

# 1850-1874 J. Sterling Morton

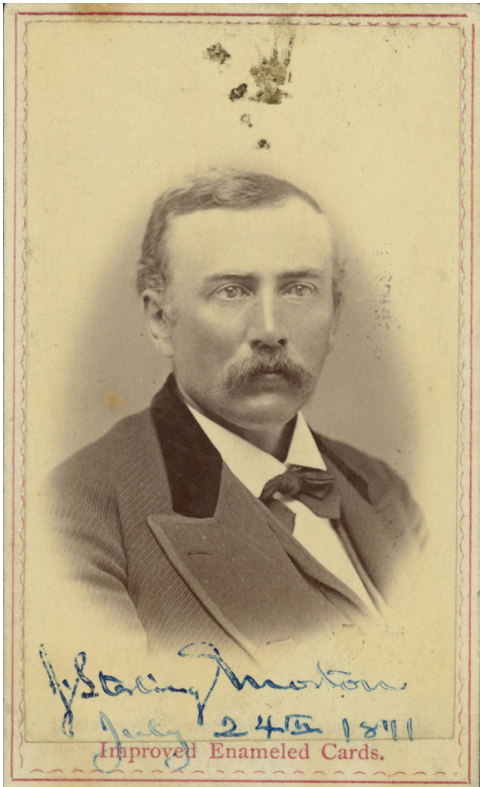
# L1

## LESSON PLAN

### J. Sterling Morton: A View of Racism from the Lens of Contextualization

Activity Grade Level

4 8 HS



#### Lesson Objectives

1. Students will understand the views of J. Sterling Morton as it relates to racial issues..
2. Students will examine the qualifications of J. Sterling Morton to the Nebraska Hall of Fame..
3. Students will evaluate other famous Nebraskan's evaluate whether they would be admitted based on the students criteria set for J. Sterling Morton.
4. Students will create a rubric for these qualifications.

#### Introduction

Was J. Sterling Morton a racist? By today's standards the answer is a resounding **YES!** He was clearly a racist, but in his era it could be argued, as that was just how things were at the time in history.. This short lesson examines this question, how to have a discussion about racism and a comparison of history vs. today.

#### The Task

Using a variety of online sources, students will gather information about the views of J. Sterling Morton, and use this information to create a rubric to outline their thoughts on qualifying characteristics for being admitted into the Nebraska Hall of Fame. Students will then study other famous Nebraskans and evaluate whether they would be admitted based on the students criteria set for J. Sterling Morton.

#### Extension Lesson

Have an open conversation on racism and discrimination using the provided news source. Follow the 10 Ways to talk to Students about Sensitive issues in the News and develop grade level appropriate discussion questions..

## Nebraska Department of Education Content Area Standards

Social Studies: [SS 4.1.2](#) | [8.1.2](#); [SS 8.4.1](#); | [SS HS.1.2](#); [SS HS.4.3](#); [SS HS.4.5](#)

Language Arts: [LA 4.1.6 Comprehension](#); [LA 4.4.1 Information Fluency](#) | [LA 8.1.6 Comprehension](#); [LA 8.4.1 Information Fluency](#) | [LA 12.1.6 Comprehension](#); [LA 12.4.1 Information Fluency](#)

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### Activity 1:

The teacher should prepare for this lesson by becoming familiar with the lesson and the History Nebraska website, reviewing the blog entry about J. Sterling Morton and their assessment of his racist views in context with the era..

<https://history.nebraska.gov/blog/was-j-sterling-morton-racist-here%E2%80%99s-what-arbor-day-founder-said-and-did>

Then guide students through the following activity starting with the question below:

Was J. Sterling Morton a racist? By today's standards the answer is a resounding **YES!**

He was clearly a racist, but in his era it could be argued, was this was just how things were at the time in history. This short lesson examines this question, how to have a discussion about racism and a comparison of history vs.. today.

As important it is to have an open discussion on racism today, it's also very important to reflect on historical perspective of the era and the public's stance about controversial issues of the time.. Not unlike today, there were many examples of discrimination based on sex, religion and race.. These thoughts and beliefs are not excusable in any sense, and that is certainly the case of J. Sterling Morton's views on race and slavery.

Consider the following statement:

*"I am not, nor ever have been in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races... I am not nor ever have been in favor of making voters or jurors of negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office... there is a physical difference between the white and black races which I believe will for ever forbid the two races living together on terms of social and political equality...."*

**This clearly shows that Morton was a racist and advocate of slavery, except those were not Morton's words but words of Abraham Lincoln.**

Ask your students to read this blog entry from History Nebraska:

<https://history.nebraska.gov/blog/was-j-sterling-morton-racist-here%E2%80%99s-what-arbor-day-founder-said-and-did>

Ask them evaluate both Morton's role in Nebraska and United States' history and his racist's views.. Have the students create a rubric to outline their thoughts on qualifying characteristics for being admitted into the Nebraska Hall of Fame.

Examples of Famous Nebraskans to consider:

- William Jennings Bryan
- Susan La Flesche Picotte
- Mildred Brown
- William Frederick Cody
- Grace Abbott

### The Process

It is important to understand that not one and nothing is one-dimensional and people's lived experiences play a role in their perceptions of the world. J. Sterling Morton certainly had a checkered past concerning race and slavery. Consider for a moment some of the positive multicultural facets that came out of his contributions. For example, Arbor Day is celebrated worldwide in countries such as Tanzania, Uganda, Spain and Venezuela. Open a discussion with students on how Arbor Day came to be, have them explain how this holiday is celebrated in other countries and compare it to celebrations held in Nebraska and the United States.

