Missouri is fast becoming discouraged about making Kansas a Slave State, & think the prospect of its becoming Free is brightening every day.”

4. What was John Brown willing to do in case there was a problem on Election day? What does this tell us about his character?

Source 4- Letter from Samuel Smith to Dr. Charles Robinson, December 1858

“Captains Brown & Montgomery continue their ‘reign of terror’ in Linn and Bourbon Counties. Brown lately made a foray [attack] into Missouri with his men, killed one man, released some six or eight slaves from bondage, mounted [them] on their masters horses and returned with themGov. Medary sent Sheriff Walker down into that region to investigate....He confirms the tales of horror, before received, loudly condemns Montgomery and Brown and says that they cannot and ought not to be sustained [continued]....”

5. What is John Brown doing in this source?

Source 5- Final words of John Brown (Dec. 2, 1859)

Background to source: John Brown led an attack on a federal arsenal {place where mass amount of weapons were stored] at Harper’s Ferry, Virginia on Oct. 18, 1859. He was seeking to use the weapons to arm slaves in an uprising. Plans did not go as expected, however, and he and his men were captured by troops. He was tried in court and found guilty of his crime and sentenced to execution. This is some of the last words he wrote before he died:

“I John Brown am quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land; will never be purged [removed] away; but with Blood...”

6. Why does John Brown call America a guilty land and how does he think the problem will finally be dealt with?

Final response: Based on the sources above, how you would describe the character of John Brown? What is your evaluation or thought of him as a person? Provide good details (4-5 sentences)