

# Aiken-Rhett House

## Pre-visit Activity

**Grade Level:** 3

**Content Area:** Social Studies/South Carolina Studies, Reading/ English, Language Arts

**Time Required:** 30-45 minutes

### Lesson Description

This lesson is designed to acquaint students with the property they will visit and the people who lived there. Students will compare and contrast the lives of enslaved African Americans and the Aiken family living at the Aiken-Rhett House. They will also learn about the Gullah language and Gullah culture and will be introduced to new vocabulary.

### South Carolina Standards

*Social Studies/ South Carolina Studies*

- 3.1 The learner will demonstrate an understanding of the way individuals, families and communities live and work together now and in the past.
  - 3.1.1 The student should be able to state how personal changes are affected by the influence of peer groups.
  - 3.1.2 Identify historical resources in the local community.
- 3.2.8 Discuss the development of slavery in South Carolina and its impact on the state.
- 3.2.9 Compare and contrast the various lifestyles of people in South Carolina during the Antebellum Period.
- 3.9.1 Make maps, globes, graphs, diagrams, and photographs to illustrate location and spatial distribution of physical and cultural features in South Carolina.
- 3.9.2 Use maps, globes, graphs, diagrams, and photographs to illustrate location and spatial distribution of physical and cultural features in South Carolina.
- 3.10.6 Discuss how the physical and human characteristics of places and regions in South Carolina change over time.

*Reading/English, Language Arts*

- IV.A The student will write descriptive paragraphs.
- IV.B The student will write stories, letters, simple explanations, and short reports across all content areas.
- V.A The student will record information from print and non-print resources and present findings in oral and written reports and other products, such as charts, diagrams, videos, or stories.

### Materials/Resources

History of the Aiken-Rhett House (for teacher)

Transparencies of the Aiken-Rhett House.

“Guess Who?” worksheet

Vocabulary List

## **Procedure**

Using the history of the house provided, discuss the house and the Aiken family. Show the students the transparencies of the house and the family to aid in the discussion. The images included are:

### **Aiken-Rhett House:**

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Built in 1817 for a Charleston merchant named John Robinson, the house was then sold to William Aiken, Sr. in 1825. After his death in 1831, the house was passed down to his son, William Aiken, Jr. and his wife Harriet Lowndes Aiken. They made many changes to the home transforming it into the grand house it is today.

### **William Aiken Jr.:**

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A very wealthy man and influential politician. He was governor of South Carolina from 1844-1846.

### **Harriet Lowndes Aiken:**

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Married to William Aiken Jr. and the daughter of wealthy Charlestonians. She was well educated, spoke four languages, and would hold extravagant parties for hundreds of guests in the Aiken-Rhett house.

### **Double Drawing Rooms:**

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These rooms would have been used for entertaining the Aikens' many guests. The rooms were once filled with fine furniture of the period.

Next, explain to the students that not everyone at this time was wealthy and went to grand parties. Tell the students that the Aiken family members were not the only people who lived at the Aiken-Rhett House. The Aiken family owned many enslaved African Americans. Using the transparencies provided show the different jobs that the enslaved African Americans would perform. The images included are:

### **Lydia Middleton, a slave, with Charlotte Helen Middleton:**

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Dorcas Richardson and Ann Gregs were two enslaved African Americans who worked at the Aiken-Rhett House where they lived with their families. Their tasks would have included serving as seamstresses, laundresses, cooks, and nannies. This image is of Lydia Middleton who served as a nanny for Charlotte Helen Middleton.

### **Kitchen:**

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This room is where enslaved African Americans would prepare the meals for the Aiken family. Many foods familiar to us today were brought to this area by Africans, such as, fried chicken, gumbo, and okra. The cooking range, ice chest, and pie safes are nineteenth century conveniences located in the kitchen.

### **Laundry:**

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This room is where the enslaved African Americans would wash and mend clothes using tools such as a clothes brush or a washboard and tub.

### **Carriage house and stables:**

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Duties of enslaved African American males included driving carriages, and tending to the horses. Will and Jacob were two enslaved African American men who worked as carpenters.

### **Slave quarters:**

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These rooms were once painted bright colors and several people would live in one room.

