

**TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT**  
***Lesson Title -The Brooks-Sumner Incident***  
***Kyra Kasperson***

**Grade –7**

**Length of class period** –One to two 42 minute periods.

**Inquiry** – Was the Sumner-Brooks incident a direct result of the Kansas-Nebraska Act and Bleeding Kansas or did it more accurately reflect the sectionalist and cultural division between the northern and southern United States?

**Objectives**

1. Students will analyze primary sources to determine historical viewpoints.
2. Students will work in cooperative groups and engage in role-playing and a mini-debate.
3. Students will compare and contrast northern and southern perspectives of the Sumner-Brooks incident.

**Materials** (all attached)

1. Winslow Homer lithograph, *Arguments of the Chivalry*, Boston: John H. Bufford, 1856.
2. Excerpts from Charles Sumner’s “The Crime Against Kansas” speech to Congress.
3. Abridged version of Preston Brooks’ speech in defense of his actions.
4. Newspaper editorials from the Furman University Secession Era Editorials Collection.

**Activities**

1. Display the Winslow Homer lithograph on a Smartboard or provide students with copies. Ask the students to discuss the image in small groups of 3-5. Ideally, students will have just finished studying Bleeding Kansas and will have received an overview of the Brooks-Sumner Incident. Briefly discuss the lithograph and the definition of chivalry.
2. Assign each group a document to read. Groups will read excerpts from Charles Sumner's speech, Preston Brooks' speech, the New York Tribune editorial, or the South Carolinian editorial. As the students are reading, select and pull aside students to play the roles of Charles Sumner, Preston Brooks, and Laurence Keitt. Explain to each his or her role in the proceedings.
3. When the students have read the materials, have the student playing Charles Sumner read some excerpts from "The Crime Against Kansas" speech as though

- he is giving the speech to Congress. I have included several excerpts referring to Mr. Butler, but you may wish to highlight certain lines for the student to read depending on time constraints. Analyze and discuss Sumner's words as a group, emphasizing his personal attacks on pro-slavery senators such as Andrew Butler.
4. Students playing the roles of Brooks and Keitt will then discuss how to best "punish" Sumner for his insults in front of the class. Keitt will advise against a duel due to Sumner's "lesser" social standing. Brooks will approach the seated Sumner, accuse him of libeling South Carolina and insulting Butler. Brooks will pretend to beat Sumner (you may, for obvious reasons, choose not to do this -but all of my classes were very well-behaved). Keitt will stop onlookers from interfering in the fight to help Sumner. Explain that Sumner took several years to recover and that Brooks was received as a hero in the South.
  5. Students acting as the northern and southern newspaper reporters will present their perspectives on the incident and engage in a mini-debate. Southern reporters should note the gifts of canes sent to Preston Brooks and northerners should express outrage at such behavior in Congress.
  6. The student playing Brooks will give his defense speech and resignation to Congress. Again, you may wish to highlight some phrases in the interest of time. Discuss Brooks' arguments in his defense and his allusions to a southern code of dignity and respect.
  7. Return to the Homer lithograph. Ask students to compare and contrast the incident with events in Kansas. Students should consider whether the affair represented underlying sectionalist and cultural differences between the North and the South.

**How will you assess what student learned during this lesson?**

1. Students will be informally assessed via monitoring of their class participation and discussion.
2. Students will write a persuasive paragraph for homework in which they must use specific details to describe the Brooks-Sumner incident as either a microcosm of Bleeding Kansas or as an indication of a deeper sectionalist and cultural rift between the North and the South.

**Connecticut Framework Performance Standards**

- 2.2 Explain why one would use a primary or secondary source in a specific context.
- 2.3 Assess an author's purpose and point of view and respond in literal, critical, and evaluative ways.
- 2.4 State and defend points of view using relevant evidence.

"THE SYMBOL OF THE NORTH IS THE PEN; THE SYMBOL OF THE SOUTH IS THE BLUDGEON." — *Every Word True*



ARGUMENTS OF THE CHIVALRY.

Signed with monogram:  
WH [Winslow Homer]  
*Arguments of the Chivalry.*  
Boston: John H. Bufford, 1856  
Lithograph on wove paper

**Excerpt from Charles Sumner's "The Crime Against Kansas" speech of May, 1855. The speech in its entirety is available numerous places on the web and contains many references to Butler, Calhoun, Douglas, etc. that you may wish to use.**

My task will be divided under three different heads: first, THE CRIME AGAINST KANSAS, in its origin and extent; secondly, THE APOLOGIES FOR THE CRIME; and thirdly, the TRUE REMEDY.

