

Wanderer Online Exhibit Classroom Assignment

The purpose of this assignment is to help students understand the impact of the *Wanderer* events on Americans, especially Savannahians. For this essay assignment students will be writing as a person from 1859 about the *Wanderer* landing and trial. To help them with this essay each student should be given a biography (see below) of a person living in 1859. It is important for students to write from the **viewpoint** of these characters.

The Biographies: The biographies provide a brief description of each character's age, gender, race, name, occupation, beliefs, etc. **This information should be the guide lines for writing each essay.** For instance, if a student's character is poorly educated, or very well educated, they should think about the type of words and phrases their characters would use. Students should also notice **when their characters wrote** their letters after the *Wanderer* trial ended, this can tell them how involved or excited their characters were about the trial.

The Trial and More: The primary theme of the essays should be the characters' feelings, opinions, and judgments of the *Wanderer* events. However, teachers should make students aware that letter writing was a way for families and friends to communicate over long distances after many weeks or months had gone by, so people seldom wrote about one subject. Each biography contains information on the character's job and family, so details on those subjects would be important to include. Last names for the characters have not been given, so students should be encouraged to make one up. Students should also make up the names of their character's children, friends, spouses, business, etc. This is a great chance to be creative!

One More Thing: The *Wanderer* exhibit contains important information on issues of the 1850's, such as the "Fugitive Slave Act," the "Compromise of 1850," the "Kansas-Nebraska Act," and "John Brown," so students should include at least one of these subjects in their essay. These legislative acts and events had a strong impact on the viewpoints of people living in the 1850's.

P.S. At the end of the letter each student should write a postscript stating whether or not they agree with the opinion of their character and why. (This should be written in the student's **own voice**, and not that of their character.)

The Biographies:

Name: Betsy Johnson

Race: White

Gender: Female

Age: 31

Resident of: Savannah, Georgia (a slave state).

Occupation: Wife of a Savannah farmer.

Marital Status: Married with 8 children.

Education: none, but did learn to read and write from her mother.

Assignment:

Write a letter to your brother Godfrey in Montgomery, Alabama (a slave state). Date the letter: "November 24, 1859, Savannah, Georgia." **Hint:** this is one week after the *Wanderer* trial finished.

Things to Consider:

Betsy is married to Lyle Johnson - a small farm owner and member of the *Wanderer* jury. Betsy and Lyle are not wealthy enough to own slaves, but they **do** believe in slavery. Because Lyle had to serve on the jury, Betsy could not attend the *Wanderer* trial and stayed home to take care of the farm. But she heard all about the trial from Lyle, and wants to tell her brother Godfrey, a newspaper reporter, about the "goings on" in Savannah. This letter should include Betsy's view of the outcome of the *Wanderer* trial - why she thinks it was the right or wrong decision.

Name: Jonathan Miller

Race: Black

Gender: Male

Age: 63

Resident of: Savannah, Georgia (a slave state).

Occupation: Free Black and Minister of a Black church in Savannah.

Marital Status: Married with 5 adult children and 4 grandchildren.

Education: none, but did learn to read and write from the son of his former owner.

Assignment:

Write a letter to your friend and fellow Free Black Minister, Thomas, in Memphis, Tennessee (a slave state). Date the letter: "November 17, 1859, Savannah, Georgia." **Hint:** this is the date when the *Wanderer* trial finished.

Things to Consider:

Jonathan, known as "Reverend John," has been a Minister for 20 years. In his 40's he was able to buy his family's freedom from a businessman in Savannah. He is unusual in that he can **read** and **write** (most Blacks during this time could not). His friend Thomas can also read and write. This letter should include John's view of the outcome of the *Wanderer* trial – why he thinks it was the right or wrong decision.

Name: Lucy

Race: Black

Gender: Female

Age: 46

Resident of: Savannah, Georgia (a slave state)

Occupation: An urban slave who works at a fish-stand in downtown Savannah. NOTE: Urban slaves were different from plantation slaves. Urban slaves worked in the large houses in downtown Savannah, taking care of the house, stables, and children of their owners. They were also "hired out," like Lucy, to earn extra money. Their owners allowed them to keep some, all, or none of the money they earned while being hired out.

Marital Status: Married, no children.

Education: none.

Assignment:

Write a letter to your husband Bill in New York, New York (a free state). Date the letter: "November 19, 1859, Savannah, Georgia." **Hint:** this is two days after the *Wanderer* trial finished.

Things to Consider:

Lucy has been a slave all of her life. Two years ago her husband Bill escaped to the North through the Underground Railroad with the help of local abolitionist Richard P. Williams. Hopefully Lucy will be joining her husband soon. Lucy has no education and therefore **cannot** read or write. This letter is being transcribed in secret for her by Mr. Williams, who also promises to mail it for her (he has done this many times before). Lucy's husband, Bill, is also illiterate, but he always finds someone to read Lucy's letters to him. This letter should include Lucy's view of the outcome of the *Wanderer* trial – why she thinks it was the right or wrong decision.

Name: Richard P. Williams

Race: White

Gender: Male

Age: 42

Resident of: Savannah, Georgia (a slave state)

Occupation: A store owner and an abolitionist (someone who wants to end slavery – yes there were abolitionists in the South).

Marital Status: Married with 2 teenage children.

Education: Attended College in New York.

Assignment:

Write a letter to your friend and fellow abolitionist, Jackson, in New York, New York (a free state). Date the letter: “November 18, 1859, Savannah, Georgia.” **Hint:** this is one day after the *Wanderer* trial finished.

