Standard 8.14 Lesson, Primary
Documents to Read and Study
Island Link
8.14 Identify the origins and development of slavery in the colonies, overt and passive resistance to enslavement, and the Middle Passage

The Atlantic Slave Trade

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s2WejXPVT2A

African Americans in the British New World

(Pictured Above: This engraving from an 1860 issue of Harper’s Weekly magazine shows the tightly packed conditions of a slave ship. Many Africans died during the grueling middle passage — so many that the ship depicted above was considered safer than most, having only lost 90 of 600 passengers.)
Even before the Mayflower touched ground off Cape Cod, African Americans were living in British North America. Although slavery itself was not foreign to West Africans, the brutal nature of the TRANS-ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE and the nature of COLONIAL SLAVERY was without parallel in African history. Millions of people deemed savages by their new "MASTERS" were uprooted from their ways of life and forced to adopt new ones.

Europeans and even some Africans would participate in the slave trade that brought millions of Africans to the New World. African SLAVE TRADERS would ruthlessly bring their captives from the interior of the continent where they would await the business transaction that would take them thousands of miles from their homeland.

"The Middle Passage"

Pictured Above: This illustration depicts what one reporter saw on the upper deck of a slave ship — "about four hundred and fifty native Africans, in a sitting or squatting posture, the most of them having their knees elevated so as to form a resting place for their heads and arms." Harvard College Library

Two by two the men and women were forced beneath deck into the bowels of the slave ship. The "packing" was done as efficiently as possible. The captives lay down on unfinished planking with virtually no room to move or breathe. Elbows and wrists will be scraped to the bone by the motion of the rough seas. Some will die of disease, some of starvation, and some simply of despair. This was the fate of millions of West Africans across three and a half centuries of the slave trade on the voyage known as the "middle passage."

Two philosophies dominated the loading of a slave ship. "LOOSE PACKING" provided for fewer slaves per ship in the hopes that a greater percentage of the cargo would arrive alive. "TIGHT PACKING" captains believed that more slaves, despite higher casualties, would yield a greater profit at the trading block.

Doctors would inspect the slaves before purchase from the African trader to determine which individuals would most likely survive the voyage. In return, the traders would receive guns, gunpowder, rum or other spirits, textiles or trinkets. The "MIDDLE PASSAGE," which brought the slaves from West Africa to the West Indies, might take three weeks. Unfavorable weather conditions could make the trip much longer.

( Pictured Above: The Trans Atlantic (Triangular) Trade involved many continents, a lot of money, some cargo and sugar, and millions of African slaves.)
Slaves were fed twice daily and some captains made vain attempts to clean the hold at this time. Air holes were cut into the deck to allow the slaves breathing air, but these were closed in stormy conditions. The bodies of the dead were simply thrust overboard. And yes, there were uprisings.

Upon reaching the West Indies, the slaves were fed and cleaned in the hopes of bringing a high price on the block. Those that could not be sold were left for dead. The slaves were then transported to their final destination. It was in this unspeakable manner that between ten and twenty million Africans were introduced to the New World.

( Pictured Above: Slave ships were packed full of captured Africans to ensure maximum profits for the ones selling the slaves at auction. This diagram of the slave ship Brookes dates from 1788 and shows the close quarters of the slave trade.)

Atlantic Slave Trade

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3NXC4Q_4JVg

Slaves bound for the North American British colonies overcame tremendous odds to reach their destinations. The dreaded "Middle Passage" often claimed half or more of its human cargo. Most of the survivors lived harsh lives as plantation slaves. Some lived in the towns and learned trades and some lived as domestic slaves, particularly in the North. Often overlooked are free African Americans, who managed to escape or were lucky enough to be granted their freedom.

Yet as the seventeenth century became the eighteenth century, the institution grew. Harsh codes were adopted across the South, and although slavery was less common in the North, many New England shippers profited from the so-called triangular trade. Slavery was indeed becoming entrenched in British colonial life.
The colonization of the Americas brought together for the first time three distinctive peoples from three distant continents. The Native Americans, Europeans, and Africans that inhabited what would become the United States of America each previously had glorious civilizations and would contribute to a new glorious civilization that would follow. Despite the great numbers of Africans — now African Americans — in bondage, a rich legacy of artistic, religious, and linguistic gifts merge with the realities of a New World to form the foundations of what would become American culture.

Art, such as this bronze head from Benin, is used to recount the history of the kingdom and its rulers.

Powerful kingdoms, beautiful sculpture, complex trade, tremendous wealth, centers for advanced learning — all are hallmarks of African civilization on the eve of the age of exploration.
Hardly living up to the "dark continent" label given by European adventurers, Africa’s cultural heritage runs deep. The empires of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay are some of the greatest the world has ever known. Timbuktu, arguably the world’s oldest university, was the intellectual center of its age.

Although primarily agricultural, West Africans held many occupations. Some were hunters and fishers. Merchants traded with other African communities, as well as with Europeans and Arabs. Some West Africans mined gold, salt, iron, copper or even diamonds. African art was primarily religious, and each community had artisans skilled at producing works that would please the tribal gods.

The center of African life in ancient and modern times is the family. Since Africans consider all individuals who can trace roots to a common ancestor, this family often comprised hundreds of members.

The slave trade that brought millions of men and women to North America unwillingly, also affected many areas of Africa. This map shows some of the regions involved in the African slave trade.

Like Native American tribes, there is tremendous diversity among the peoples of West Africa. Some traced their heritage through the father’s bloodline, some through the mothers. Some were democratic, while others had a strong ruler. Most African tribes had a noble class, and slavery in Africa predates the written record.

