



# Assignment

## Write an Argument Based on the Sources

**Topic: John Brown's Raid**

### Part 1

**Sources for the Performance Task:**

***Source #1***

You have found a source about John Brown's Raid at Harpers Ferry and Its Impact on the Road to the Civil War

**John Brown's Raid**

**By Ellie Beane**

John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry in 1859 marked a pivotal moment in American history, serving as a catalyst for the escalating tensions that eventually led to the Civil War. During the raid at Harpers Ferry in 1859, John Brown and his sons played a central role in a daring attempt to incite a slave rebellion. Brown, a passionate abolitionist, aimed to seize the federal arsenal, arm the enslaved people in the area, and ignite a revolt against the institution of slavery. The raid, however, met with significant challenges.

Brown, along with a small band of followers, seized the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, with the aim of arming slaves for a rebellion. However, the armory had a regiment of United States' Marines nearby, and they were noticed basically immediately. In a dramatic confrontation, the marines stormed the engine house where Brown and his men had barricaded themselves.

The raid's boldness and its challenge to the institution of slavery sent shockwaves through the nation.

While Brown's efforts were ultimately thwarted by the U.S. Marines led by Colonel Robert E. Lee, the impact of the raid on the nation was profound. It may seem interesting to see the name Robert E. Lee is mentioned as a United States Marine. It is true, however, that he was before he decided to stay loyal to his state of Virginia when they seceded from the Union.

The raid ended in failure for Brown and his sons. Several of Brown's followers were killed, and Brown himself was wounded and captured. His sons, Watson and Oliver, were among those captured during the raid. John Brown faced a swift trial and was sentenced to death for treason and murder. Despite his stoic defense and the impassioned plea for abolition, Brown was executed by hanging on December 2, 1859.

The raid at Harpers Ferry escalated the sectional tensions that had been simmering for decades. The South saw Brown's actions as evidence of a Northern conspiracy to incite slave insurrections, reinforcing their fears of abolitionist aggression.

Southerners viewed the raid as a threat to their economic and social order, further alienating them from the Northern states.

In the North, while not all shared Brown's radical methods, many sympathized with his cause. Brown's willingness to sacrifice himself for the abolitionist movement inspired a sense of moral duty among Northern abolitionists.

The Battle Hymn of the Republic song was originally written as "John Brown's Body". "John Brown's Body" originated during the American Civil War and was a Union marching song. It celebrated John Brown and his heroic yet perhaps misguided raid at Harpers Ferry. The lyrics underwent various adaptations, and the melody evolved into what is now known as "The Battle Hymn of the Republic."

"The Battle Hymn of the Republic" was written by Julia Ward Howe in 1861, set to the tune of "John Brown's Body." The hymn became a rallying cry for the Union forces during the Civil War. Howe's lyrics, inspired by her visit to a Union army camp, evoke a sense of righteousness and divine purpose, framing the conflict as a moral crusade against slavery.

Both songs carry significant historical and cultural weight, reflecting the intense emotions and convictions of the Civil War era. "John Brown's Body" commemorates the radical abolitionist, while "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" transforms its melody into a powerful anthem of justice and liberty. These songs remind us of the spirit of a nation torn by slavery and the quest for freedom.

The raid at Harpers Ferry influenced the political landscape, contributing to the growing divide between the newly formed Republican Party and the Southern Democrats. The incident became a focal point in the 1860 presidential election, with Southern states using it as evidence of Northern hostility toward their institutions. The election of Abraham Lincoln, a Republican, in 1860, triggered the secession of Southern states and the onset of the Civil War.

While Brown's raid did not directly cause the Civil War, it served as a momentous event that accelerated the nation's descent into conflict. The event exposed the irreconcilable differences between the North and the South on the issue of slavery, making compromise increasingly difficult. Brown's actions and subsequent trial elevated the discourse on slavery to a new level of intensity, pushing the nation closer to the brink of war.

#### Sources Used

Historyworld (n.d.). John Brown and Harpers Ferry. Retrieved from <http://www.historyworld.com/johnbrown>

#### **Source #2**

This article explains what Frederick Douglass thought of John Brown's Raid on Harpers Ferry.

