Students must read the “Foreword” of Peter Hoffer’s Cry Liberty (which the teacher has passed out).

Students must highlight important parts of the passage and annotate each page. (Note: Annotation requires that students write one comment or question related to the content in the margins.)

In their own words, students must summarize the Stono Rebellion based on the information from the following passage:

“Stono was the only full-scale slave rebellion to erupt in the British colonies of North America. Despite its relative magnitude, and despite its first panicked and then ferocious responses of South Carolina’s white residents, little information about the outbreak has survived. We catch glimpses of a band of slaves marching down Pon Pon road, which linked Charleston with Savannah; we hear drums beating and spy a flag hoisted at the head of the procession. Various reports permit us to make out the charred, smoking houses scattered in the procession’s wake. In short, we see clearly a rebellion in progress. But how did the uprising get to that point? What were the contingencies along the way, the long-held grudges or incidental sparks that brought these people together to tramp along the road?” (p. vii-viii.)

Lesson Plan: (written with a 50-minute class period in mind—could be extended)

Essential Question: How did enslaved people in colonial America exercise resistance?

Technique: Historical Thinking Lesson

Step 1: “Opening Up the Textbook”

Think-Pair-Share

- How does the textbook portray plantations and slavery during the colonial period?

  Students should notice that the book only uses a primary source from the plantation owner’s point of view. The book conveys that slavery was an essential part of the Southern economy for the production of cash crops.

- Do enslaved Africans have agency (the ability to change their situation) according to p. 141 of the Holt, Rhinehart, and Winston textbook? If so, in what ways do they exercise agency?

  Here, students may notice that an entire paragraph is dedicated to talking about how slaves could work unsupervised or on individual tasks. The book mentions the ability to buy one’s freedom, but does not tell us how frequently this practice occurred.

Step 2: Have students share their responses from the Think-Pair-Share activity about how the textbook discusses the agency of slaves on plantations. Students will most likely discuss how our textbook narrative is unclear. The narrative mentions some ways enslaved persons exercised agency but not to what extent and it does not mention any specific instances of rebellion.

Step 3: Explain to students that in this lesson we will be “Opening Up the Textbook” by dividing into three groups and having each group study another “voice.” After each group has worked to analyze the source, the groups will come back together to synthesize what they have learned.
Source #1:
Group 1 will present information from this source to the class.

The Stono Rebellion

Source: [http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/slavery-iv-slave-rebellions](http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/slavery-iv-slave-rebellions)

Excerpt:

From the earliest days of the peculiar institution, resistance was a constant feature of American slavery. It took many forms, from individual acts of sabotage, poor work, feigning illness, or committing crimes like arson and poisoning to escaping the system altogether by running away to the North. There were also “maroons”–groups of fugitive slaves who formed independent communities in inaccessible areas like Virginia’s Great Dismal Swamp and the Florida Everglades.

But the most dramatic instances were outright slave rebellions. Because American plantations were far smaller than those in other parts of the Western Hemisphere and because in the United States, unlike other areas, whites outnumbered slaves, slave rebellions were smaller and less frequent than in Brazil and the West Indies. (The most massive rebellion outside the United States was the slave insurrection of the 1790s that overthrew slavery and French rule in Saint Domingue and established the nation of Haiti.) Nevertheless, one scholar, Herbert Aptheker, has counted over two hundred plots, conspiracies, and actual uprisings between the early seventeenth century and the Civil War.

The colonial era witnessed two significant slave rebellions. In 1712, some twenty-five slaves armed themselves with guns and clubs and set fire to houses on the northern edge of New York City. They killed the first nine whites who arrived on the scene and then were killed or captured by soldiers. In the aftermath, eighteen participants were executed in the most brutal manner (individuals were burned alive, broken on the wheel, and subjected to other tortures). The event set a pattern for subsequent uprisings—the violence of the retribution far exceeded the mayhem committed by the rebelling slaves.

