



The Inventor's Lineage: An American Moment in History

Grade Level: 9th - 12th Grade

Unit Objectives:

Students will.....

1. Learn about the life and scientific contribution of inventor Lewis Howard Latimer, through a virtual tour of the Lewis Latimer museum.
2. Build an understanding of Latimer's family tree, including his parents' long history of belonging, and what led him to become a brilliant inventor.
3. Become knowledgeable in differentiating the reasons of why slavery became both an economic and cultural foundation of America over the span of four centuries.
4. Work in small groups and individually to brainstorm then draft their family histories, recognizing the importance of knowing how their families made them into the inventors they have become!
5. Create a personal Family Tree to reflect on students' personal history. Students will share their creations with the class once complete.

Concepts/Skills:

African American history, Family trees and Ancestry, Collaborative Problem Solving, 2D Spatial Translation and Reasoning, and Practice with Critical Thinking.



The Inventor's Home

Learn about Latimer's Family History

Challenge

Create your own Family Tree!

Learning Objective

Build an understanding of Latimer's Family history, while also exploring the importance of Family Trees when creating our own family structures. Students will look at how Latimer's family history of enslavement affected his opportunities as a Black Inventor in the 1800s.

Duration

Suggestion time 60 minutes

Lesson Outline

Engage	10 minutes
Explore	10 minutes
Explain	20 minutes
Elaborate	15 minutes
Evaluate	5 minutes

ENGAGE

10 Minutes

Introduce the concept of Lewis Latimer's life and family history, starting with his parent's George Latimer and Rebecca Smith, two enslaved people from Norfolk, Virginia. Give a short description on the fact of slavery in American History, but focus more on Latimer's personal family history.

Look around the Latimer Museum, and point to pictures of George Latimer and his parents. Ask the group if they can see any physical similarities between them. Try and bring them to an understanding of what makes a family.

What can you see about Latimer's family? Does he look like his parents? Do you think they have the same personality? Can you see any similarities there? What can someone learn from their parents/family?

THINKING PROMPT:

Think about what you've heard about Family Trees before. How are they used? What are they meant to do? Think about the time period that Latimer's parents are from. How do you think this time period affected their family unit?

Let's talk about Latimer's parents. What type of labor do you think they had to do during slavery? What does it mean to be owned by another person? Can you think of any freedoms that they may not have had because of this?

Answers could include: Family Trees show who's in your family, and who one family member is to another (parent/child, aunts/uncles, cousins, grandparents). Latimer learned a lot from his parent's story, but their own family history may have been harder to find because of slavery.

INQUIRY QUESTIONS:

- What is a family tree?
- What is it used for? Why is it used?
- What would your own family tree look like?



EXPLORE

10 minutes

Watch Video:

[“Lewis Howard Latimer Life Story - Inventor and Innovator”](#)
(6:45 Minutes)



Lewis Howard Latimer (1848-1928), was an African-American inventor, electrical pioneer, and a son of fugitive slaves. With no access to formal education, Latimer taught himself many skills throughout his life and career, soon becoming an extraordinary inventor!

The story of Lewis Latimer's life begins quite a bit before he was born in 1848. His parents, George Latimer and Rebecca Smith started their remarkable life journey in Norfolk, Virginia, where George Latimer was born to a white slave-owner Mitchell Latimer and an enslaved woman named Margaret Olmsted.

KEY VOCABULARY

Family Tree: a visual drawing or picture of a tree that shows the history of one's family, with family members like grandparents, parents, children, and cousins included on each branch. Because of slavery, Latimer's parents had their family history taken from them, making Latimer appreciate their strength even more.

Genealogy: the study of family history and lineage. Genealogists use a mixture of historical records and personal research to help paint the picture of a person's family members and lineage. The research gained from genealogists can also be used to create an accurate representation of family structures.

Slavery: an system that supports the dehumanization of people into property for either control, free labor, or other forms of oppression. In American History, Africans were taken from their home countries through a forced migration, and brought to America as property.

