Raid and Reaction

How one failed attack deepened a national conflict

8.C.11.2.D "Examine the motives and impact for John Brown's Raid on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB As you read, underline two details that explain Brown's reasons for the raid and circle two details that show its impact. Draw an arrow from one of Brown's actions to a result of that action.

The Raid at Harpers Ferry

1 On the night of October 16, 1859, John Brown led a small group of Black and white followers into Harpers Ferry, Virginia, now in West Virginia. They seized the federal arsenal, a place where the government stored weapons. Brown believed slavery was a grave injustice and that waiting for laws to change would not free people held in bondage. He planned to take weapons from the arsenal and use them to help spark an uprising of enslaved people. His target mattered because its weapons could arm more people than his small group could supply.

2 Brown's group took control of the arsenal and held several townspeople hostage. Brown expected enslaved people from the surrounding area to join his group, but few did. Local residents and militia members fought the raiders, trapping them in an arsenal building. U.S. Marines, led by Colonel Robert E. Lee, stormed the building on October 18. They captured Brown, and several raiders and other people had been killed. Without a large force to arm, Brown's plan to launch a wider rebellion failed, even though the raid itself lasted only about two days.

3 Virginia authorities tried Brown for crimes including murder, treason against Virginia, and plotting an uprising of enslaved people. He was convicted and hanged on December 2, 1859. In the North, some people condemned his use of violence, while others praised his opposition to slavery. Many white Southerners feared that similar raids could threaten their communities, and some strengthened local defenses. The different reactions deepened distrust between North and South. Brown did not end slavery with his raid, but the failed attack intensified the national conflict over slavery on the eve of the Civil War.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Brown's view of slavery shape his decision to raid Harpers Ferry?

2. Why did Brown choose an arsenal as his target?

3. How did the number of people who joined Brown affect the result of his plan?

4. How did reactions to the raid affect relations between North and South?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence newspaper editor's note dated December 1859. Judge whether Brown's failed raid could still have a major impact, using his motive, the raid's result, and contrasting reactions as evidence.

ANSWER KEY

Raid and Reaction

GRADE 8 · 8.C.11.2.D

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

As you read, underline two details that explain Brown's reasons for the raid and circle two details that show its impact. Draw an arrow from one of Brown's actions to a result of that action. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Brown's view of slavery shape his decision to raid Harpers Ferry?	**He believed slavery was a grave injustice and that waiting for laws to change would not free enslaved people, so he tried to spark an uprising.**
2	Why did Brown choose an arsenal as his target?	**He wanted its government weapons to arm more people than his small group could supply.**
3	How did the number of people who joined Brown affect the result of his plan?	**Few enslaved people from the area joined him, leaving him without the large force he had hoped to arm. His plan for a wider rebellion failed.**
4	How did reactions to the raid affect relations between North and South?	**Some Northerners praised Brown's opposition to slavery, while many white Southerners feared more raids. These reactions deepened distrust between the regions.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Brown's raid failed to start the uprising he hoped would help end slavery. He seized an arsenal to get weapons, but few people joined him and he was captured. Some Northerners praised his stand against slavery, while many white Southerners feared more attacks. Even though his plan failed, those opposing reactions could deepen the conflict between North and South.

Accept supported judgments that distinguish Brown's failed plan from the raid's wider impact. Students may describe Northern reactions as divided rather than suggesting all Northerners praised Brown.