Sullivan's Island served as a port of entry into the area for enslaved peoples. Here the newly imported Africans were quarantined in Pest Houses until they were sold. (For more information visit Fort Moultrie on Sullivan's Island) Enslaved Africans brought many different skills to this country. These skills included carpentry, basketry, blacksmithing, pottery making, boat building, and rice cultivation. Governor Aiken's plantation on Jehossee Island served as a home for more than eight hundred enslaved African people who used their knowledge to grow rice. The enslaved Africans also brought their own languages. These African languages mixed with English to form a Creole language known as Gullah. (A list of Gullah words can be found in [The Black Border: Gullah stories of the Carolina Coast](#) by Ambrose E. Gonzales.) Discuss the other skills of the enslaved African Americans using the transparencies provided.

### **Mortar and Pestle:**

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The rice would be poured into the mortar (the bucket) and then pounded with the pestle to remove the outer husks. The process of removing husks is called winnowing and could also have been done using a fanner basket made of marsh grass and saw palmetto or white oak. Sweet grass baskets are still made within the local community, but primarily for decorative purposes.

### **Fanner basket:**

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Coiled grass baskets were used to remove husks from rice. The process is called winnowing. The basket is made from tough marsh grass and saw palmetto or white oak. Sweet grass baskets are still made within the local community, but primarily for decorative purposes.

Today rice is a staple in many low country dishes and has been since rice was successfully grown in the area.

Music was an important part of African American culture. The lyrics tell of the day to day complexities of slavery and of the hope for freedom. These songs were called spirituals. (You will discuss spirituals in greater detail during the post-visit activity) Enslaved Africans also found comfort in religion. Several African American churches were established during the antebellum period including the Calvary Protestant Episcopal Church, the Zion Presbyterian Church, and several AME Churches. These churches served as a source for leadership opportunities and education without the influence of white Americans.

### **Activity**

Hand out the vocabulary list and go over the new terms with the students.

Next, hand out the "Guess Who?" worksheet. Once the students have completed the worksheet go over the answers and discuss how Dorcas' and Henrietta's daily lives would have been different.

# Aiken-Rhett House

## Vocabulary List

**Gullah**- Creole language composed of a combination of several African languages and English. Gullah can also refer to a style of food, carpentry, music, dance, basket making, and ironwork brought to the area by Africans.

**“Goobah”**- Gullah word for peanut.

**“Bubbah”**- Gullah word for brother.

**“Tote”**- Gullah word meaning to carry.

**Mortar and pestle**- tools used by enslaved Africans to remove outer husks from rice.

**Winnowing**- process of removing husks from rice using a fanner basket. The rice was thrown upwards and outwards allowing the husks to be blown away by the wind.

**Fanner basket**- basket used for the winnowing process made with marsh grass.

**Spiritual**- songs sung by enslaved Africans about freedom and their daily lives.

**Sullivan’s Island**- island near Charleston where many Africans were imported into the United States and then sold.

**American Civil War**- war fought between the Northern states and the Southern states of the United States between 1861 and 1865. The Southern states had seceded from the United States to form their own country, the Confederate States of America.

## GUESS WHO?

These are some of the activities that someone would have done on an ordinary day at the Aiken-Rhett House in the nineteenth century. Do you think that they would have been done by Dorcas or Henrietta? Write the appropriate activity under the correct person's name. Some things may belong in both columns.

Sew

read

wash clothes

Feed animals

go to church

write a letter

Play the piano

help Mrs. Aiken dress

milk a cow

Visit friends

set the table

study foreign languages

Sing

cook supper

**Dorcas**

**Henrietta**

# Aiken-Rhett House

## On-site Activity

**Grade Level:** 3

**Content Area:** Social Studies/South Carolina Studies

**Time Required:** 1 + hours

### Lesson Description

The Aiken-Rhett House is unique in that the slave quarters and work buildings still stand on the property. This provides the opportunity for visitors to look back in time at the lives of enslaved African Americans living in Charleston during the nineteenth century. By observation of the largely untouched surroundings and by comparison of the two vastly different worlds represented, students will gain a deeper understanding of daily life in the nineteenth century for people of European and African descent.