#### **A Look at The Raid**

##### **By Aaron Higgins**

Frederick Douglass, a prominent African American abolitionist and former slave, had complex views on John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry in 1859. Douglass and Brown shared a common goal of abolishing slavery, but their approaches and perspectives differed.

Initially, Frederick Douglass was not informed of Brown's plan to raid Harpers Ferry, and when he learned of it, he was somewhat concerned. Douglass admired Brown's commitment to the abolitionist cause, but he was worried about the feasibility and potential consequences of the raid. He believed that Brown's tactics might be too radical and could lead to the unnecessary sacrifice of lives without achieving the desired impact.

Despite his reservations, Douglass eventually became involved in Brown's plans. He believed that slavery was a system of violence that required forceful resistance, and he admired Brown's willingness to take direct action against it. Douglass viewed the raid as a desperate but courageous attempt to strike a blow against the institution of slavery.

After the raid's failure, Douglass faced increased scrutiny and suspicion from authorities, given his association with Brown. Douglass, however, remained steadfast in his commitment to the abolitionist cause and defended Brown's actions. In speeches and writings following the raid, Douglass praised Brown's moral courage and dedication to the anti-slavery movement.

Douglass' perspective on John Brown's raid underscored the complexities within the abolitionist movement. While both men shared the goal of ending slavery, Douglass, with his emphasis on strategic and nonviolent means, diverged from Brown's more militant approach. Nonetheless, Douglass recognized the impact of Brown's actions in inspiring the anti-slavery movement and bringing attention to the urgency of the cause.

In the broader context of American history, John Brown's raid and Frederick Douglass's response illuminate the diverse strategies employed within the abolitionist movement. While Douglass and Brown had different tactical preferences, their shared commitment to eradicating slavery shaped the narrative of the pre-Civil War era and laid the groundwork for the eventual emancipation of enslaved individuals in the United States.

#### Sources Used

Discovery News (2009, May 13). Frederick Douglass' Thoughts. Retrieved from <http://news.discovery.com/fdjohnbrownraid.html>

You found a source that introduces you to one of the most famous conductors of the Underground Railroad, William Still.

## **William Still and The Freedom Seekers**

**By Mary Scott**

William Still, often hailed as the “Father of the Underground Railroad,” played a pivotal role in the clandestine network that assisted enslaved individuals in their quest for freedom during the 19th century. Born in Burlington County, New Jersey, in 1821, Still became a prominent abolitionist, conductor on the Underground Railroad, and a chronicler (information keeper) of the journeys to freedom undertaken by countless individuals.

As the son of formerly enslaved parents, Still understood the horrors of slavery intimately. His own family's experience fueled his commitment to the abolitionist cause. In the 1840s, Still moved to Philadelphia, where he became involved in anti-slavery activities and eventually assumed a key role in the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society.

One of Still's most significant contributions was his work as a “conductor” on the Underground Railroad, a secret network of safe houses and routes that assisted fugitive slaves in reaching free states or Canada. His efforts in aiding those seeking freedom were unparalleled, and he documented the stories of over 1,000 freedom seekers in meticulous detail.

Still maintained detailed records of the individuals passing through the Underground Railroad, carefully recording their names, backgrounds, and the circumstances of their escape. His records, compiled into a journal titled “The Underground Railroad Records,” provide a valuable and comprehensive account of the harrowing journeys these individuals undertook to escape the bonds of slavery. The records include personal narratives, sketches, and other identifying information that shed light on the resilience and determination of those seeking freedom.

Among the stories documented by Still is that of Harriet Tubman, whom he assisted in her escape and later collaborated with on various abolitionist activities. Still's meticulous record-keeping not only assisted freedom seekers in their quest for liberty but also became a historical archive that provides valuable insights into the lives and struggles of those who sought emancipation.

Still's commitment to preserving the stories of the Underground Railroad and the individuals involved went beyond the abolitionist movement. His records became a crucial resource for historians and researchers, offering a unique window into the complexities of the Underground Railroad and the people who risked everything for freedom.

#### Sources Used

The Post (n.d.). The Freedom Seekers. Retrieved from <http://www.thepost.com/wstill>

#### **Source #4**

You have found a source about Robert Smalls, an enslaved man who emancipated himself.

