

Custom House Comparison

Objectives

Using a letter written in 1799, students will learn about Mississippi's territorial days, the role of a custom house, the role of development in their community, and how to write their own persuasive business letter. Historical note: Although the historical letter is intended to persuade territorial governor Winthrop Sargent that Natchez would be the best location for a Custom House, Mr. Rees is unsuccessful and the Custom House is built in New Orleans.

The *Custom House Comparison* lesson is adaptable for grades 9-12.

| Mississippi Department of Education 2011 Curricular Connections | | |
|---|------------------------------------|----------------|
| Common Core Language Arts | 9 th Grade | 2c, 2e 1-2, 3d |
| | 10 th Grade | 2c, 2e 1-2, 3d |
| | 11 th Grade | 2c, 2e 1-2, 3d |
| | Reading Standards for Grades 9-10 | 1, 2, 4 |
| | Writing Standards for Grades 9-10 | 1a-e, 9b |
| | Reading Standards for Grades 11-12 | 1, 3, 4, 5 |
| | Writing Standards for Grades 11-12 | 1a-e, 9a, 9b |

Custom House Comparison

Objective:

Using a letter written in 1799, students will learn about Mississippi's territorial days, the role of a custom house, the role of development in their community, and how to write their own persuasive business letter.

Materials: *Ebenezer Rees* letter; introduction to *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne; *Custom House Background for Teachers*.

Procedures:

1. Distribute the *Ebenezer Rees* letter and have students read the letter written by Ebenezer Rees in 1799. Identify unusual vocabulary.
2. Brainstorm a list of types of letters. Students will use the list to identify the letter's purpose using specific examples from the letter. If using a Smartboard, students can underline evidence (ie. the claim and reasons).
3. Students will read the introduction to *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne. *Note: If enough copies of The Scarlet Letter are not available for the entire class, the introduction to the book is available on numerous websites, including Google Books.*
4. Using both texts students will cite evidence of the importance of a custom house and its uses. Use *Custom House Background for Teachers* if students need a starting point.
5. Students will identify current development projects in their community, and write a guest column for the local paper urging positive action.

Extension Activities:

- In 1794, the London firm of Laurie and Whittle created a map of the southern United States. A copy of this map is located at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History but it is also accessible [online](#). Locate Natchez on the map and determine if Ebenezer Rees was correct in declaring Natchez a good location for a custom house. Were there other cities along the Mississippi River or throughout the territory that would also have been good locations for a custom house? Why or why not?
- Ebenezer Rees states that the "office of collector would be acceptable to many." Write a letter to Mr. Rees explaining why you are interested in applying for the job and why you think you would be the right candidate to run the custom house.

Custom House Background for Teachers

- A custom house was a government building for officials who processed paperwork for goods imported and exported from the country. The officials also collected customs duty (taxes) on specific imported goods. Oftentimes this included luxury items such as tea, exotic textiles and spices, ivory, and alcohol. Today this process is still in effect in countries throughout the world. The governing agency in the U.S. is the United States Customs and Border Protection.
- At the time Rees wrote his letter and Hawthorn his book, custom houses were commonly situated at seaports or along trade routes. Hawthorn himself worked at several custom houses in Boston and Salem, Massachusetts. His introduction to *The Scarlet Letter* takes place in the Salem Custom House. This building still stands and is run by the National Parks Service. View more information on their [website](#).

Natchez 5th August 1799

Sir

I had the Honor to receive your Letter of the 20th Ult^o, requesting my opinion, where a suitable place should be, for placing a Custom House for this Territory.

I have taken some pains to consult with a number of respectable Characters on this subject, who, divested of every motive that might be influenced by Interest, agree with me, that the Town of Natchez is the only eligible spot for placing it at present.

