I WILL BE HEARD: William Lloyd Garrison, Abolitionism, Colonization, and Identity

- **Compelling Question**
  - How can the development of William Lloyd Garrison’s views and life help you develop your own identity?

- **Virtue: Identity**

- **Definition** – Identity answers the question, “Who am I?”

- **Lesson Overview**
  - In this lesson, students will explore the life of William Lloyd Garrison and follow the development of his identity. Through his example, students will understand how they can develop and refine their identity in their own lives and how through this refinement help advance freedom for themselves and others.

- **Objectives**
  - Students will analyze William Lloyd Garrison's life and actions and how they reflect his identity
  - Students will understand how they can develop and refine their own identity
  - Students will apply this knowledge to focus and refine their own identity

- **Background**
  - The Second Great Awakening of the early 1800s helped to create several reform movements including temperance, women’s rights, and abolitionism. Many early abolitionists supported the private freeing of slaves or the gradual emancipation of slavery in the states. In 1817, the American Colonization Society was formed to further these goals and return freed slaves back to Africa in the hopes that they would be happier in their (and their ancestors’) homeland. Several important individuals such as James Madison, John Marshall, Henry Clay, and Daniel Webster supported the society for humanitarian reasons.

  In the 1820s and 1830s, several individuals began to argue for the immediate emancipation of American slaves. They were motivated by evangelical Christianity, the Enlightenment and idea of universal rights, and the ideals of liberty, equality, and natural rights in the Founding and especially the Declaration of Independence. William Lloyd Garrison shifted his views and became one of the leaders of the abolitionist movement which sought to free the slaves and spoke around the country, sent petitions to Congress, and published newspapers and pamphlets. They fought against slavery for more than three decades until the Thirteenth Amendment eventually freed the slaves at the end of the Civil War.

- **Vocabulary**
  - Second Great Awakening
  - Temperance
  - Abolition
  - Emancipation
  - Humanitarian
  - Enlightenment
  - Instrumental
  - Indictment
  - Shackles
  - Unequivocal
  - Recantation

- **Introduce Text**
  - Have students read the background and narrative, keeping the “Walk-In-The-Shoes” question in mind as they read. Then have them answer the remaining questions below.

- **Walk-In-The-Shoes Questions**
  - As you read, imagine you are the protagonist.
    - What challenges are you facing?
    - What fears or concerns might you have?
    - What may prevent you from acting in the way you ought?
• **Observation Questions**
  o Who was William Lloyd Garrison?
  o What was the purpose of William Lloyd Garrison’s writing?
  o How does William Lloyd Garrison’s work as a reporter shape his identity?

• **Discussion Questions**
  o Discuss the following questions with your students.
    ▪ What is the historical context of the narrative?
    ▪ What historical circumstances presented a challenge to the protagonist?
    ▪ How and why did the individual exhibit a moral and/or civic virtue in facing and overcoming the challenge?
    ▪ How did the exercise of the virtue benefit civil society?
    ▪ How might exercise of the virtue benefit the protagonist?
    ▪ What might the exercise of the virtue cost the protagonist?
    ▪ Would you react the same under similar circumstances? Why or why not?
    ▪ How can you act similarly in your own life? What obstacles must you overcome in order to do so?
Handout A: I WILL BE HEARD: William Lloyd Garrison, Abolitionism, Colonization, and Identity

Background

The Second Great Awakening of the early 1800s helped to create several reform movements including temperance, women’s rights, and abolitionism. Many early abolitionists supported the private freeing of slaves or the gradual emancipation of slavery in the states. In 1817, the American Colonization Society was formed to further these goals and return freed slaves back to Africa in the hopes that they would be happier in their (and their ancestors’) homeland. Several important individuals such as James Madison, John Marshall, Henry Clay, and Daniel Webster supported the society for humanitarian reasons.

In the 1820s and 1830s, several individuals began to argue for the immediate emancipation of American slaves. They were motivated by evangelical Christianity, the Enlightenment and idea of universal rights, and the ideals of liberty, equality, and natural rights in the Founding and especially the Declaration of Independence. William Lloyd Garrison shifted his views and became one of the leaders of the abolitionist movement which sought to free the slaves and spoke around the country, sent petitions to Congress, and published newspapers and pamphlets. They fought against slavery for more than three decades until the Thirteenth Amendment eventually freed the slaves at the end of the Civil War.