But, before entering upon this argument, I must say something of a general character, particularly in response to what has fallen from Senators who have raised themselves to eminence on this floor in championship of human wrongs; I mean the Senator from South Carolina, (Mr. BUTLER,) and the Senator from Illinois, (Mr. DOUGLAS,) who, though unlike as Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, yet, like this couple, sally forth together in the same cause. The Senator from South Carolina has read many books of chivalry, and believes himself a chivalrous knight with sentiments of honor and courage. Of course he has chosen a mistress to whom he has made his vows, and who, though ugly to others, is always lovely to him; though polluted in the sight of the world, is chaste in his sight -- I mean the harlot, Slavery. For her, his tongue is always profuse in words. Let her be impeached in character, or any proposition made to shut her out from the extension of her wantonness, and no extravagance of manner or hardihood of assertion is then too great for this Senator. The frenzy of Don Quixote, on behalf of his wench Dulcinea del Toboso, is all surpassed. The asserted rights of Slavery, which shock equality of all kinds, are cloaked by a fantastic claim of equality. If the slave States cannot enjoy what, in mockery of the great fathers of the Republic, he misnames equality under the Constitution -- in other words, the full power in the National Territories to compel fellow men to toil, to separate husband and wife, and to sell little children at the auction block -- then, sir, the chivalric Senator will conduct the State of South Carolina out of the Union! Heroic knight! Exalted Senator! A Second Moses come for a second exodus!

Mr. President, men are wisely presumed to intend the natural consequences of their conduct, and to seek what their acts seem to promote. Now, the Nebraska Bill, on its very face, openly cleared the way for Slavery, and it is not wrong to presume that its originators intended

the natural consequences of such an act, and sought in this way to extend Slavery. Of course, they did. And this is the first stage in the Crime against Kansas.

With regret, I come again upon the Senator from South Carolina, [Mr. Butler] who, omnipresent in this debate, overflowed with rage at the simple suggestion that Kansas had applied for admission as a State; and, with incoherent phrases, discharged the loose expectorations of his speech, now upon her representative, and then upon her people. There was no extravagance of the ancient Parliamentary debate which he did not repeat; nor was there any possible deviation from truth which he did not make with so much of passion, I am glad to add, as to save him from the suspicion of intentional aberration. But the Senator touches nothing which he does not disfigure -- with error, sometimes of principle, sometimes of fact. He shows an incapacity of accuracy, whether in stating the Constitution or in stating the law, whether in the details of statistics or the diversions of scholarship. He cannot open, but out there flies a blunder. Surely he ought to be familiar with the life of Franklin; and yet he referred to this household character, while acting as agent of our fathers in England, as above suspicion; and this was done that he might give point to a false contrast with the agent of Kansas -- not knowing that, however, they may differ in genius and fame, in this experience they are alike; that Franklin, when intrusted with the petition of Massachusetts Bay, was assaulted by a foul-mouthed speaker, where he could not be heard in defence, and denounced as a "thief" even as the agent of Kansas has been assaulted in this floor, and denounced as a "forger." And let not the vanity of the Senator be inspired by the parallel with the British statesmen of that day; for it is only in hostility to Freedom that any parallel can be recognized.

**This abridged version of Preston Brooks' defense speech to  
Congress may be found at  
<http://www.bartleby.com/268/9/15.html#txt1>**

SOME 1 time since a senator from Massachusetts allowed himself, in an elaborately prepared speech, to offer a gross insult to my State, and to a venerable friend who is my State representative and who was absent at the time. Not content with that, he published to the world, and circulated extensively, this uncalled-for libel on my State and my blood. Whatever insults my State insults me. Her history and character have commanded my pious veneration; and in her defense I hope I shall always be prepared, humbly and modestly, to perform the duty of a son. I should have forfeited my own self-respect, and perhaps the good opinion of my countrymen, if I had failed to resent such an injury by calling the offender in question to a personal account. It was a personal affair, and in taking redress into my own hands I meant no disrespect to the Senate of the United States or to this House. 1

But if I had committed a breach of privilege, it was the privilege of the Senate, and not of this House, which was violated. I was answerable *there* and not *here*. They had no right, as it seems to me, to prosecute me in these Halls; nor have you the right in law or under the Constitution, as I respectfully submit, to take jurisdiction over offenses committed against them. The Constitution does not justify them in making such a request, nor this House in granting it. If, unhappily, the day should ever come when sectional or party feeling should run so high as to control all other considerations of public duty or justice, how easy it will be to use such precedents for the excuse of arbitrary power, in either House, to expel members of the minority who may have rendered themselves obnoxious to the prevailing spirit in the House to which they belong. 2

If I desired to kill the senator why did I not do it? You all admit that I had him in my power. It was expressly to avoid taking life that I used an ordinary cane, presented to me by a friend in Baltimore nearly three months before its application to the “bare head” of the Massachusetts senator. I went to work very deliberately, as I am charged—and this is admitted—and speculated somewhat as to whether I should employ a horsewhip or a cowhide; but knowing that the senator was my superior in strength, it occurred to me that he might wrest it from my hand, and then—for I never attempt anything I do not perform—I might have been compelled to do that which I would have regretted the balance of my natural life. 3

My answer is, that the senator would not accept a message; and having formed the unalterable determination to punish him, I believed that the offense of “sending a hostile message,” superadded to the indictment for assault and battery, would subject me to legal penalties more severe than would be imposed for a simple assault and battery. That is my answer. 4

To such as have given their votes and made their speeches on the constitutional principles involved, and without indulging in personal vilification, I owe my respect. But, sir, they have written me down upon the history of the country as worthy of expulsion, and in no unkindness I must tell them that for all future time my self-respect 5

requires that I shall pass them as strangers. And now, Mr. Speaker, I announce to you and to this House, that I am no longer a member of the Thirty-fourth Congress.