The slavery known to Africans prior to European contact did not involve a belief in inferiority of the slaves. Most slaves in West Africa were captured in war. Although legally considered property, most African slaves were treated as family members. Their children could not be bought or sold. Many achieved high honors in their communities, and freedom by manumission was not uncommon. Plantation slavery was virtually unknown on the African continent.

The impending slave trade brings ruin to West Africa. Entire villages disappear. Guns and alcohol spread across the continent. Tribes turn against other tribes as the once-fabled empires fade into history. The Diaspora of African peoples around the world had begun.

**Kingdoms of the Medieval Sudan** Histories of Songhay, Kanem-Bronu, Hausaland, and Mali and overviews of trade and the influence of Islam are offered on this website. Pop quizzes test what you have learned, and a gallery of photos of the region in modern times is exceptional. **Tabala Wolof: Sufi Drumming of Senegal** Islam blended with rather than destroyed many traditional African customs. This page explains how traditional drum rhythms were incorporated into Sufi prayer rituals in the 1700s. There are a few pictures and a sound clip. **The Saharan Trade** This website explores the trade routes that developed across the Sahara Desert up until the 1400s. The first routes were established primarily to trade gold from the gold-rich Ghana area from salt from North Africa. Egypt became a trading partner in 1235 C.E. Now that’s traveling in style! Mansa Musa, the most famous ruler of the Mali Empire, spent and gave so much gold during his celebrated hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) in 1324 that he severely lowered the
value of the precious metal in Egypt. Learn More... Salt was such a valuable commodity in Sudanic Africa, that chunks of salt broken from large salt bars from mines in the Sahara were actually used as currency. Learn More...
Nat Turner was inspired by visions of the Spirit to lead a slave uprising in Virginia on August 22, 1831.

Slaves did not accept their fate without protest. Many instances of rebellion were known to Americans, even in colonial times. These rebellions were not confined to the South. In fact, one of the earliest examples of a slave uprising was in 1712 in Manhattan. As African Americans in the colonies grew greater and greater in number, there was a justifiable paranoia on the part of the white settlers that a violent rebellion could occur in one’s own neighborhood. It was this fear of rebellion that led each colony to pass a series of laws restricting slaves’ behaviors. The laws were known as slave codes.

Although each colony had differing ideas about the rights of slaves, there were some common threads in slave codes across areas where slavery was common. Legally considered property, slaves were not allowed to own property of their own. They were not allowed to assemble without the presence of a white person. Slaves that lived off the plantation were subject to special curfews.

In the courts, a slave accused of any crime against a white person was doomed. No testimony could be made by a slave against a white person. Therefore, the slave’s side of the story could never be told in a court of law. Of course, slaves were conspicuously absent from juries as well.

Slave codes had ruinous effects on African American society. It was illegal to teach a slave to read or write. Religious motives sometimes prevailed, however, as many devout white Christians educated slaves to enable the reading of the Bible. These same Christians did not recognize marriage between slaves in their laws. This made it easier to justify the breakup of families by selling one if its members to another owner.

As time passed and the numbers of African Americans in the New World increased, so did the fears of their white
captors. With each new rebellion, the slave codes became ever more strict, further abridging the already limited rights and privileges this oppressed people might hope to enjoy.

**Library of Congress: Slave Codes** Slavery in the United States was governed by an extensive body of law developed from the 1660s to the 1860s. Every slave state had its own slave code and body of court decisions. A detailed site exploring slave codes from the Library of Congress. **Race, Religion, and the "Trail of Tears"** When the first Africans arrived in Jamestown in 1619, Europeans were already treating native Americans as slaves. Intermarriage between Africans and native Americans became so common, that a 1740 South Carolina slave code specifically addressed the status of mixed race children. **Slavery In Early America’s Colonies** This outstanding article traces the legal foundations for the slave codes. Slavery came to be justified through a complicated belief system, and the legal justification was only a small part of that belief system. However, the law was what gave structure to the institution. English common law was flexible and fluid, but the other great tradition of Roman was extremely rigid. Jurists had to look to both to decide the lawsuits that began flooding the American courts. Excerpts from court documents and laws from Maryland and Virginia show how the structure of slavery grew. **Virginia’s Slave Codes** Virginia’s slave code of 1705 was designed to settle the questions about the status of non-Christian servants... they were all slaves. The law served as a model for codes in other colonies. This webpage from PBS provides a brief overview and links to related topics. If any slave resist his master ... correcting such slave, and shall happen to be killed in such correction ... the master shall be free of all punishment ... as if such accident never happened. Read more about the 1705 slave code which served as a model for future laws. **Learn More...** African slave men outnumbered women 3 to 1, and native American men had been killed off by disease and in war. Intermarriage allowed each group to benefit from the surplus of the opposite sex. But what of the children of those marriages — were they slave or free? **Learn More...** The American practice of using the term "boy" for male slaves of any age dates back to Roman times, more than a thousand years earlier. The Romans used the Latin work "puer" in their legal documents. Are there other vestiges of the time of chariots that touch us today? **Learn More...**
2a. Reasons for Colonization and Life in the Colonies
2b. The Founding and People of the Thirteen Colonies
2c. Slavery in the Colonies
2d. Colonial Government

Primary Documents and Supporting Texts:
Excerpt The First Virginia Charter 1606 – http://avalon.law.yale.edu/17th_century/va01.asp
Mayflower Compact – http://avalon.law.yale.edu/17th_century/mayflower.asp
Charter of Massachusetts Bay Colony 1629 – http://avalon.law.yale.edu/17th_century/mass03.asp
Maryland Toleration Act 1649 – http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/maryland_toleration.asp