Narrative

In March, 1828, as the cold Boston winter continued to grip the port city, twenty-three-year-old newspaper editor, William Lloyd Garrison had dinner at Reverend William Collier’s boardinghouse. They enjoyed a good dinner with a guest, Benjamin Lundy, though no alcohol was served because all had taken a temperance pledge not to drink. Over many hours of conversation, Lundy deeply impressed Garrison and would change the young man’s life. In an animated fashion, Lundy declared, “I shall not hesitate to call things by their proper names, nor yet refrain from speaking the truth.” Under Lundy’s influence, Garrison’s ideas about an uncompromising stand for ideals and his views about slavery would change as he became the nation’s leading proponent of abolitionism, or the end of slavery, for more than thirty years. In fact, Garrison would write, “I feel that I owe everything instrumentally and under God, to Benjamin Lundy.” Therefore, Lundy would help shape Garrison’s core identity to which he devoted his life.

Garrison was then the editor of the National Philanthropist and a devout evangelical Christian who was deeply involved with reform movements, particularly temperance and world peace. Garrison was also a supporter of the gradual emancipation of slaves and their colonization back to Africa, which was a popular movement organized around the efforts of the American Colonization Society. During a stint as an editor for a partisan newspaper in Vermont, Journal of the Times, Garrison supported the “gradual emancipation of every slave in the republic” and the “transportation of such liberated slaves and free colored peoples as are desirous of emigrating to a more genial [climate]” in Africa. Indeed, he thought this doctrine was the “duty of every patriot and Christian” and was based upon “wisdom and humanity.” He thought immediate emancipation was “most assuredly out of the question” so he did not advocate for it. Garrison’s reformist ideas began to center more on abolitionism over the next few years until it became the focus of his identity.

On July 4, 1829, Garrison walked six blocks from his rooming house to Park Street Church to deliver an Independence Day oration. Garrison used the patriotic occasion to point out that slavery conflicted with America’s most cherished ideals of liberty, equality, and self-government. Free and enslaved African Americans “possess the same inherent and inalienable rights as ours,” he thundered from the pulpit. He called slavery a “national sin” and supported the gradual emancipation of slaves. Garrison then accepted Lundy's offer of moving to Baltimore to publish an anti-slavery newspaper, The Genius of Universal Emancipation. Lundy persuaded Garrison to alter his views and support immediate emancipation and equal rights in America instead of colonization as moral imperatives.

Garrison publicly asserted that colonization was an “uncertain” method of attacking slavery that was immoral and practically unrealistic considering the millions of slaves in America. Still, he stated that he would not oppose continuing colonization efforts at this point. He defended the “immediate and complete emancipation of slaves”
and shed any support for gradual emancipation. His stance was increasing uncompromising and led to an indictment for libel for which he served a jail term from April to June, 1830. He was unapologetic and said, “My pen cannot remain idle, nor my voice be suppressed, nor my heart cease to bleed, while two millions of my fellow beings wear the shackles of slavery in my own guilty country.” Lundy's influence was strong in Garrison's changing views and unalterable stand for what is right.

Garrison and Lundy, however, had a falling out after the jail sentence and unfavorable publicity. Garrison considered his future in newspapers and decided to move back to Boston that autumn because he thought so many of the ministers and public figures there were supporters of gradual emancipation and colonization who could and should be converted as he was to immediate emancipation without colonizaton. He received financial backing and launched his new newspaper, The Liberator, dedicated to his new abolitionist principles.

The inaugural edition of The Liberator was published on January 1, 1831, and plainly laid out Garrison's anti-slavery views. He wrote that since he found New England so lethargic on emancipation, he would “lift up the standard of emancipation in the eyes of the nation, within sight of Bunker Hill and in the birth place of liberty.” Garrison then publicly apologized for his own previous “unreflecting” support for the “popular but pernicious doctrine of gradual abolition” that he had previously advocated. “I seize this opportunity to make a full and unequivocal recantation and thus publicly ask pardon of my God, of my country, and of my brethren the poor slaves, for having uttered a sentiment so full of timidity, injustice, and absurdity.” He had altered his views considerably and now identified with those who urged the immediate freeing of slaves.

Garrison's identity was also marked by an increasing unwillingness to compromise. “I will be as harsh as truth, and as uncompromising as justice. On this subject I do not wish to think or speak, or write, with moderation. No! No! Tell a man whose house is on fire to give a moderate alarm ... but urge me not to use moderation in a cause like the present.” He demonstrated his identification with his cause when he finished: “I am in earnest – I will not equivocate – I will not excuse – I will not retreat a single inch – AND I WILL BE HEARD.”

Garrison had views about slavery that were developed by an important mentor in his life. At first, he did not think much about abolitionism. Then, he supported gradual emancipation and colonization back to Africa. Finally, he became committed to an uncompromising view of justice for African Americans with immediate emancipation and the fulfillment of American ideals of liberty and equality. Garrison's views shifted from merely following the views of his society to changing those views in the national leadership in the abolitionist movement.