

## Questions for Classroom Discussion

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### **Two Letters Regarding Bleeding Kansas**

1. For what reason in the spring of 1855 did five of John Brown's sons move to Osawatomie, Kansas on the banks of Pottawatomie Creek?
2. What can we speculate about John Brown's motives when we read that upon learning that the anti-slavery cause was in trouble and in need of weapons, Brown loaded a wagon with rifles and broadswords and headed for Osawatomie?
3. The proslavery territorial legislature (Kansas wasn't yet a state and wouldn't become one until 1861) passed a series of laws forbidding what two things?
4. How would you have reacted to the two laws passed by the Kansas territorial legislature if you had been an abolitionist?
5. What amendment to the U.S. Constitution did one of the laws violate?
6. Because they were so angry at the pro-slavery territorial legislature, what "unsanctioned" organization did the anti-slavery and free-state settlers organize?
7. As both free and slave state supporters started to fight, the violence escalated, until what happened on May 21, 1856 (supposedly in response to the beating of a pro-slavery sheriff)?
8. Why do you think the pro-slavery forces chose Lawrence, Kansas as their target?
9. What was John Brown's motive for launching his attack on pro-slavery settlers in the aftermath of the attack on and burning of Lawrence, Kansas?
10. What happened the night of May 24, 1856?

### **The Letters**

#### A Son's Praise of His Father's Plight

11. What happened to John Brown Jr. after pro-slavery forces captured him?
12. What does the author mean when he states, "By now Kansas had descended into all out guerrilla war"?
13. What commonly held belief or sentiment does John Brown Jr. express about the only way to end the fighting?

14. Instead of focusing on the murders of the pro-slavery settlers, what does Brown Jr. focus on in his letter?
15. Whose arrival brings about an end to fighting in Kansas?
16. When does Kansas finally join the Union as a state and does it join the nation as a free state or a slave state?

#### A Widow's Response to a "Cold Blood" Attack

17. Was James Doyle a slave owner?
18. Why did John Brown choose to go to the Doyle's home and target James Doyle and sons?
19. What did Mrs. Doyle claim happened to the three men?
20. How do most historians believe Mr. Doyle and sons were killed?
21. For what reason do most historians think Brown shot the three men?
22. Regardless of how the Doyles were murdered, it is uniformly believed that Brown was responsible for what?
23. Mrs. Doyle claims in the letter that Brown had her family members murdered for what reason?
24. Mrs. Doyle says Brown murdered her husband and two sons and left her as a  
“\_\_\_\_\_.”
25. Defenders of John Brown then and today don't focus on the massacre and instead focus on what aspect about John Brown?

#### Reading Questions:

Letter from John Brown Jr., August 16, 1856

1. In the first paragraph, what event does Brown Jr. say is going on near the U.S. Calvary camp where he is being held?
2. In the first paragraph, what does Brown Jr. claim the “Ruffians” have been doing to “free state settlers”?
3. In the second paragraph, how does Brown Jr. say a group of anti-slavery settlers managed to get a group of pro-slavery men out of the log cabin in which they were hiding?

4. In the third paragraph, what had Brown Jr. just learned happened the night before?
5. In the third paragraph, what happened to the pro-slavery “Col[onel] Titus”?

Letter from John Brown Jr., August 19, 1856

6. In the second paragraph, what does Brown Jr. say Governor Shannon and Major Sedgwick, attempted to do “yesterday”?
7. In the second paragraph, what conditions does Brown Jr. say the anti-slavery men made before they would release the pro-slavery prisoners?
8. In the third paragraph, Brown Jr. says “the great majority of [anti-slavery men] have made up their minds that nothing short of war to the death can save [them] from” what?
9. In the “Note written vertically at top of 1” what does Brown Jr. say about the prospects for Kansas becoming a free state?

Letter from Mahala Doyle to John Brown, 1859

10. Although Mrs. Doyle says “vengeance” was not hers to have, how did she feel about the capture of John Brown?
11. Why do you think Mrs. Doyle says to John Brown that, “you can now appreciate my distress”?
12. What does Mrs. Doyle hope John Brown receives (or to use her words, “meets”)?
13. Who does Mrs. Doyle say is “very desirous” to be at John Brown’s execution?
14. What does Mrs. Doyle say her son would like to do, if “gov: wise would permit it”?