

Option 1

Imagine that you have not had the opportunity to go to school so far. Your family has no books or magazines, no computer, and no educational television shows. When you see printed words, they appear as meaningless pages of squiggly lines. Ask someone in your home to interview you using the following questions. Think ahead of time about what your answers would be. If possible, film your interview or share it with other friends and family.

- ✓ How do you spend your days?
- ✓ How do you feel about not being able to read or write?
- ✓ What things are hard for you because you cannot read or write?
- ✓ What do you hope to do when you grow up? What will you need to be able to do to achieve that goal?
- ✓ If you had a chance to learn to read and write, would you take it? What sacrifices would you be willing to make in order to learn?

Option 2

Despite the threats of fines (for white teachers) and whippings (for black teachers), a few secret schools did operate in the South to educate slave children. At the web site below, read about one school in Savannah, Georgia, run by a woman named Matilda Taylor.

Schools for Slave Children
www.movingbeyondthepage.com/link/3065
Read about Matilda Taylor and the school she ran for slave children before continuing with this activity.
http://georgiahistory.com/education-outreach/online-exhibits/featured-historical-figures/mother-mathilda-beasley/educator-of

Here are some opening lines from a play written by Sister Charlene Walsh about Mrs. Taylor's school. Consider how the scene might continue to unfold. Using the characters already introduced, write the remainder of the scene. Have the characters explain why they are willing to risk so much to receive an education. What do they hope education will do for their lives?

Scene I - Kitchen of Mathilda Taylor's Home

Mathilda is in the kitchen with reading material and numbers written on cardboard boxes and paper bags so that they can be hidden hurriedly if necessary. Two boys (Sam and Tom) enter and greet Miss Taylor.

Children: Good morning Miss Taylor.

Miss T: Good morning children, warm yourselves by the stove. Were you careful coming through the yard?

Sam: Yes, Ma'am, we know it would mean big trouble if white folks caught us comin' to learn any readin' and numbers.

Miss T: Good! You two look over this list of words while we wait for Susie, Katie, and the other boys.

A moment later, Susie and Katie enter from a back door and begin taking their books out of paper bags.

Susie: Miss Taylor, I couldn't wait to come for lessons today! I love reading and writing!

Tom: Me too, but numbers are my favorites! 7

Miss T: Learning is exciting, isn't it!

Optional Extension:

Use puppets or additional friends as actors to bring your scene to life!



Wrapping Up

In this lesson, you have become familiar with several new vocabulary words and considered the implications of forced illiteracy for slaves. You read about how the settlement at Buxton was taking steps to educate all its people so that they could enjoy yet another benefit of true freedom: the freedom to be educated!