Fugitive Slave: an enslaved person who escapes from one state into another, or into another federal territory. In American History, the Fugitive Slave Acts of 1850 reinforced the notion that enslaved people had no freedoms in the eyes of the law, and must be returned to slave-holders once escaping.

Abolitionist: a person who favors the abolition of a practice or institution, especially capital punishment or (formerly) slavery. During the time of Latimer's parents, abolitionists recognized the horrors of slavery, and advocated for its end fearlessly.

THE FAMILY TREE

We all come from someone, which is why Family Trees are so important! When curious about the members of your family, a Family Tree can be a great way to track your family's journey, starting from a grandparent, and ending with you and your siblings. We don't always have all the answers when it comes to our families, and that's okay! Family Trees just scratch the surface.

What is a family structure?

Everyone's family structure can look different. A family can be made up of a parent, siblings, and even a family pet, or of grandparents and cousins. No matter the makeup, family structures are the foundation of who we are, and are the main reason why Family Trees are so useful! It helps us see our families in a fun and creative way.

What is the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade? How did it affect Latimer's Family?

The **Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade (noun)** is referred to as the trade route of human beings from the African Continent, to the Americas and the Carribean. The slave trade regularly used the triangular trade route and its Middle Passage, and existed from the 16th to the 19th centuries.

By the time that Lewis's parents were alive, the trans-Atlantic slave trade had become illegal, meaning that it was no longer possible for southern slaveholders to capture more people in Africa and force them to work for free. The limitations of obtaining more free labor made it even more dangerous for enslaved people to escape.

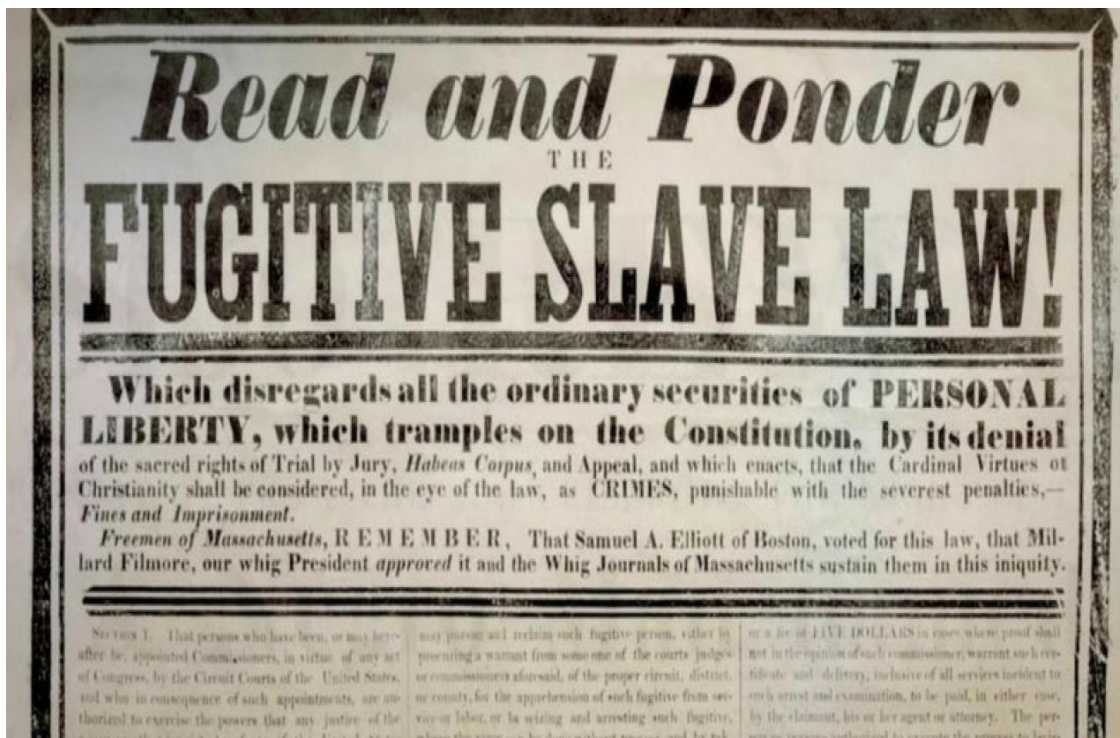


How did the pressures to end slavery affect slave holders?