A second uprising, Cato’s Conspiracy, originated in Stono, South Carolina, in 1739. England at this time was at war with Spain, and a group of about eighty slaves took up arms and attempted to march to Spanish Florida, where they expected to find refuge. A battle ensued when they were overtaken by armed whites. Some forty-four blacks and twenty-one whites were killed.

Slavery in the United States was so carefully policed that rebellion became a near-impossibility. It is instructive that the three major plots occurred outside the plantation belt—two cities and a small farming area. Here, controls on slaves were often lax, and the conspirators could move about relatively freely. The leaders of the three plots were, compared to ordinary slaves, skilled, privileged individuals—a blacksmith (Prosser), a free black (Vesey), and a preacher (Turner). Such men had greater opportunities to learn to read and write and greater knowledge of the outside world than plantation field hands. In all three uprisings, religion played a significant role, reflecting its status as a pillar of the slave community and a source of antislavery values among
the blacks. When asked whether he regretted what he had done, Turner replied, “Was not Christ crucified?”

If slave rebellions were not nearly so common as individual, day-to-day acts of resistance to slavery, they did keep alive the hope of freedom and expressed in the most dramatic form the discontent that lay just beneath the apparently placid surface of southern slavery.
Source #2:

Group 2 will present information from this source to the class.

*Slave Auctions: A “Three-Way” Negotiation?*

Sylvia Cannon, a freed slave, described slave auctions this way:

I see 'em sell plenty colored peoples away in them days, 'cause that the way white folks made heap up of their money. Course, they ain't never tell us how much they sell 'em for. Just stand 'em up on a block about three feet high and a speculator bid 'em off just like they was horses. Them what was bid off didn't never say nothing neither. Don't know who bought my brothers, George and Earl. I see 'em sell some slaves twice before I was sold, and I see the slaves when they be traveling like hogs to Darlington. Some of them be women folks looking like they going to get down, they so heavy.

The slave auctioneers spoke of their business as though they were, in fact, buying and selling hogs. The callousness is clear in this July 10, 1856 letter from slave trader A.J. McElveen to Charleston slave merchant Z.B. Oakes:

I offered Richardson 1350 [equal to 27,000 in 1998] for his two negros. He Refused to take it. The fellow is Rather light. He weighs 121 lbs., but Good teeth & not whipped. The little Girl he was offrd 475 [9,500, 1998]. I thought the boy worth about 850 [17,000, 1998] and at that price they would not Sell for cost, but I Supposed the fellow would bring 9 to 950 [18,000 to 19,000, 1998] &c and the little Girl 500 [8,300] at best.

Yet Southern dealers and plantation owners defended their practices, claiming that separations of families were rare and that when they did occur, there was little hardship. South Carolinian Chancellor Harper argued that blacks lacked any capability for domestic affection and showed, "insensibility to ties of kindred." In other words, African-Americans really didn't mind being bought and sold since they were naturally promiscuous and lacked the ability to achieve stable family life. This, of course, was simply paternalistic racism.

As an old former slave, Jennie Hill, explained:

Some people think that slaves had no feeling – that they bore their children as animals bear their young and that there was no heart-break when the children were torn from their parents or the mother taken from her brood to toil for a master in another state. But that isn't so. The slaves loved their families even as the Negroes love their own today and the happiest time of their lives was when they could sit at their cabin doors when the day's work was done and sang the old slave songs, "Swing Low Sweet Charriot," "Massa's in the Cold, Cold Ground," and "Nobody Know What Trouble I've Seen." Children learned these songs and sang them only as a Negro child could. That was the slave's only happiness, a happiness that for many of them did not last.
And another ex-slave, Savilla Burrell, remembered the heartache this way:

They sell one of Mother's chillun once, and when she take on and cry about it, Marster say, "Stop that sniffing there if you don't want to get a whipping." She grieve and cry at night about it. How many slaves were sold away from their families? One study, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* by Michael Tadman, suggests that one out of every five marriages was prematurely terminated by sale and that if other interventions are added, the number rises to 1 in 3. In addition, slave trading tore away one in every two slave children under the age of 14.
Source #3:

Group 3 will present information from this source to the class.

