

History in a Nutshell

James Pennington's Fight for Freedom

Grade Level: 5-8

Learning Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Explain how the actions of abolitionists like James Pennington helped to end enslavement in the United States. (Connecticut Social Studies Frameworks HIST 8.1, HIST 8.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.1-2, 5.7, 5.9; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6-8.1-2, 6-8.7-8)
- Understand how James Pennington was able to convince people that slavery was immoral through his speeches and actions. (Connecticut Social Studies Frameworks HIST 5.9, HIST 8.4, HIST 8.9; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.1-2, 5.7, 5.9; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6-8.1-2, 6-8.7-8)
- Compare what was considered legal and moral during James Pennington's time to what is considered legal and moral today. (Connecticut Social Studies Frameworks HIST 5.2, HIST 5.5, HIST 8.4; CIV 6-7.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.1-2, 5.7, 5.9; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6-8.1-2, 6-8.7-8)

Program Framework:

1. Introductory video
2. Close-looking activity
3. Independent practice

Teacher Background: In this program, students will learn about abolitionist James Pennington, who escaped enslavement in Maryland, became a preacher, and dedicated his life to ending the institution of slavery. Pennington's fight for freedom brought him all over the nation, including Connecticut, where he attended Yale and preached for abolition at Hartford's Talcott Street Church.

Materials: introductory video, images and readings for close-looking activity

I. Introductory Video

Images Shown

1. [Portrait of James W.C. Pennington](#). Originally published in *Birthplace of American Democracy: Hartford, Commonwealth of Connecticut*, by William Franklin Henney, Hartford: The Connecticut Magazine Company, 1906.
2. [Map of the United States](#), Lucy Phelps, before 1821. Drawing; black ink and watercolor on paper, lined with paper. 2007.81.0, The Connecticut Historical Society.

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3. [Anna Murray Davis and Frederick Douglass](#). Courtesy of New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park/National Park Service.
4. [Talcott Street Congregational Church](#), Hartford, 1858. Courtesy of the Shoeleather History Project.
5. [Faith Congregational Church](#). Courtesy of Faith Congregational Church.
6. [La Amistad](#), 1840. Watercolor. Gift of Simeon Eben Baldwin, 1919, 1972.1, New Haven Museum.
7. [The Reasonableness of the Abolition of Slavery at the South](#), James Pennington, 1856. 1856 P414r, The Connecticut Historical Society.
8. [Anti-Slavery Banner](#), 1835-1845. Linen, silk, paint, wood, iron. 1997.13.0, The Connecticut Historical Society.
9. [Two Civil War Soldiers](#), William H. Jennings, 1861-1865. Photography; albumen print on paper on cardboard mount. The Clifford T. Alderman Collection, 2012.233.217, The Connecticut Historical Society.
10. [A two years' absence, or, A farewell sermon, preached in the Fifth Congregational Church](#), James Pennington, 1845.252.7 P414t, The Connecticut Historical Society.
11. [Covenants involving moral wrong are not obligatory upon man: a sermon delivered in the Fifth Congregational Church, Hartford, on Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 17, 1842](#), James Pennington. 1842 P414c, The Connecticut Historical Society.
12. [A text book of the origin and history, &c., &c. of the colored people](#), James Pennington. Hartford: L. Skinner, Printer, 1841. 1841 P414t, The Connecticut Historical Society.

II. Close-Looking Activity

1. This activity can be done with students in real time, either in the classroom or virtually, with the teacher guiding students using [Visual Thinking Strategies](#) to connect the images and readings to what students learned in the introductory video.
 - What is going on in this picture/passage?
 - What makes you say that?
 - What more can we find?
2. Alternatively, students can explore the images and readings on their own, using the guiding questions that are provided below.
 - Passage from [A two years' absence, or, A farewell sermon, preached in the Fifth Congregational Church](#), James Pennington, 1845. 252.7 P414t, The Connecticut Historical Society.
 - What was Pennington arguing in this passage?

