

Discussion Guide



Directions: Discuss the following questions with your partner(s).

1. What ideals encouraged John Brown to dedicate his life to abolitionism?
2. When John Brown dedicated his life to the destruction of slavery what means did he use to achieve his goal? Were there other means at his disposal that were less violent? What other courses did abolitionists use to work for the end of slavery in the United States? Which ones were consistent with the constitutional rule of law and a healthy civic society?
3. What is the difference between acting according to uncompromising principles and acting according to the classical idea of prudence, or practical wisdom? Which course guided Brown, and did it benefit his cause?
4. Why did John Brown move to Kansas? What actions against slavery did he take while he was there? Were his actions justified? Explain your answer.
5. Is it ever morally permissible to do a wrong to achieve a good end? Explain your answer.
6. What was Brown's plan to rid the country of slavery? Was it a realistic plan? Were there other alternatives that he could have pursued to help end slavery? Had he deluded himself into thinking that it was the right and only path? Explain your answers.
7. Did the raid on Harper's Ferry go according to plan? Were innocent people were swept up in the violence and lost their lives? Did Brown consider the loss of life tragic or necessary to achieve his goals? Explain your answer.
8. Did Brown express any remorse for killing people or breaking the law? Did his righteous vision cloud his judgment regarding the rightness or wrongness of his actions? Explain your answer.
9. Did Brown consider the consequences of his raid for human lives? Did he consider the consequences if he had actually succeeded in raiding Harper's Ferry and starting a race war in the South? Did he consider the consequences of fueling tensions between North and South because of his violent plan? Explain your answers.
10. Why was John Brown considered by some to be a hero and by some to be a villain? Why is his life and legacy still debated as a hero or villain?