



# Teaching Unit: Footsteps to Freedom at the Camp Nelson National Monument

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## #1 Defining Home

**UNIT:** Footsteps to Freedom at the Camp Nelson National Monument

**TARGET LEVEL:** K-12

**MATERIALS:** computer, internet connection, pen and paper.

**SKILLS PROMOTED:** critical thinking, close reading and interpretation, primary source and visual analysis.

Students consider what constitutes a 'home' by learning about the experiences and aspirations of the Black refugee community at Camp Nelson.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

1. Students will learn about the development of the Black refugee community at Camp Nelson, the reasons they came, the challenges they faced, and how their actions ultimately shifted the course of the war.
2. Students will assess the human and political impact of the 1864 expulsion at Camp Nelson, the establishment of the Home for Refugees, and its commemorative legacy.

### RESOURCES:

Exhibit: Refugee Tents; Home for Refugees; Oliver Perry House Chapters

Photograph of the Refugee Cottages

Extract from Isabel Wilkerson Caste

### LESSON STEPS:

1. In advance of the class, ask students to explore and read the Refugee Tents; Home for Refugees; and the Oliver Perry House sites of the online exhibit. This will provide them with background of the 1864 expulsion and various 'homes' established at Camp Nelson.
2. Open the class by asking students to share what kind of qualities they think makes a 'home'. Write or draw responses on a large piece of poster or whiteboard. You may wish to share the extract of 'An Old House and the Infrared Light' by Isabel Wilkerson (and/or Lincoln's House Divided Speech) to illustrate how the concept functions metaphorically to think about nation and inherited history.
3. Bring students back to Camp Nelson and recall their pre-lesson exhibit assignment. Lead a group discussion with the following prompts:
  - a. Who lived in the camp?
  - b. How did their experiences differ according to race, gender, and status?
  - c. What were the motivations and aspirations of the refugees who travelled to the camp?
  - d. Why did expulsions occur and what do they tell us about the camp's leadership and the Union troops' understanding of the Camp's purpose?
4. Share the photograph of the Refugee Cottages at Camp Nelson on a large screen. Ask students to analyse the image in pairs using the 'describe/reflect/question' method and prompts below:
  - a. **Describe:** Look closely at this image, what do you see? What is the subject matter? [e.g. In this black and white image, women and children gather in the

thoroughfare of a long row of cottages. A man on horseback is elevated above the crowd.]

- b. Reflect: What do you think is going on in this image? Who do you think these people are? What does it tell us about living in Camp Nelson? Is this what you expected a military camp would look like?
- c. Question: What can't we learn from this image? What other sources can we look for to find that information?

**ASSESSMENT:**

1. Create a poster that introduces a general audience to the history of the Home for Refugees at Camp Nelson using the documents and knowledge gained during this lesson.
2. [Grade K-5 /6-8] Draw and annotate a house that reflects the different kinds of 'home' found at Camp Nelson.
3. [Grade 9-12 /Higher Education] Research another refugee (also known as 'contraband') camp that arose during the Civil War. Write an essay comparing the circumstances and experiences that Black refugees faced at your chosen example with those at Camp Nelson.

## RESOURCES:



The Home for Colored Refugees at Camp Nelson featured 97 duplex cottages to house African Americans refugees, including men unfit for military service, women, and children. *Camp Nelson Photographic Collection, 1864, University of Kentucky Special Collections Research Center*

**Isabel Wilkerson. 'An Old House and an Infrared Light' in *Caste: The Origins of our Discontent*.**

“America is an old house. We can never declare the work over. Wind, flood, drought, and human upheavals batter a structure that is already fighting whatever flaws were left unattended in the original foundation. When you live in an old house, you may not want to go into the basement after a storm to see what the raise have wrought. Choose not to look, however, at your own peril. The owner of an old house knows that whatever you are ignoring will never go away. Whatever is lurking will fester whether you choose to look or not. Ignorance is no protection from the consequences of inaction. Whatever you are wishing away will gnaw at you until you gather the courage to face what you would rather not see. We in the developed world are like homeowners who inherited a house on a piece of land that is beautiful on the outside, but whose soil is unstable loam and rock, heaving and contracting over generations, cracks patched but the deeper ruptures waved away for decades, centuries even. Many people may rightly say, “I had nothing to do with how this all started. I have nothing to do with the sins of the past. My ancestors never attacked indigenous people, never owned slaves.” And, yes. Not one of us was here when this house was built. Our immediate ancestors may have had nothing to do with it, but here we are, the current occupants of a property with stress cracks and bowed walls and fissures built into the foundation. We are the heirs to whatever is right or wrong with it. We did not erect the uneven pillars or joists, but they are ours to deal with now. And any further deterioration is, in fact, on our hands.”