Things to Consider:

Richard moved to Savannah from New York ten years ago and runs a successful dry-goods store. Upset by the treatment of slaves in Savannah, Richard became an abolitionist and member of the **Underground Railroad** five years ago. In that time he has helped 20 slaves escape to freedom in the North, with the help of his friend Jackson. This letter should include Richard’s view of the outcome of the *Wanderer* trial – why he thinks it was the right or wrong decision.

Name: Chester A. Harris

Race: White

Gender: Male

Age: 31

Resident of: New York, New York (a free state).

Occupation: Newspaper reporter for *The New York Times*.

Marital Status: Married with a four-year-old son.

Education: Completed College with a degree in Journalism. .

Assignment:

Write a newspaper article on the outcome of the *Wanderer* trial for *The New York Times*. Date the article: “November 17, 1859, Savannah, Georgia.” **Hint:** this is the date when the *Wanderer* trial finished.

Things to Consider:

As a newspaper reporter for the *New York Times* Chester has written several articles **condemning** the slave ship *Wanderer* and the slave trade – keep this in mind when you write your final *Wanderer* article for the newspaper. **Don’t forget** to include a headline for your article.

Name: Julia L. Marrow
Race: White
Gender: Female
Age: 25
Resident of: Savannah, Georgia (a slave state).
Occupation: Wife of plantation owner.
Marital Status: Married with 3 young children.
Education: 10th grade education.

Assignment:

Write a letter to your sister, Emily, in Boston Massachusetts (a free state). Date the letter: "November 22, 1859, Savannah, Georgia." **Hint:** this is five days after the *Wanderer* trial finished.

Things to Consider:

Julia grew up in Boston, and as a result **does not** believe in the slave trade or slavery. Her marriage to a Savannah plantation owner was arraigned. She has lived in Savannah for five years and it has been difficult for her to witness the treatment of her husband's slaves on his plantation. This letter should include Julia's view of the outcome of the *Wanderer* trial – why she thinks it was the right or wrong decision.

Name: Horus H. Smith
Race: White
Gender: Male
Age: 50
Resident of: Savannah, Georgia (a slave state).
Occupation: Wealthy cotton merchant.
Marital Status: Widowed with 5 children and 1 grandchild.
Education: Attended College in London, England but did not complete a degree.

Assignment:

Write a letter to your brother, William, in Charlestown, South Carolina (a slave state). Date the letter: "November 20, 1859, Savannah, Georgia." **Hint:** this is three days after the *Wanderer* trial finished.

Things to Consider:

Horus H. Smith is from a wealthy and well-known family in Savannah, he is also a **secessionist** (he believes the South should break away from the North and form its own country). His brother William is also a secessionist. This letter should include Horus's view of the outcome of the *Wanderer* trial – why he thinks it was the right or wrong decision.

Name: Lyle Johnson

Race: White

Gender: Male

Age: 35

Resident of: Savannah, Georgia (a slave state)

Occupation: JURIST, and farmer. **Important:** The jury of the *Wanderer* trial found the defendants NOT GUILTY.

Marital Status: Married with 8 children.

Education: 5th grade education.

Assignment:

Write a letter to your mother, Dorathea, in Jackson, Mississippi (a slave state). Date the letter: "November 19, 1859, Savannah, Georgia." **Hint:** this is two days after the *Wanderer* trial finished.

Things to Consider:

Lyle is a small farm owner and member of the *Wanderer* jury. Lyle is not wealthy enough to own slaves, but he **does** believe in slavery. Being a member of the *Wanderer* jury has been the **biggest** event in Lyle's life and he is very proud of his role in this important court case. This letter should include Lyle's reasons for finding the defendants NOT GUILTY.

Name: Edward W. Jefferson

Race: White

Gender: Male

Age: 37

Resident of: Savannah, Georgia (a slave state).

Occupation: JURIST, and rice plantation owner. **Important:** The jury of the *Wanderer* trial found the defendants NOT GUILTY.

Marital Status: Married with 2 children.

Education: College graduate.

Assignment:

Write a letter to your friend Gerald in Little Rock, Arkansas (a slave state). Date the letter: "November 18, 1859, Savannah, Georgia." **Hint:** this is one day after the *Wanderer* trial finished.

Things to Consider:

Edward Jefferson comes from one of the most distinguished families in Savannah. His ancestors include Revolutionary War heroes who fought at the "Siege of Savannah" in 1779. As the owner of a rice plantation outside of Savannah, Edward believes in slavery, but more than that: Edward is a secret member of the **Fire Eaters!** REMEMBER: Fire Eaters wanted a civil war so the South could separate from the North and form its own country. They also wanted to reopen the slave trade. Edward's friend, Gerald, is also a Fire Eater. This letter should include Edward's reasons for finding the defendants NOT GUILTY.

Historic Note:

Women and Blacks were not allowed to serve on juries during this time, so all jurists were White males.

Name: Gordon M. Atwell

Race: White

Gender: Male

Age: 25

Resident of: Savannah, Georgia (a slave state)

Occupation: JURIST, and river boat pilot. **Important:** The jury of the *Wanderer* trial found the defendants NOT GUILTY.

Marital Status: Unmarried.

Education: Completed the 4th grade.

Assignment:

Write a letter to your brother Tom in Toledo, Ohio (a free state). Date the letter: "November 22, 1859, Savannah, Georgia." **Hint:** this is five days after the *Wanderer* trial finished.

Things to Consider:

Gordon has been working on river boats since he was 12 years old. Gordon believes in slavery but he is not sure about the slave trade (forcing Africans onto ships and then selling them as slaves). Gordon is writing to his brother, Tom, who **does not** believe in slavery. This letter should not only include Gordon's reasons for finding the defendants NOT GUILTY, but a convincing argument supporting the institution of slavery.

Historic Note:

Women and Blacks were not allowed to serve on juries during this time, so all jurists were White males.