

1. Describe what you see in the image and discuss what adjectives you would use to describe the central figure.**2. How accurately does each quote describe the central figure? Why?**

Gov. Henry Wise of Virginia, on interviewing John Brown in 1859 said:

"He is cool, collected and indomitable, and he inspired me with great trust in his integrity as a man of truth."

Henry David Thoreau, "A Plea for Captain John Brown an address to the people of Concord, Mass. in October 1859: *"A man of rare common sense and directness of speech, as of action; a transcendentalist above all, a man of ideas and principles, that was what distinguished him. Not yielding to a whim or transient impulse, but carrying out the purpose of a life. I noticed that he did not overstate anything, but spoke within bounds."*

Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Chiefly About War Matters by a Peaceable Man," article in the Atlantic, 1862 said:

"I shall not pretend to be an admirer of old John Brown . . .this blood-stained fanatic . . .Nobody was ever more justly hanged. He won his martyrdom fairly, and took it firmly."

3. What happened in Kansas?

John Brown has just described a lawless Kansas with "Free State" men killed by proslavery men and nothing done about it. His violence was a response to this. **Is this justified? Why or why not?**

4. Is violence against the government ever justified?

You've just heard John Brown give a defense of violence in pursuit of a political goal, the abolition of slavery. **Are any political goals/causes so important, so right, that they justify violence?**

5. Why didn't John Brown use nonviolence?

John Brown has just recounted how moral suasion—nonviolence—was tried for decades and found unable to stop the spread of slavery. Other abolitionists such as Frederick Douglass came to this same conclusion. Does it justify Brown's violence that he and other abolitionists exhausted the avenue of nonviolence? Why or why not?

Historical Background of John Brown

As a boy of five, John Brown witnessed a slave his own age being beaten with a fire shovel. He vowed to become a foe of slavery. By the mid-1800s, Brown was fulfilling his vow. The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 allowed the two territories to decide the issue of slavery by popular ballot. The fight in Kansas was so intense that the state earned the nickname, "Bleeding Kansas." As Missouri pro-slavery "Ruffians" flocked to Kansas, New England abolitionists bankrolled "Free-Soilers" to move to the settlement of Lawrence, Kansas. In 1856, after abolitionists were attacked in Lawrence, John Brown led a raid on scattered cabins along the Pottawatomie Creek, killing five people.

John Brown had another plan to bring about an end to slavery. On October 16, 1859, Brown and a small group of militants seized the federal armory at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, hoping to ignite a slave rebellion. They waited in vain for the uprising they hoped would follow. The next day, U.S. Army officers Robert E. Lee and J. E. B. Stuart brought in a company of marines and stormed the armory's fire-engine house where Brown had taken cover. They captured Brown and his band, and killed two of his sons. Brown was hanged, along with six other conspirators. In death he became a martyr for abolitionists. "I am worth inconceivably more to hang," he said, "than for any other purpose."

Brown's execution further polarized a nation already divided over the question of slavery. In the North, it galvanized abolitionists—a small but vocal minority, comprised of Christian reformers, women, free blacks, and fugitive slaves. Appalled that the "land of the free" was the world's largest slave-holding nation, they advocated federal intervention to rid the nation of a moral evil. Brown's execution also energized "Free-Soilers," Northerners who were willing to leave slavery alone in the South but opposed its spread to new territories in the West.

In the South, Brown's martyrdom further alienated whites. Southerners felt a strong allegiance to their states and region and a shared fear that they were in danger of being dominated by Northern interests. Of the total Southern white population of eight million in 1860, only 384,000 owned slaves, and over 80 percent of these had fewer than twenty. Still, the slave system made the South's agricultural economy viable and shaped the region's cultural identity. Southern planters and small farmers alike were committed to keeping the region's 3.5 million African Americans enslaved.

6. Is John Brown's legacy a positive one or a negative one (hero, madman or something else)? Explain your reasoning.