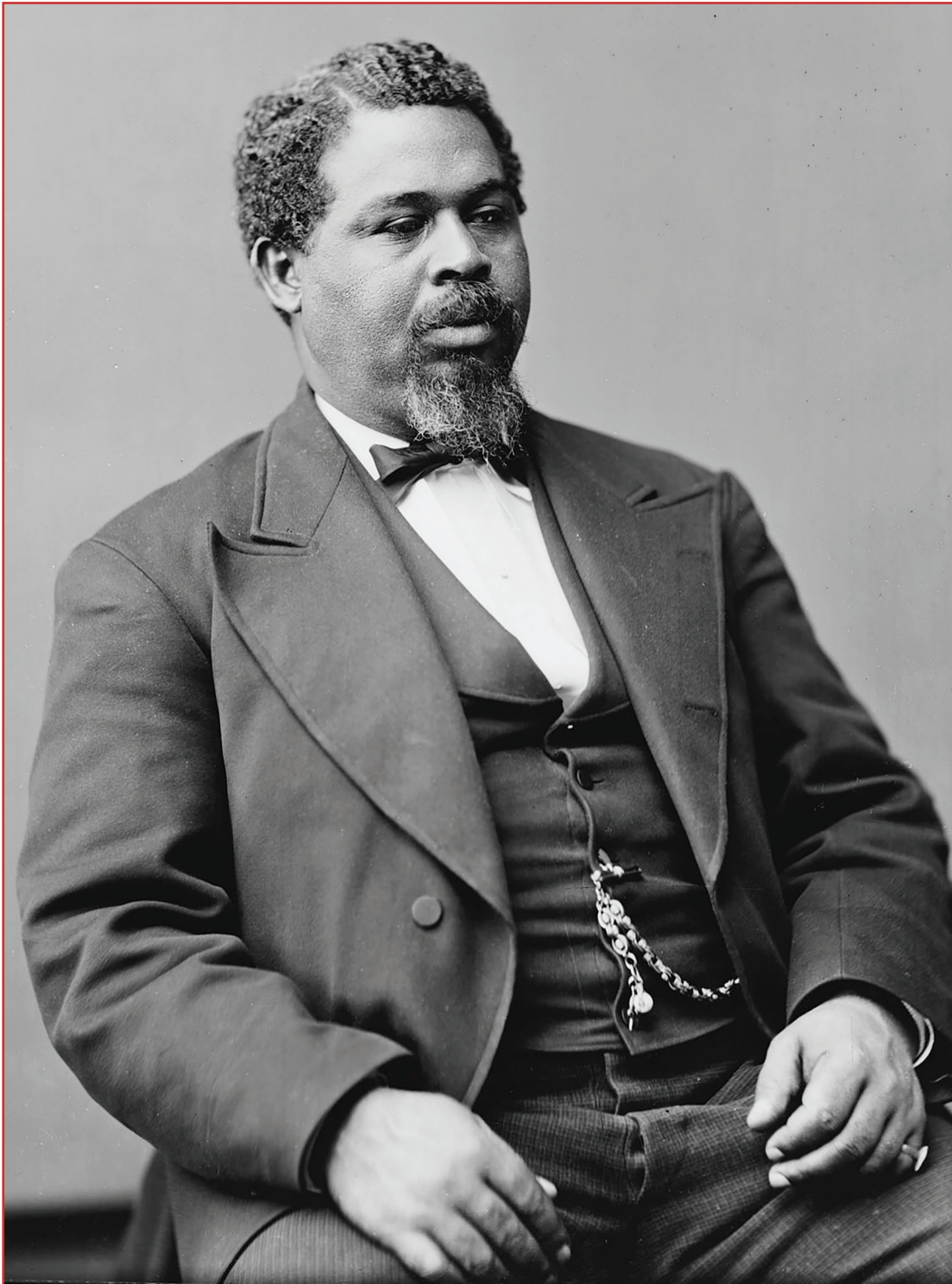


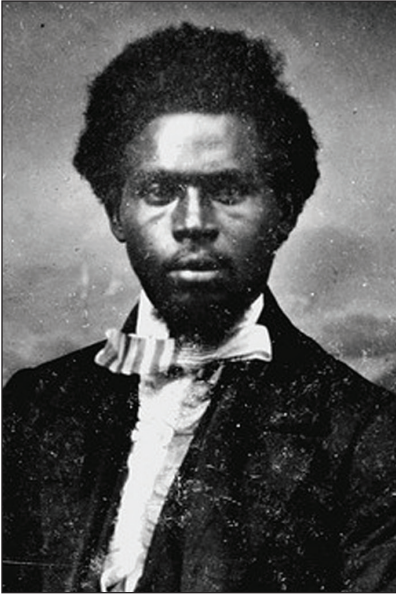
# ROBERT SMALLS LESSON PLAN

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WITH STORYTREE CHILDREN'S THEATRE