In almost every Commercial Country the Custom House is in the metropolis, there, is necessarily the grand resort of business, and would be attended with great and insurmountable inconveniences, was it placed in any other part. — The Landing, at the Town of Natchez is the most Central of any, in the settled part of this Territory; every Boat descending the waters of the Mississippi stop there, it is the same with those that ascend, and few or no Boats ever come from New Orleans but those, intended, and indeed unload there, & from thence have their Goods transported by Land, or in Boats to the neighbouring Creeks above, consequently the business of a Custom House would easily, and advantageously be managed there; should it be placed at any of the Landings about of the Town of Natchez, it would be attended not only with inconveniences, particularly in procuring Sureties but loss to the Territory — This would not be the case at Natchez,

The office of Collector would be acceptable
to many, I know of no person who would refuse accepting
it, but a little time will be necessary to fix on one the
most suitable, to fill that place, and who would be willing
to accept of it; - as soon as that can be done I shall
take the liberty of enclosing it to your Excellency -

I have the Honor to be

Sir

Your Excellency's

Most Obedient

Humble Servant

Eden Keey

MDAH

Mr. Pres. Quincy 15. 1799

His Excellency

Winthrop Sargent.

TRANSCRIPT

Natchez, 5th August 1799

Sir

I had the Honor to receive your letter of the 20th requesting my opinion where a suitable place should be for placing a Custom House for this Territory.

I have taken some pain to consult with a number of respectable characters on this subject, who divested of every motive that might be influenced by interest, agree with me that the town of Natchez is the only eligible spot for placing it at present.

In almost every commercial Country the Custom House is in the metropolis, there is necessary the grand resort of business, and would be attended with great insurmountable inconvenience was it placed in any other part. The landing at the town of Natchez is the most central of any, in the settled part of this Territory; every boat descending the water of the Mississippi stop there, it is the same for those that ascend and few or no boats ever come from New Orleans, but those intended and indeed unload there, and from thence have their goods transported by land or in boats to the neighboring creeks above. Consequently the business of a custom house should easily and advantageously be managed there. Should it be placed at any of the landings south of the town of Natchez it would be attended not only with inconvenience particularly in procuring sureties but loss to the territory. This would not be the case at Natchez.

The office of collector would be acceptable to many. I know of no person who would refuse accepting it, but a little time will be necessary to fix on one the most suitable to fill that place and who would be willing to accept it as soon as that can be done. I shall take the liberty of enclosing it to your Excellency.

I have the honor to be,

Sir

Your Excellency's most obedient humble servant

Ebenezer Rees

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY LESSON PLANS

TEACHER EVALUATION

COMPLETE BOTH SIDES AND PLEASE MAIL OR FAX TO THE ADDRESS ON THE NEXT PAGE. THANK YOU!

TEACHER NAME _____

SCHOOL NAME & ADDRESS _____

EMAIL (OPTIONAL) _____

TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS _____ GRADE LEVEL _____

LESSON TITLE _____

1. In your opinion, did this unit elicit better than average student response; if so, how?
2. Which segments of the unit exceeded your students' attention span?
3. Will this unit be of assistance to you in developing future classroom activities; if so, how?
4. How did this unit add to your earlier teaching on the same subject?
5. Would this teaching unit be handier to use as a:
___ multi-day unit ___ multi-week unit ___ other
6. Were the activities and lessons appropriate for your students? How?

Please rate the following lesson materials and activities by circling the appropriate number.

4=excellent, 3=good, 2=average, 1=inadequate

| | | | | |
|---------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| <u>Directions and Notes</u> | <u>4</u> | <u>3</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>1</u> |
| <u>Curricular Connections</u> | <u>4</u> | <u>3</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>1</u> |
| <u>Student Worksheets</u> | <u>4</u> | <u>3</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>1</u> |
| <u>Interactive Activities</u> | <u>4</u> | <u>3</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>1</u> |
| <u>Historic Images</u> | <u>4</u> | <u>3</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>1</u> |
| <u>References and Resources</u> | <u>4</u> | <u>3</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>1</u> |

| | | | | |
|---------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| <u>Activity One</u> | <u>4</u> | <u>3</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>1</u> |
| <u>Overall unit</u> | <u>4</u> | <u>3</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>1</u> |

We would appreciate any additional comments on this teaching unit and any suggestions for improvement. Comments may be entered in the space below.

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