With the slave trade being the backbone of economy for centuries, many southern slave holders were concerned with maintaining the status quo that it became a very lucrative business to catch fugitive slaves and return them to the south.

These people were called slave catchers, and they would indiscriminately capture African Americans living in the north. The lack of legal recourse for fugitive slaves and free blacks living in fear of being captured became an important cause of the abolitionists, and Lewis's father George Latimer would end up playing a significant role in eventually changing the laws regarding fugitive slaves.

The issue of escaped slaves in the north would become a big problem between the Northern free states and Southern slave states that would be a contributing factor that would eventually lead the country to Civil War.



THINKING PROMPT:

Lewis Howard Latimer was an inventor whose life is greatly influenced by that of his parents. Their decision to run away opened the door for Latimer to become one of the most influential scientific creators of our time! Think about the historical information you were just given, and consider the following.

How did hardships affect the Latimer Family Structure?

“Like many other families who experience hardship, Latimer’s parents being previously enslaved may have made their family structure smaller, but also stronger together.”

Do you see any similarities between Latimer’s Family Tree, and the one you would make for yourself? What is the same? What’s different?

“Latimer and I would both have close family members on our trees, but I can think of grandparents, cousins, and other family members that I would add to the drawing of my Family Tree.”

What are some risks for runaway/fugitive slaves?

“There was a chance that they would be found by slave catchers, and returned to their slave owners. Once returned, there could be a number of horrible consequences such as torture or death.”

Why was the work of abolitionists so important?

“Abolitionists advocated for the ultimate freedom of African Americans, making sure that they were respected and given the same, irreversible rights as white citizens.”

How do you think Latimer’s parents and their enslavement affected his childhood?

“Latimer’s parents wanted the best life for their child, and when growing up, he recognized the freedoms that he had, ones that were not granted to his parents once enslaved. There was also an anxiety of being captured by slave catchers that never left the mind of his parents.”



WORKSHEET

NAME
GRADE

DATE
TEACHER

ACTIVITY:

Mr. Lewis Latimer's Family History is the reason why he became one of the most influential inventions of all time. Take a moment to think about your family history, and write down any achievements or hardships that you have been told by your relatives. How has your family history affected YOU?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

How do you think Latimer's Family History affected his life?

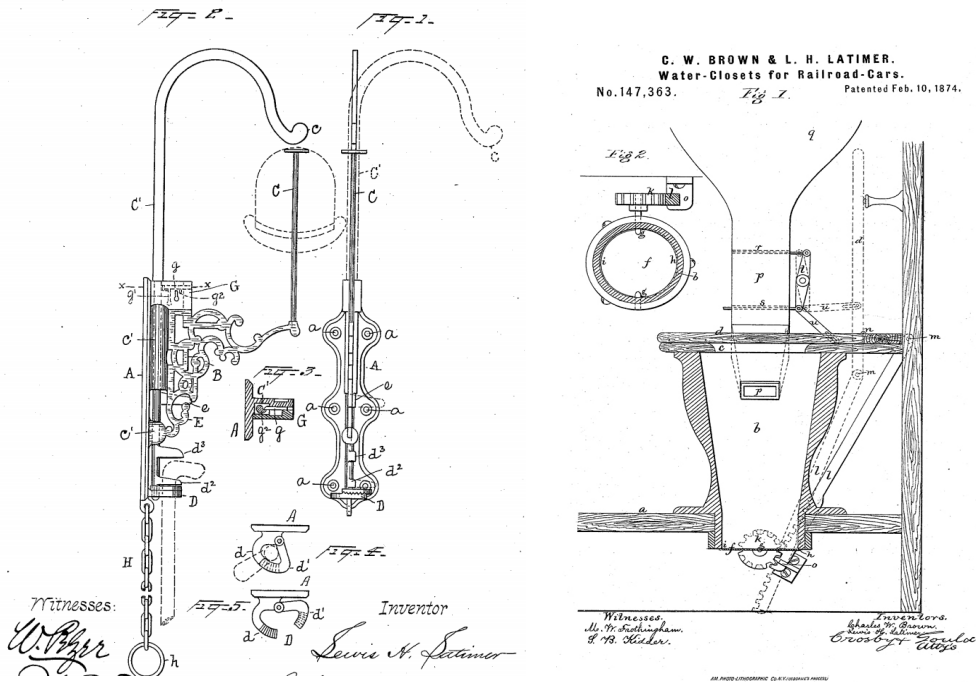
What about your family history? What moments stand out to you?

