

## Selections from *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (Use with Lesson 1)

Be it remembered, That on this tenth day of November, Anno Domini, eighteen hundred and thirty-one, **Thomas R. Gray** of the said District, deposited in this office the title of a book, which is in the words as following.

*The Confessions of Nat Turner*, the leader of the late insurrection in Southhampton, Virginia, as fully and voluntarily made to Thomas R. Gray, in the prison where he was confined. and acknowledged by him to be such when read before the Court of Southhampton, with the certificate, under seal, of the Court convened at Jerusalem, November 5, 1831, for his trial. Also, an authentic account of the whole insurrection, and with lists of the whites who were murdered, and of the negroes brought before the Court os Southhampton, and there sentenced, &., the right where of he claims as proprietor, in conformity with an Act of Congress, entitled, "An act to amend the several acts respecting Copy Rights."

### **The Confession**

Agreeable to his own appointment, on the evening he was committed to prison, with permission of the jailer, I visited NAT on Tuesday the 1st November, when, without being questioned at all, he commenced his narrative in the following words:

SIR, - You have asked me to give a history of the motives which induced me to undertake the late insurrection, as you call it - To do so I must go back to the days of my infancy, and even before I was born. . . . .noticing the singularity of my manners, I suppose, and my uncommon intelligence for a child, remarked I had too much sense to be raised, and if I was, I would never be of any service to any one as a slave - To a mind like mine, restless, inquisitive and observant of every thing that was passing, it is easy to suppose that religion was the subject to which it would be directed. . . .The manner in which I learned to read and write, not only had great influence on my own mind, as I acquired it with the most perfect ease, so much so, that I have no recollection whatever of learning the alphabet- but to the astonishment of the family, one day when a book was shewn to me to keep me from crying , I began spelling the names of different objects - this was a source of wonder to all in the neighborhood, particularly the blacks - and this learning was constantly improved at all opportunities . . .Knowing the influence I had obtained over the minds of my fellow servants, (not by the means of conjuring and such like tricks - for to them I always spoke of such things with contempt) but by the communion of the Spirit whose revelations I often communicated to them, and they believed and said my wisdom came from God. I now began to prepare them for my purpose, by telling them something was about to happen that would terminate in fulfilling the great promise that had been made to me. . . .And about this time I had a vision - and I saw white spirits and black spirits engaged in battle, and the sun was darkened - the thunder rolled in the Heavens, and blood flowed in streams and I heard a voice saying, "Such is your luck, such you are called to see, and let it come rough or smooth, you must surely bare it. . . .and the great day of judgment was at hand. . .fight against the Serpent, for the time was fast approaching when the first should be last and the last should be first. . . .On Saturday

evening, the 20th of August, it was agreed between Henry, Hark, and myself, to prepare a dinner the next day for the men we expected, and then to concert a plan, as we had not yet determined on any. Hark, on the following morning, brought a pig, and Henry brandy, and being joined by Sam, Nelson, Will and Jack, they prepared in the woods a dinner, where, about three o'clock, I joined them.

Q. Why were you so backward in joining them.

...I saluted them on coming up, and asked Will how came he there, he answered, his life was worth no more than others, and his liberty as dear to him. I asked him if he thought to obtain it? He said he would, or lose his life. This was enough to put him in full confidence. Jack, I knew, was only a tool in the hands of Hark, it was quickly agreed we should commence at home (Mr. J. Travis') on that night, and until we had armed and equipped ourselves, and gathered sufficient force, neither age nor sex was to be spared, (which was invariably adhered to)... we determined to enter the house secretly, and murder them whilst sleeping. Hark got a ladder and set it against the chimney, on which I ascended, and hoisting a window, entered and came down stairs, unbarred the door, and removed the guns from their places. It was then observed that I must spill the first blood. On which, armed with a hatchet, and accompanied by Will, I entered my master's chamber, it being dark, I could not give a death blow, the hatchet glanced from his head, he sprang from the bed and called his wife, it was his last word, Will laid him dead, with a blow of his axe, and Mrs. Travis shared the same fate, as she lay in bed. The murder of this family, five in number, was the work of a moment, not one of them awoke; there was a little infant sleeping in a cradle, that was forgotten, until we had left the house and gone some distance, when Henry and Will returned and killed it; we got here, four guns that would shoot, and several old muskets, with a pound or two of powder. .... A general destruction of property and search for money and ammunition, always succeeded the murders...I took my station in the rear, and as it was my object to carry terror and devastation wherever we went, I placed fifteen or twenty of the best armed and most relied on, in front, who generally approached the houses as fast as their horses could run; this was for two purposes, to prevent escape and strike terror to the inhabitants - on this account I never got to the houses, after leaving Mrs. Whitehead's, until the murders were committed, except in one case....

...It has been said he was ignorant and cowardly, and that his object was to murder and rob for the purpose of obtaining money to make his escape. It is notorious, that he was never known to have a dollar in his life; to swear an oath, or drink a drop of spirits. As to his ignorance, he certainly never had the advantages of education, but he can read and write, (it was taught him by his parents), and for natural intelligence and quickness of apprehension, is surpassed by few men I have ever seen....He is a complete fanatic, or plays his part most admirably. On other subjects he possesses an uncommon share of intelligence, with a mind capable of attaining any thing; but warped and perverted by the influence of early impressions. He is below the ordinary stature, though strong and active, having the true Negro face, every feature of which is strongly marked. I shall not attempt to describe the effect of his narrative, as told and commented on by himself, in the condemned hole of the prison. The calm, deliberate composure with which he spoke of

his late deeds and intentions, the expression of his fiend-like face when excited by enthusiasm, still bearing the stains of the blood of helpless innocence about him; clothed with rags and covered with chains; yet daring to raise his manacled hands to heaven, with a spirit soaring above the attributes of man; I looked on him and my blood curdled in my veins...But fortunate for society, the hand of retributive justice has overtaken them; and not one that was known to be concerned has escaped.