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AMERICAN POLITICIAN, PUBLISHER AND NAVAL PILOT  
BORN 1839 - DIED 1915



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**“LET US MAKE A CONSTITUTION FOR ALL THE PEOPLE, ONE WE WILL BE PROUD OF AND OUR CHILDREN WILL RECEIVE WITH DELIGHT.”**

Robert Smalls was an American politician, publisher and naval pilot. Born into slavery in Beaufort, South Carolina, he freed himself, his crew, and their families during the American Civil War by commandeering a Confederate transport ship, CSS Planter, in Charleston harbor, on May 13, 1862, and sailing it from Confederate-controlled waters of the harbor to the U.S. blockade that surrounded it. He then piloted the ship to the Union-controlled enclave in Beaufort-Port Royal-Hilton Head area, where it became a Union warship. His example and persuasion helped convince President Abraham Lincoln to accept African-American soldiers into the Union Army.



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## AWARDS

A gold medal was presented to Mr. Smalls on behalf of the colored people of New York by Mr. J. J. Zuille. October 2, 1862

### **About the Award:**

The medal is of gold, and bears a representation of the steamer Planter leaving Charleston harbor, when near Sumter. The federal fleet is seen in the distance. On the reverse it bears this inscription: "Presented to Robert Smalls by the colored citizens of New York, October 2, 1862, as a token of their regard for his heroism, his love of liberty and his patriotism."

## CURRICULUM VOCABULARY

**USS Planter** – The Confederate ship Smalls took to the Union Blockade

**Confederate Army** - The military land force for the Confederate States of America (mainly the southern states) during the Civil War

**Union Army** - The military land force for United States Army (mainly the Northern States) during the Civil War

**Civil War** - a war fought between the southern and northern states from 1861 – 1865

**Historical Character** - historical figure is a famous person in history, such as Abraham Lincoln, George Washington, Robert Smalls The concept is generally used in the sense that the person really existed in the past, as opposed to being legendary.

## THEATRE/STORY VOCABULARY

**Monologue** – When one person is speaking.

**Context** – the circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, and in terms of which it can be fully understood and assessed.

## MATERIALS

**Written Monologue**

**Video Monologue**

**TO UNDERSTAND A STORY, YOU MUST HAVE CONTEXT.**

**Context is** - the circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, and in terms of which it can be fully understood and assessed. In acting, we call this the When/Where/Who. When I am speaking? Where am I speaking? And Who am I speaking to?

## UNDERSTANDING THE STORY

### WHEN/WHERE/WHO?

**When is Robert Smalls talking in the monologue?**

- a. Before the escape
- b. During the escape
- c. After the escape

**How did you get your answer?**

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**Who is he speaking with?**

- a. SC senators at that Constitutional Convention
- b. His daughter
- c. His mother

**How did you get your answer?**

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**How did Robert Smalls disguise himself?**

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**Why was the USS Planter so important to the Union?**

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**As he starts to tell the story of that night, how does he feel? How do you know?**

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## MONOLOGUE

*SMALLS IS ADDRESSING THE STATE SENATE AT THE 1895 CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION. THIS IS HIS FINAL SENTENCE.*

*Costume: black jacket, white collared shirt, tie. Look sharp.*

Let us make a Constitution for all the people, one we will be proud of and our children will receive with delight. *{actual quote}*

*HE SIGHS AND LOOKS BACK AT THE CAMERA, HIS DAUGHTER*

And what happened? Tillman and the rest voted to disenfranchise the Negro anyway. How did this happen? How did it come to this? After the war, we were moving forward. At the 1868 Constitutional Convention, we ratified the most progressive constitution in the country. Whites and Blacks had equal voices, and now 27 years later, it seems we've lost our voice. And once again, our Freedom.

Freedom.

Freedom.

I love that word. That's all I've ever wanted Freedom. Freedom for you, my sweet girl, freedom for my wife, freedom for everyone of any color of any background. We the people, all of us, have a right to freedom.