Stono Rebellion: Planned or Unplanned? Does it matter?

Excerpts from Cry Liberty:

“Historians reconstructing the events of September 1739 most often have suggested that where there is fire there must have been much smoke: that is, there must have been a conspiracy devised at least days, perhaps weeks, in advance, and a plan of action laid out among the ringleaders. White planters perennially warned of such plots and were nervously attentive to any rumors of rebellion. Surely several dozen slaves did not find themselves assembled on the king's highway burning houses and beating drums by sheer happenstance.

Peter Hoffer combed the records in an effort to clear the ground of any unwarranted suppositions of what 'surely' must have been. Where the record is so sparse, we likely will never know with certainty what brought these slaves to Pon Pon Road. Yet Hoffer ably suggests a narrative in which contingency is paramount. Perhaps these men did not start out intending to raise slaves in rebellion throughout the countryside. Is it possible that one unexpected event led to another, and then yet another, slowly narrowing options and forcing choices?

Such a reconstruction pushes a narrative and contingency to the outermost boundaries of what can be summoned from the past. In doing so, Hoffer's narrative leads us to look at the 'evil' at Stono in unexpected ways. The men whose resistance in the end proved heroic may not have been, to begin with, heroes at all. Rather than a desperate conspiracy, the rebellion may have been prodded into being step by small step as ‘the natural outcome’ in Hoffer's words, 'of the everyday deformities of slavery.'"

(p. viii.-ix.)
Step 4: Three Groups Share Out Summaries of their Sources

- Students from each group will share their sources.
- Groups will answer the following questions:
  1) What does your source reveal about slave resistance?
  2) How does your source confirm, illuminate, or contradict the textbook narrative?

Step 5: What is at stake when we discuss slave resistance?

As a class, read the following excerpt from Cry Liberty together:

“Here is the story as we have told it up to now: Slaves newly imported from Africa, warriors in spirit and by training, working on plantations twenty miles from the colonial capital of Charles Town (renamed Charleston after the American Revolution), hearing of the coming war between the English and the Spanish empires, decided to rebel. During the night, they broke into a storehouse to obtain guns, killed and burned out the white planters they encountered, and marched to the sound of two drums down a packed earth road toward the Spanish colony of Florida. They tried to enlist the slaves in the neighborhood to join the rebellion. They sought the freedom that the Spanish promised to runaway slaves. Brave, if bloody, their acts mirrored the horrors of slavery itself, and the violence they offered to the masters matched the violence that slavery inflicted on its black victims. They died in battle.

But have we told the only story we might tell? The rebellion may not have begun that way at all. There is a curious backward flow of events to the conventional account. If there were Angolan soldiers leading the band in the morning, there must have been Angolan soldiers leading the mayhem the night before; if the plan in the morning was to raise rebellion, there must have been a plan in place in the evening to raise rebellion; if all who marched down the road in the morning had committed themselves to rebellion, then all who took part in the night’s activities must have had the same solemn motivation as the rebels. This is the logical fallacy of post hoc ergo propter hoc--if later, then before. It turns causation around, making later events into the causes of earlier ones.

If we had told the story backward, imputing the rebellion to those who had, at first, very different intentions, are we missing an important lesson in the entire episode than the one we find in our textbooks? If the story’s beginning is neither so dramatic nor so heroic, for that very reason we need to understand more clearly the parts that circumstance and chance played in the lives of enslaved men and masters alike.”
Closing Discussion Questions:

1. Why is it important to study the forms of resistance of enslaved people in American history?
2. Do acts of resistance in history still matter, even if they were ultimately ineffective?
3. What are some reasons that our textbook offered a limited narrative of slave and plantation life?