### South Carolina Standards

*Social Studies/South Carolina Studies*

- 3.1 The learner will demonstrate an understanding of the way individuals, families and communities live and work together now and in the past.
- 3.1.2 Identify historical resources in the local community.
- 3.2.8 Discuss the development of slavery in South Carolina and its impact on the state.
- 3.2.9 Compare and contrast the various lifestyles of people in South Carolina during the Antebellum Period.
- 3.9.1 Make maps, globes, graphs, diagrams, and photographs to illustrate location and spatial distribution of physical and cultural features in South Carolina
- 3.10.6 Discuss how the physical and human characteristics of places and regions in South Carolina change over time.

### Teacher Preparation

Read the information provided and contact Historic Charleston Foundation at (843) 805-6735 with any questions or concerns. Implement the pre-visit activity before your visit.

### Procedure

The teacher will be met by two docents at the Aiken-Rhett House. The students will be divided into two groups. (All the students will tour the entire Aiken-Rhett complex with half the students touring the outbuildings and slave quarters while the other half tours the main house.)

**Outbuildings and Slave Quarters:**

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The students will go to the kitchen and discuss the differences between modern kitchens and the Aiken-Rhett kitchen.

Students will then tour the laundry, slave quarters, carriage house, and yard.

**Main House:**

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In the main house students will be given a tour of the house by a docent. Then they will complete a "Treasure Hunt" activity. (Teachers are asked to bring the correct number of worksheets and pencils for their students.) Once the worksheets are complete, the students will meet on the piazza to discuss the results.

The two groups will then switch stations.

## Aiken-Rhett House

On-site

### TREASURE HUNT

1. How did people in the Aiken-Rhett House light their rooms? Name two types of lamps used.
2. List the names of three people whose images appear somewhere in the house (portraits or photographs).
3. Find something you could use instead of a radio to make music. What is it?
4. How would the people who lived in the Aiken-Rhett House entertain themselves?
5. How would they have kept warm in the winter?
6. How many paintings are in the Art Gallery?
7. Where would the family have gone to the bathroom?
8. In the kitchen house, what nineteenth century conveniences would have been used in the preparation of meals?
9. What different animals would have been kept at the Aiken-Rhett House?
10. What did the Aiken-Rhett families use for travel before the introduction of cars?

# Aiken-Rhett House

## Post-visit Activity

**Grade Level:** 3

**Content Area:** Social Studies/South Carolina Studies, Reading/English, Language Arts

**Time Required:** 45 minutes

### Lesson Description

This lesson focuses on African American music. Spirituals revealed the wishes and thoughts of the men and women who were unable to express their feelings in more direct ways. Students will hear some examples and analyze the lyrics to find the hidden meanings they contained. African American music has continued to shape the music we listen to today. After listening to a more modern selection of music, students should be able to identify some of the same themes that were present in nineteenth century songs that were part of the African American culture.

### South Carolina Standards

Social Studies/South Carolina Studies

- 3.1 The learner will demonstrate an understanding of the way individuals, families, and communities live and work together now and in the past.
  - 3.1.1 The student should be able to state how personal changes are affected by the influence of peer groups.
  - 3.1.2 Identify historical resources in the local community.
- 3.2.8 Discuss the development of slavery in South Carolina and its impact on the state.
- 3.2.9 Compare and contrast the various lifestyles of the people in South Carolina during the Antebellum Period.
- 3.8 The learner will demonstrate an understanding of the heritage of South Carolina.
  - 3.8.1 The student should be able to discuss folklore and other cultural contributions from various regions of South Carolina and how they help form a state heritage.

*Reading/English, Language Arts*

- IV.A The student will write descriptive paragraphs.
- IV.B The student will write stories, letters, simple explanations, and short reports across all content areas.
- V.A The student will record information from print and non-print resources and present findings in oral and written reports and other products, such as charts, diagrams, videos, or stories.

### Materials/Resources

Recording of Spirituals (available at the Charleston County Library)

Lyrics sheets

Recording of modern music

## **Procedure**

Spirituals have become the basis for many modern songs, especially the syncopation and polyrhythms. The lyrics reflect themes such as mourning, suffering, resisting, and the desire for freedom. Many spirituals can still be heard in African American churches.

Open the lesson with a modern recording. (The music of B.B. King, Louis Armstrong, Dizzie Gillespie, or James Brown is suggested.) Explain that this song has its roots in a kind of music that people sang a long time ago, and play the recording of spirituals from the Charleston County Library. The recommended recording is The Society for the Preservation of Spirituals' cassette entitled "Sinuuh w'ah yuh doin' down dere."

