



*Students explore, The Underground Railroad Museum*

In 8<sup>th</sup> grade U.S. History, Bemis students have had the opportunity to explore an Underground Railroad Museum, set up in the school's Presentation Room. "It was kind of cool to walk around and see all of the different things that happened at this time. It actually felt like a museum," reported Colin Hertel. Shianna Venable agreed, "The slavery exhibits are great for hands-on learners and it gives students a chance to explore the history of slavery in a unique and fun way."

During their exploration students became "experts" on 3 of the 15 exhibits that are on display. To become an expert on their assigned exhibit, students engaged in close and critical analysis of the individual documents and photos on display. Harman Singh comment on the variety of resources, "The museum gave me a chance to view different anti-slavery materials. I looked at newspapers, pictures and convention meeting papers that were made during the movement." Melisa Salihovic described the exhibits this way, "The stories about people fighting to end slavery were displayed. This was important to learn because it showed the perspectives of those people who struggled." Bradey Carson added "This museum helps me understand what happened when slavery was going on. All of this is going to stick in my head."



*Kyla Cummings, Abigail Cole, and Maddie Kolioupolos examine documents at exhibit 6.*

In these activities students analyzed primary and secondary sources related to all aspects of slavery from its beginning in America, up through the Civil War. Through their exploration of the museum, students discovered powerful images, stories of courage, and a variety of tactics used in the fight to end slavery. Kyla Cummings commented on the value of this learning experience, "Learning about slavery in a museum format is so much better than using a textbook. Having sources and information right in front of you makes the world of history come alive." Maddie Kolioupolos added, "I believe the most interesting thing about the museum is the fact that it gives us students the chance to look at the information ourselves. Also, it allows us to have more of a "hands-on" experience, which I personally enjoy." Abigail Cole summed the experience up saying, "The museum is very cool and a neat way of learning about slavery."

Following this close and critical look at the documents displayed, students used their expertise to answer critical thinking questions. These questions required students to cite evidence from the museum exhibits to support the claims that they made. Santos Kipper reflected on the story of Jonathan Walker. Walker had his hand branded as punishment and humiliation from smuggling slaves to freedom. "I was struck by the fact that this punishment was designed to humiliate but actually it helped Walker gain followers in the fight against slavery," Santos said. Zaire Mitchell-Drayton was interested in the story of Harriet Tubman. Zaire was shocked that "She risked her life nineteen times and still survived. She ran away and went back to the south to save the lives of others. She became a hero."



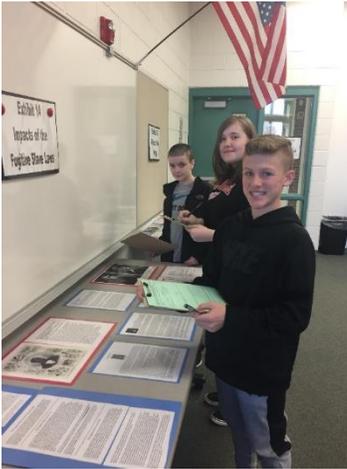
*Riyan Wadsworth, Maddie Harlein and Zaire Mitchell-Drayton discuss Harriet Tubman*



Discussion Circles

Finally, the students shared their analysis of the museum exhibits in a series of discussion circles. This discussion format allows students to share their learning with others, while at the same time gaining new knowledge of the history of slavery and the fight to end it in America. Ashely Young said, “The museum discussions helped me to understand more about slaves because my classmates shared about different slaves and their stories.” Riyan Wadsworth added “The discussions helped me because I learned more about all the people at all exhibits, not just at the exhibits I’m doing. I think this is the best activity we’ve done so far.” Maddie Harlein put it this way “I like being able to discuss the things we’ve learned. Being able to share my opinion and hear other’s opinions has helped me a lot. It really helps me to understand.”

**More student thoughts:**



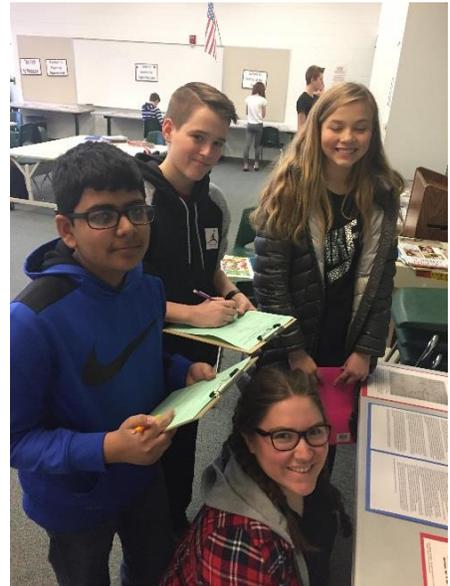
Dominic Elliot, Shianna Venable and Bradey Carson study the Exhibit on the Impact of Fugitive Slave Laws.

“I would not say the slave museum was fun, but it is interesting. I think it is interesting to see and learn all about slaves. If you like history you will like the slave museum.” – Dominic Elliott.



Santos Kipper and Joshua Hoenschied display Johnathan Walkers branded hand.

“I personally noticed the slave hand, and felt deep sympathy for those who went through hard labor. I also felt sad about the awful conditions slaves had to live in their dirt floor houses.” - Joshua Hoenschied



Harman Singh, Colin Hertel, Ashley Young and Fernanda Hernandez examine the economics of slavery at Exhibit 3. “I enjoyed the museum because it goes in depth with topics I might not have realized I was interested in. It has taught me a lot about the legacies African American slaves left behind.” –Fernanda Hernandez