President Lincoln asked me why I risked my life and my family's life on that warm spring night in May 13, 1862, and do you know what I answered? Freedom.

That night. What a night that was. I was thinking of my mom, she was on a plantation in Beaufort, and I was thinking of her as I steered The Planter through the harbor.

My mom. What a woman. Your grandmother.

*[chuckles to himself at the memory]* I was what some might say a "privileged slave" if there ever is such a thing. The McKee family took to me, and I didn't have to work in the fields. But do you know what my momma did? Your Grandmother? She asked massa, to have me taken

into the field and see the Negroes working in the field. It was hot. The sun beating down on their backs. Never looking up, just working. Working. Working and Sweating. And I remember one of the men pausing as if he was just stopping to take a breath. And one of the men in charge started yelling at him to get back to work. He took one more breath as he heaved back into the picking, and I guess it was one breath too many. They took him to the whipping the post.

The whipping post. They beat that man for taking a breath. A breath.

That moment changed everything for me. I knew then that those white men, the McKee family, no matter how kindly they treated me, that to them, my breath belonged to them. I was their property.

So, what did I do? I started getting in trouble. Some might say, good trouble. [wink]. But momma called it bad trouble. I started to breaking the rules. Even spent time in jail. That's when my momma had me sent down to the harbor. Had me start workin' on my boats. On The Planter. A beautiful ship. I learned everything I could about that ship and the harbor.

Now you see, that's the interesting thing about the white man. He thinks that the color of our skin makes us dumb. What kind of thinking is that? How can my skin stop me from thinking and learning and discovering?

But your skin can't stop from you thinking, now can it? And I just kept learning everything I could.

I started working on The Planter a month before the war broke out. I was there on the harbor when the South fired on Fort Sumter. People on their rooftops cheering on the Confederate soldiers. Me just standing there, looking. Looking. Wondering. Thinking.

And then, a year and two months later my chance came. The Planter was loaded with supplies. It was supposed to set sail in the morning, but I had other plans.

What a night, May 12. I took the wheel of the boat. I took the wheel of The Planter. 3:30AM. 16 people, including myself. Including you. Your momma. Your sister. You had to be with me, I couldn't leave you behind.

***BEAT - Breath***

I was scared. Scared all the way to my bones.

I had taken the captain's uniform and his broad straw hat.

That hat. I pulled it down just like so, so they couldn't see my face. We had to get past Fort Johnson. Fort Sumter. Get there before dawn. Before anyone noticed. We reached Fort Johnson, my heart raced, but I knew the whistle code. Twice long. One Short [makes the sound].

Then Fort Sumter. By then the sun was coming up. Just enough for us to see the confederate soldiers. Just enough light for them to see my skin wasn't white. But I pulled that hat down. I put that collar up. I knew the code.

Twice Long. One Short.

And they let us pass. No one saw that we didn't turn left. And we headed for the Union Blockade. Confederate Flag still raised. I had to time it just right. Too soon and the Confederates would've fired on us. Too late, and the Union soldiers would've fired on us.

### ***BEAT – Breath***

And we did it.

The look on the union soldiers' faces, when we emerged, 16 slaves smiling, singing, dancing, rejoicing for our freedom.

And did we have a gift for the soldiers.

The Planter was carrying 6 canyons, some of them stolen Union canyons. 1000lbs of ammunition and plans, Confederate Army plans.

I had done it, I had brought my family to freedom, but knew we weren't free yet. I needed to do more. So, I sent you and your momma and sister back to Beaufort, and I became a sailor for the Federal Navy.

Not officially, of course, my skin was still black after all. My commander called me a pleasant looking darky.

**LONG BEAT**

I did enjoy using all the knowledge I collected from the Confederates against them. Troop positions. Gun placements. Codes. Supply routes and schedules.

**LONG BEAT**

And then I continued to fight. I fought in 17 battles. I earned a rank and pension from the federal army.

I was there, on The Planter when Charleston surrendered. Pulled it right up to the Confederate headquarters. And then I went home.

Home.

Home to Beaufort. To the plantation where my momma was born as an enslaved person. Where I was born as an enslaved person.

And I bought that plantation. But the fighting didn't end.

**LONG BEAT**

And if Tillman and his men are any indication, the fighting won't end for a long time.

Oh, my sweet girl. We have to make them see us. A Constitution for all the people. All the people.

Freedom. Freedom.

*There should be a melancholy in his voice at the end. A tiredness.*