**Note 1.** Delivered in the House of Representatives on July 14, 1856. Abridged. The assault occurred on May 22.

**Newspaper Editorials on the Caning of Senator Charles Sumner**  
**From the Secession Era Editorials of Furman University**  
(<http://history.furman.edu/~benson/docs/index.htm>)

**New York, *Tribune*, 23 May 1856 [Republican]**

By the news from Washington it will be seen that Senator Sumner has been savagely and brutally assaulted, while sitting in his seat in the Senate chamber, by the Hon. Mr. Brooks of South Carolina, the reason assigned therefore being that the Senator's remarks on Mr. Butler of South Carolina, who is uncle to the man who made the attack. The particulars show that Mr. Sumner was struck unawares over the head by a loaded cane and stunned, and then the ruffianly attack was continued with many blows, the Hon. Mr. Keitt of South Carolina keeping any of those around, who might be so disposed, from attempting a rescue. No meaner exhibition of Southern cowardice -- generally miscalled Southern chivalry -- was ever witnessed. It is not in the least a cause for wonder that a member of the national House of Representatives, assisted by another as a fender-off, should attack a member of the national Senate, because, in the course of a constitutional argument, the last had uttered words which the first chose to consider distasteful. The reasons for the absence of collision between North and South -- collision of sentiment and person -- which existed a few years back, have ceased; and as the South has taken the oligarchic ground that Slavery ought to exist, irrespective of color -- that there must be a governing class and a class governed -- that Democracy is a delusion and a lie -- we must expect that Northern men in Washington, whether members or not, will be assaulted, wounded or killed, as the case may be, so long as the North will bear it. The acts of violence during this session -- including one murder -- are simply overtures to the drama of which the persecutions, murders, robberies and war upon the Free-State men in Kansas, constitute the first act. We are either to have Liberty or Slavery. Failing to silence the North by threats, notwithstanding the doughfaced creatures who so long misrepresented the spirit of the Republic and of the age, the South now resorts to actual violence. It is reduced to a question whether there is to be any more liberty of speech south of Mason and Dixon's line, even in the ten miles square of the District of Columbia. South of that, liberty has long since departed; but whether the common ground where the national representatives meet is to be turned into a slave plantation where Northern members act under the lash, the bowie-knife and the pistol, is a question to be settled. That Congress will take any action in view of this new event, we shall not be rash enough to surmise; but if the Northern people are not generally the poltroons they are taken for by the hostile slavebreeders and slavedrivers of the South, they will be heard from. As a beginning, they should express their sentiments upon this brutal and dastardly outrage in their popular assemblies. The Pulpit should not be silent.

If, indeed, we go on quietly to submit to such outrages, we deserve to have our names flattened, our skins blacked, and to be placed at work under task-masters; for we have lost the noblest attributes of freemen, and are virtually slaves.

**Columbia, South Carolina, *South Carolinian*, 27 May 1856 [Democratic] "Public Approval of Mr. Brooks"**

We were not mistaken in asserting, on Saturday last, that the Hon. Preston S. Brooks had not only the approval, but the hearty congratulations of the people of South Carolina for his summary chastisement of the abolitionist Sumner.

Immediately upon the reception of the news on Saturday last, a most enthusiastic meeting was convened in the town of Newberry, at which Gen. Williams, the Intendant, presided. Complimentary resolutions were introduced by Gen. A. C. Garlington, and ardent speeches made by him, Col. S. Fair, Maj. Henry Sumner, and others. The meeting voted him a handsome gold-headed cane, which we saw yesterday, on its way to Washington, entrusted to the care of Hon. B. Simpson. At Anderson, the same evening, a meeting was called, and complimentary resolutions adopted. We heard one of Carolina's truest and most honored matrons from Mr. Brooks' district send a message to him by Maj. Simpson, saying "that the ladies of the South would send him *hickory* sticks, with which to chastise Abolitionists and Red Republicans whenever he wanted them."

Here in Columbia, a handsome sum, headed by the Governor of the State, has been subscribed, for the purpose of presenting Mr. Brooks with a splendid silver pitcher, goblet and stick, which will be conveyed to him in a few days by the hands of gentlemen delegated for that purpose. In Charleston similar testimonials have been ordered by the friends of Mr. Brooks.

And, to add the crowning glory to the good work, the slaves of Columbia have already a handsome subscription, and will present an appropriate token of their regard to him who has made the first practical issue for their preservation and protection in their rights and enjoyments as the happiest laborers on the face of the globe.

Meetings of approval and sanction will be held, not only in Mr. Brooks' district, but throughout the State at large, and a general and hearty response of approval will re-echo the words, "Well done," from Washington to the Rio Grande.