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Project: *A More Perfect Union, Year Two*

Robert Carter III
and his
Deed of Gift

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A More Perfect Union- Year Two
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Robert Carter III lived in Virginia in the second half of the eighteenth century. He had all the marks of Virginia gentry: family name, money, land, and slaves. His peers included George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry and the Lee family (Levy, xi). What makes Carter different is that he is a forgotten founding father. This is partly related to the fact that he held few public offices and his stand on independence from Britain and the formation of the new nation fluctuated. According to Andrew Levy, in his book *The First Emancipator: The Forgotten Story of Robert Carter-The Founding Father Who Freed His Slaves*: “It is infuriating, however, to consider that we have been unable to find a single use for Robert Carter, He does not sooth us, excuse us, or help us explain ourselves” (194-95).

Robert Carter does have a use. Students of American history need to use historical habits of mind to recognize individuals who have made a difference in history. Fifth graders learn about the slave trade, the institution of slavery and the abolition of slavery. Even though Carter does not have the esteem of his peers, he should be recognized for the courage he had in addressing the contradiction of slavery in his own life. Being a slaveholder was an inherited position for Carter and it took great thought and determination to carry out his plan for manumission of his hundreds of slaves. Carter’s intentions and how he executed them are noteworthy especially considering the time during which he lived. Levy’s book provides the background for the children’s story *The Carter Family and the Deed of Gift*. This account will make the story of Robert Carter III accessible for fifth grade students.

Frameworks:

The Political, Intellectual, and Economic Growth of the Colonies, 1700-1775

5.12 Explain the causes of the establishment of slavery in North America. Describe the harsh conditions of the Middle Passage and slave life, and the responses of slaves to their condition. Describe the life of free African Americans in the colonies.

The Growth of the Republic

5.31 Describe the significance and consequences of the abolition of slavery in the northern states after the Revolution and of the 1808 law that banned the importation of slaves into the United States.

5.35 Identify the key issues that contributed to the onset of the Civil War.

- A. the debate over slavery and westward expansion

Implementation

Literature Circles is an effective method for using the elementary account of Robert Carter's narrative with fifth graders. Most fifth graders have participated in Literature Circles in reading class. The assigned roles make comprehension of texts, especially more challenging non-fiction ones, accessible to readers with varied abilities.

Literature Circle Roles

Discussion Director: The *Discussion Director* is the head of the group. This student writes thoughtful questions to provoke discussion. This student makes sure that the others in the group follow the rules of a discussion and he or she makes sure that all students have an opportunity to participate.

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Illustrator: The *Illustrator* chooses an important aspect of the text to illustrate to help the other group members visualize the information. The illustrator exhibits his or her work holding comments until the group has had time for discussion.

Vocabulary Enricher: The *Vocabulary Enricher* chooses unfamiliar words to define and share with the group. The chosen words should be challenging, unknown or interesting. A dictionary should be available for this role.

Literary Luminary: The *Literary Luminary* identifies sections of the text which he or she feels is important for discussion or clarification. The student can read the selections aloud or have the group review them. This is helpful for understanding difficult passages.

Connector: The *Connector* identifies associations between the text and other text sources, the students or events in the world. This role helps students comprehend information that is new and challenging through personal connections.

Summarizer: The *Summarizer* provides a brief summary of key points for the members of the group. This is a method for identifying critical information in the text.

Literature Circle Templates are available at: <http://www.edselect.com/Docs/Litcir.pdf>

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