Hand out the lyrics sheet and discuss the meaning of these lyrics. Enslaved Africans sang songs that hinted at their desire for freedom as well as singing about their daily lives. Go through one or two songs as a group, discussing what the enslaved people who made up the songs must have been feeling and experiencing.

Now play the song that was used to begin the lesson and hand out the lyrics sheets. Discuss the fact that the music we listen to today has some of the same basic themes in it that African American music had in the nineteenth century. Students can again read the lyrics sheet to learn what the song's writer must have been thinking feeling at the time.

## **Activity**

1. Students may either work together or alone for this activity. Brainstorm for different events in their daily lives that they feel strongly about, good or bad. Examples may include moving away from home, the death of a loved one, or interpersonal relationships with others. Write ideas on the board. Students can try writing their own song based on their experiences. The format could be an imitation of a spiritual or a more modern type of music. Students who wish to share their song could use drums, rattles etc. (the same instruments used by enslaved African Americans) to accompany their singing.
2. The student can also write a short story about Dorcas, Henrietta, or any other historical figure that he or she learned about while visiting the Aiken-Rhett House. The story should reflect the characters' daily lives.

## **“When Duh Saints Go Marchin’ Home”**

Oh, when duh saints go marchin’ home  
Oh, when duh saints go marchin’ home  
Oh, Lord, uh wants tuh be een duh number  
When duh saints go marchin’ home

Uh silber spade, gwine dig muh grave

Uh goldin chain gwine hang me down

Uh ebergreen gwine res’ wid me

Duh Riber Jerding chill an’ col’  
Duh Riber Jerding chill an’ col’  
Oh, Lord, uh wants tuh be een duh number,  
When duh saints go marchin’ home

## “Draw Lebel”

### Chorus

Draw Lebel, de angel am uh comin' down  
Comin' down, comin' down  
Draw Lebel, de angel am uh comin' down,  
Down tuh duh groun'

1.

Draw, Deacon, draw

2.

Draw, Preachuh, draw

3.

Draw roun' duh haltuh

4.

Draw, Preachuh, draw

5.

Draw tell de bread ob day

## **“Norah Hice duh Winduh”**

Turkle dub come flop dis' way  
Hice duh winduh let duh dub come een.  
Rain uh rainin' all de day  
Hice duh winduh let duh dub come een

### Chorus

Oh Norah, hice duh winduh, Norah  
Hice duh winduh, Norah,  
Hice duh winduh,  
Hice duh winduh let duh dub come een.

2.

Some come cripple en some come lame,  
Some come walkin' een Jesus' name,

3.

Fiah een de Eas' en fiah een de Wes'  
En duh fiah gwine bri'n up duh wilderness

4.

Pawl een Silas. Dey een prison  
Fuh teefin' sumpin dat wasin' hisin

## “Een Muh Time ob Dyin’

En muh time ob dyin’  
Uh don’ wan’ nobody tuh moan,  
All uh wan’ muh friends tuh do,  
Is tuh close muh dyin’ eye

### Chorus

Well, well, well  
So uh kin die easy  
Well, well, well  
Lawd lim’ me die easy  
Well, well, well  
So uh kin die easy  
Jedus gona’ make up  
Muh dyin’ bed

2.

Meet me, Jedus, meet me,  
Meet me en de middle ob de ear,  
An’ if des’ wings duh fail me Lawd,  
Meet me wid annudder pair

3.

Hell so deep, Hell so wide  
Hell an’ got no bottom Lawd  
Hell an’ got no side

4.

Goin’ down tuh de ribbah,  
Pitch muh sword en duh sand  
All muh troubles ober Lawd,  
Meet me een de Primus Land

## “Drinkin’ De Wine”

Ef muh brudder ax fuh me  
Tell um uh’ll meet um een de Galleree  
Ought tuh bin deh ten tousan’ ear  
Drinkin’ de wine

### Chorus

Oh, de wine, de wine, de wine  
Oh, de wine, de wine, de wine  
Ought tuh bin deh ten tousan’ ear  
Drinkin’ de wine

2.

Ef muh mudder ax fuh me

3.

Ef muh Deacon ax fuh me

4.

Ef muh Preachuh ax fuh me

5.

Ef muh auntie ax fuh me

6.

Ef muh sister ax fuh me