



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
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## **The Amistad Story: Commemorating a Local Narrative**

Guide for Curriculum Unit 08.03.09  
by Kristin Wetmore

Why should my students study the Amistad case? It is a fascinating narrative for several reasons. It was really the first civil rights case in this country. It happened before the Civil War, at a time when black people had few rights, if any. It is a David and Goliath story, good vs. evil, right vs. wrong. The case illustrates how the people of New Haven came together for a just cause. The case still has relevance today. New Haven and its residents played an important role in the odyssey of the Amistad captives. A small group of committed people from New Haven helped bring about change that resonated for years.

The first time I taught about the Amistad captives, I came across a quote by Dr. John Henrik Clarke in *The Middle Passage* by Tom Feelings. He wrote, "Of the countless number of Africans ripped from the villages of Africa -- from the Senegal River to northern Angola -- during the nearly four centuries of the slave trade, approximately one third of them died on the torturous march to the ships and one third of them died in the holding stations on both sides of the Atlantic or on the ships. If the Atlantic were to dry up, it would reveal a scattered pathway of human bones, African bones marking the various routes of the Middle Passage." I have never forgotten this image. This is the reason I think it is so important to teach all students of the struggle to overcome such atrocities.

(Recommended for Social Studies and Art History, grades 7-12)

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