#### **Robert Smalls: The Best Actor Ever**

##### **By Unknown**

Robert Smalls, a remarkable figure in American history, defied the shackles of slavery and orchestrated an outrageous escape that would become legendary. Born into bondage in Beaufort, South Carolina, in 1839, Smalls' creativity and courage led him to emancipate himself and his family during the American Civil War.

In May 1862, Smalls, a skilled harbor pilot and deckhand, was working aboard the Confederate transport ship CSS Planter. Seizing an opportunity fueled by his cunning and knowledge of naval operations, Smalls, along with other enslaved crew members, hatched a daring plan to seize control of the vessel.

On the night of May 13, 1862, when the white officers left the ship to spend the night ashore, Smalls and his fellow enslaved crew members executed their plan. Under the cover of darkness, Smalls donned the captain's uniform and a wide-brimmed hat, adopting a striking resemblance to the Confederate captain. With a careful imitation of the captain's mannerisms and the correct signals, Smalls steered the CSS Planter past Confederate checkpoints and forts.

Navigating through treacherous waters, Smalls successfully passed key harbor defenses, including Fort Sumter, a Confederate stronghold. The CSS Planter was loaded with valuable cargo, including weapons and explosives, making the stakes even higher.

Once beyond Confederate lines, Smalls made a daring move. He raised a white flag and surrendered the ship to the Union blockade, ensuring the safety of himself, his family, and the other enslaved crew members on board. Smalls' courageous act not only secured freedom for himself, his wife, and children but also delivered a strategic asset to the Union Navy.

News of Robert Smalls' escape spread rapidly, capturing the attention of the nation and beyond. His daring exploit became a symbol of resistance against slavery and a testament to the intelligence and bravery of enslaved individuals. Smalls' actions further fueled the momentum for the Emancipation Proclamation, which President Abraham Lincoln would issue in 1863, declaring enslaved people in Confederate-held territories free.

After the war, Robert Smalls continued to play a significant role in politics and civil rights. He served as a delegate to the South Carolina Constitutional Convention of 1868, a state legislator, and later as a U.S. Congressman. Smalls' life journey stands as a testament to the indomitable spirit of those who sought freedom against the oppressive forces of slavery, leaving an enduring legacy in the records of American history.

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**Which source has the most useful information about deciding whether or not John Brown's Raid at Harpers Ferry was a reasonable risk for him to take? Include the source title or number and explain why this source has the most useful information about deciding whether or not John Brown's Raid at Harpers Ferry was a reasonable risk for him to take. Support your answer with at least two details.**

**Your Response**



Word Count: 0

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## Part 2

You will now review your sources, take notes, and plan, draft, revise, and edit your writing. You may use your notes and go back to the sources. Now read your assignment and the information about how your writing will be scored; then begin your work.

### **Your assignment:**

Your history class is creating a website. Your class has been studying significant events leading up to the start of the Civil War.

You have decided to write about John Brown's Raid at Harpers Ferry. It is a controversial topic because many people believe that the obviously terrible plan was to be a sure failure and should have never happened. There are those, however, that believe in spite of its failure, it was a significant event that did in fact contribute to the end of slavery in the United States.

Today, you will write an essay in which you establish an argumentative claim for or against the wisdom of John Brown's Raid. Was it reasonable to believe that the enslaved people would join the raid as John Brown believed that they would? Make sure to address potential counterarguments in your essay and support your claim with information from the sources you have examined.

### **Argumentative Scoring**

Your argumentative letter will be scored using the following:

1. **Statement of claim and organization:** How well did you state your claim, address opposing claims, and maintain your claim with a logical progression of ideas from beginning to end? How well did your ideas thoughtfully flow from beginning to end using effective transitions? How effective was your introduction and your conclusion?
2. **Elaboration/evidence:** How well did you integrate relevant and specific information from the sources? How well did you elaborate your ideas? How well did you clearly state ideas using precise language that is appropriate for your audience and purpose?
3. **Conventions:** How well did you follow the rules of grammar usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling?

**Now begin work on your argumentative essay.** Manage your time carefully so that you can:

- plan your essay
- write your essay
- revise and edit the final draft of your essay

Word-processing tools and spell check are available to you.

For Part 2, you are being asked to write a multi-paragraph essay, so please be as thorough as possible. Type your response in the space provided. The box will expand as you type. Remember to check your notes and your prewriting/planning as you write and then revise and edit your essay.

**Your Response:**

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