Are there any places in your family history that you are unsure of? Write them down.

What is your favorite thing about your family history? What are you most proud of?

EXPLAIN

20 minutes



Lewis Latimer was an inventor who lived and invented in the late 1800's. His ideas brought new inventions to people in the United States and around the world. His innovations - and the tools used - are the foundation of a few machines we have today.



BRAINSTORM

Explain to your students that Family Histories look different for everyone. Also mention that some histories have been permanently erased because of slavery, and its impact on the family unit. Ask your students to consider these differences when thinking about their own personal histories.

What Do You Know: 3 minutes discussion

Take notes on a board or Padlet. Exploring Lewis Latimer's Family History, think about the facts that he knows about his parents. What are their names? How long have they been in America? When did they escape? What do you know about your family?

Examples: Are they from another country? When did they migrate to America? What other information comes up?

What Don't You Know: 3 minutes discussion

Students can also brainstorm what they aren't too familiar with in regard to their family histories. For Latimer, there are some facts that he will never know, for his family's full history was taken because of slavery. Not everything is known about, and so, allow your students to explore the unknown.

Examples: Do you know your distant relatives? Are there some grandparents you never met? What haven't you learned about your family history yet?

ELABORATE

15 minutes

After learning about Lewis Latimer's Family History, we will ask students to complete a design of their family tree. Ask them what their family tree will look like, and- if possible- which moments in history have affected their family's story.

Work with students to complete a simple design of their family tree that would be used to outline and share their histories with their classmates.

What would be included in your family tree? What aspects of your life would you highlighted? How would your family history represent who you are and who you are becoming?

Remember students should consider:

1. The scope of their family tree. Does it go back to their parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents?
2. How would their family tree help paint the full picture of who they are?

The sky's the limit for this activity! Encourage students to think big. Many students will not know exactly what their full family histories are, this is not important for this assignment. The focus is demonstrating an understanding of their own lives through recognizing that they have a history living within them!



WORKSHEET

NAME
GRADE

DATE
TEACHER

ACTIVITY:

Sketch a symbol or tiny drawing to represent all of your family members on the tree. Add their names and relation to you. Use the back of the paper for more space. Don't worry about not knowing all of the names or answers. Wherever you are unsure, leave it blank and ask a family member for help.

EVALUATE

5 minutes

Assessment Rubric

Use the students' design and written descriptions to evaluate students' ability to determine the layout of their Family Trees!

Evaluate their family trees for the use of descriptive adjectives, voice, and organization and their illustration based on family histories and depth of experience.

	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Needs Improvement
Student demonstrated understanding of a Family Tree.				
Student provided a clear understanding of the function of a Family Tree.				
Student shared their work successfully.				
Student clearly depicted their Family Tree using grade level descriptive language.				
Student shared their work confidently to the class and were able to communicate with others.				

Common Core Standards

Speaking & Listening

SL.6.4

Present claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically and using pertinent descriptions, facts, and details to accentuate main ideas or themes; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

Speaking & Listening

SL.7.4, SL.8.4

Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with pertinent descriptions, facts, details, and examples; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

Next Generation Science Standards:

MS-ETS1-1

Define the criteria and constraints of a design problem with sufficient precision to ensure a successful solution, taking into account relevant scientific principles and potential impacts on people and the natural environment that may limit possible solutions.