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- Who was he speaking to?
- What impact do you think his speeches had on people?
- Runaway slave ad for Pennington from *The Hagerstown Torch Light and Advertiser*, November 1st, 1827. From *American to the Backbone: The Life of James W.C. Pennington, the Fugitive Slave Who Became One of the First Black Abolitionists*, by Christopher Webber, New York: Pegasus Books, 2011. [Background information: James Pennington was born James Pembroke but later changed his last name to that of one of the men who helped him after he escaped. Frisby Tilghman was his enslaver in Maryland]
 - What are your initial reactions to this ad?
 - How do you think Pennington felt knowing that this ad existed while he was trying to escape?
 - \$200 was a lot of money back then (equal to [more than \\$2500 today](#)). Do you think people who were anti-slavery may have been persuaded by the money to turn in an escaped slave? Why or why not?
- [Reading the Emancipation Proclamation](#), drawn by Henry Walker Herrick, 1864. Engraving; printer's ink on wove paper. The Newman S. Hungerford Museum Fund, 2006.50.0, The Connecticut Historical Society. [Background information: The Emancipation Proclamation delivered by President Lincoln freed enslaved people in the Confederacy in 1863, but not those in the North. Those enslaved in the North would not be freed until the passing of the 13th Amendment in 1865.]
 - What is happening in this image?
 - Was the end of enslavement the end of the fight for freedom for Black people in America?
- [Two Civil War Soldiers](#), William H. Jennings, 1861-1865. Photography; albumen print on paper on cardboard mount. The Clifford T. Alderman Collection, 2012.233.217, The Connecticut Historical Society. [Background information: The soldiers' identities are unknown but the one on the right is white and the one on the left is black. Pennington and other Black abolitionists gave speeches to recruit Black soldiers for the Union cause during the Civil War.]
 - Who do you think these people are?
 - Why do you think so many Black men fought for the North in the Civil War?
 - Other than being a soldier, how did Black people fight for freedom during this time period?

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III. Independent Practice

1. Contemporary Connections

- James Pennington helped fugitive slaves and was one himself. By helping people gain their freedom, Pennington was breaking the law. Are there other times in history that doing what was right could get you in trouble? What about nowadays? Write down any examples and discuss with a classmate.
- The efforts of James Pennington and other abolitionists helped to make enslavement illegal in the United States, but do you think enslavement stopped worldwide in 1865?

2. Writing to understand: What impact did James Pennington have on people's lives? Consider what Pennington fought for throughout his life and document the ways he was able to enact positive change.

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Close-looking images and readings

Passage from [*A two years' absence, or, A farewell sermon, preached in the Fifth Congregational Church*](#), James Pennington, 1845. 252.7 P414t, The Connecticut Historical Society.

"...Two hundred and thirty long, dreary and bloody years have passed away, during which eight generations of us have sunk, starved, beaten, mangled, broken-hearted, and bathed in blood to the grave. At this day of reform, revivals, missionary operations, political renovations, and literary excellence, when we rise up and cry to these men upon Christian principle, enough, enough, O do let the past days of your bloody doings suffice; slacken your hands, let us go that we may make friendship, and do a little for the glory of God before the day of account comes with us both; they turn upon us and ask by what authority we say these things. We think it now about time to ask these self-consecrated tyrants, by what authority they have done these things and continue to do them. It is high time they begun to look to the account they will have to give ere long. They have pretended to act by Bible authority. They very well know that if we are right, they are wrong; hence they are afraid to come 'to the law and to the testimony,' because on this subject they know there is no truth on their side."

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Runaway slave ad for Pennington from *The Hagerstown Torch Light and Advertiser*, November 1st, 1827. From *American to the Backbone: The Life of James W.C. Pennington, the Fugitive Slave Who Became One of the First Black Abolitionists*, by Christopher Webber, New York: Pegasus Books, 2011.

200 Dollars Reward

RAN AWAY from the subscriber living near Hagers-town, Washington county, Md. on Monday the twenty-ninth of October, a negro man named JAMES PEMBROOK, about 21 years of age, five feet five inches high, very black, square & clumsily made, has a down look, prominent and reddish eyes, and mumbles or talks with his teeth closed, can read, and I believe write, is an excellent blacksmith, and pretty good rough carpenter; he received shortly before he absconded, a pretty severe cut from his axe on the inside of his right leg. Any person who take up and secure him in the jail of Hagers-town shall receive the above reward.

FRISBY TILGHMAN

November 1.

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[Reading the Emancipation Proclamation](#), drawn by Henry Walker Herrick, 1864. Engraving; printer's ink on wove paper. The Newman S. Hungerford Museum Fund, 2006.50.0, The Connecticut Historical Society.



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[Two Civil War Soldiers](#), William H. Jennings, 1861-1865. Photography; albumen print on paper on cardboard mount. The Clifford T. Alderman Collection, 2012.233.217, The Connecticut Historical Society.



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