View more on the Nebraska Studies Website:

<https://nebraskastudies.org>  
<https://nebraskastudies.org/en/hall-of-fame/>  
<https://nebraskastudies.org/en/notable-nebraskans/>

### Extension Lesson - Discussion:

Have an open conversation on racism and discrimination. Review the article from the New York Times; First Encounters With Race and Racism: Teaching Ideas for Classroom Conversation: First Encounters With Race and Racism: Teaching Ideas for Classroom Conversations

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/27/learning/lesson-plans/first-encounters-with-race-and-racism-teaching-ideas-for-classroom-conversations.html>

Follow the 10 Ways to talk to Students about Sensitive Issues in the News:

<https://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/03/23/10-ways-to-talk-to-students-about-sensitive-issues-in-the-news/>

1. Create a safe, respectful supportive tone in your class
2. Prepare yourself
3. Find out what students already know or have experienced
4. Compile the students' questions and examine them together
5. Make connections
6. Have students investigate and learn more
7. Explore students' opinions and promote dialogue
8. Be responsive to feelings and values
9. Make home connections
10. Do something

Develop discussion questions appropriate to the grade level and review some of the resources listed below:

<https://www.civiclebraska.org/legacy-racism-town-country/>  
<https://www.pbs.org/parents/talking-about-racism>  
<https://www.embracerace.org/resources/teaching-and-talking-to-kids>

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**J. Sterling Morton: A View of Racism from the Lens of Contextualization**

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**The Resources**

Was J. Sterling Morton a racist? Here's what the Arbor Day founder said and did;  
<https://history.nebraska.gov/blog/was-j-sterling-morton-racist-here%E2%80%99s-what-arbor-day-founder-said-and-did>

Nebraska Studies Website:

<https://www.nebraskastudies.org>

<https://www.nebraskastudies.org/en/hall-of-fame/>

<https://www.nebraskastudies.org/en/notable-nebraskans/>

New York Times; First Encounters With Race and Racism: Teaching Ideas for Classroom Conversation:

<https://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/03/23/10-ways-to-talk-to-students-about-sensitive-issues-in-the-news/>

10 Ways to talk to Students about Sensitive Issues in the News:

<https://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/03/23/10-ways-to-talk-to-students-about-sensitive-issues-in-the-news/>

Nebraska Dept. of Education Academic Standards.

<https://www.education.ne.gov/contentareastandards/>

Nebraska Dept. of Education State Social Studies Standards.

<https://cdn.education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Nebraska-Social-Studies-Standards-Final-11-2019.pdf>

Nebraska State Historical Society.

<http://nebraskahistory.org/oversite/research.htm>

Nebraska State Historical Society: Nebraska History magazine

<https://history.nebraska.gov/publications/nebraska-history-magazine>

Nebraska State Historical Society: Nebraska Trailblazer

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/museum/teachers/material/trailist.htm>

Rubrics: General Rubric <http://www.socialstudieshelp.com/rubric.htm>

The Library of Congress Learning Page: The Historians' Sources: Analysis of Primary Sources. "Questions for Analyzing Primary Sources."

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/lessons/psources/analyze.html>

Civic Nebraska: Confronting racism's legacy, from town to country

<https://www.civicnebraska.org/legacy-racism-town-country/>

PBS: Talking to Young Children About Race and Racism

<https://www.pbs.org/parents/talking-about-racism>

Embrace Race: 10 tips for teaching and talking to kids about race

<https://www.embracerace.org/resources/teaching-and-talking-to-kids>

## Nebraska Department of Education Content Area Standards

### ■ Social Studies Standards

4

**SS 4.1.2** Investigate how different perspectives impact government decisions at the state level.

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**SS 8.1.2** Evaluate the roles, responsibilities, and rights as local, state, national, and international citizens.

**SS 8.4.1** Analyze patterns of continuity and change over time in United States history.

HS

**SS HS 1.2** Demonstrate meaningful civic participation by analyzing local, state, national, or international issues and policies.

**SS HS.4.3 (US)** Examine historical events from the perspectives of marginalized and underrepresented groups.

**SS HS.4.5(US)** Apply the inquiry process to construct and answer historical questions.

### ■ Language Arts Standards

4

**LA 4.1.6** Comprehension: Students will construct meaning by using prior knowledge and text information while reading grade-level literary and informational text.

**LA 4.4.1** Information Fluency: Students will evaluate, create, and communicate information in a variety of media and formats (textual, visual, and digital).

### ■ Language Arts Standards

8

**LA 12.1.6** Comprehension: Students will construct meaning by using prior knowledge and text information while reading grade-level literary and informational text.

**LA 12.4.1** Information Fluency: Students will evaluate, create, and communicate information in a variety of media and formats (textual, visual, and digital).

### ■ Language Arts Standards

HS

**LA 12.1.6** Comprehension: Students will construct meaning by using prior knowledge and text information while reading grade-level literary and informational text.

**LA 12.4.1** Information Fluency: Students will evaluate, create, and communicate information in a variety of media and formats (textual, visual, and digital).