

Publishers' Bindings Online, 1815-1930: The Art of Books
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Sample Lesson Plan: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*
Grades 5-8

Objectives:

Students will learn that although it was written in antebellum America, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published for many years thereafter and in many languages. They also will see that one book can take on a variety of appearances. Key concepts include bookbinding techniques such as blind stamping, gold stamping, color stamping, white metal stamping, and onlay. The lesson will be completed with the aid of the PBO bindings database.

Materials:

A computer with an Internet connection and a large screen or other capability to display the teacher's actions to the entire class.

Lesson

Introduction

Written in 1850 and first published as a magazine serial in 1851, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin or, Life Among the Lowly* reached book form in 1852. The abolitionist novel sold 10,000 copies its first week and 300,000 copies in its first year, on its way to becoming the best-selling American novel of the 1850s. The book was so influential that when Abraham Lincoln met Harriet Beecher Stowe, he was rumored to have said to her, "So this is the little lady who made this big war."

Considered a classic, the book has continued publishing in various forms to this day, including some versions created especially for children. Although they have basically the same content inside, the numerous editions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* look quite different on the outside. Their covers have been made of different materials, such as leather, cloth, and paper. A number of different techniques have been used to put letters and pictures on the covers, including stamping and printing. The pictures themselves have varied greatly. In addition, the book has been translated into many different languages, so some covers have words and even letters that an English-speaking person might not understand.

During this lesson, we will discover some of the many different forms the cover of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has taken during the past 150-plus years.

1852 Covers

[Teacher's Note: Covers from 1852 can be found by going to "Guided Search" (go to <http://bindings.lib.ua.edu/sitesearch.html>, select the "Search by Keyword" link, and click on "Guided Search" at the top of the page) and seeking *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (as a phrase)

in the title field AND 1852 in the date field. Specify 50 records to be “Displayed in Gallery” before clicking on “Search.” Scroll down slowly to allow students to see all of the covers in thumbnail form.]

Numerous copies of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* exist from the original publication year, 1852. You will notice that many of the covers are quite similar.

One common appearance of the cover in 1852 was a blind-stamped front with a gold-stamped spine. [Click on the third image from the left on the top line (pbw00269). Click on the large box underneath the example to enlarge the image.] A blind-stamped design is an impression made in leather or cloth without coloring the material. The cover of this copy of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* has a border, corner designs, and center design blind-stamped in black cloth. Notice the title is not on the front cover. [Click on the image of the spine.] The title, along with some other designs, is stamped on the spine in gold leaf. This is what many 1852 copies of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* look like. [Click on “Results” to return to the gallery view. You may move on or explore other examples of this technique in the gallery. Individual examples also can be found by seeking the pbw or pba number in any field in “Guided Search.” Other examples of this technique include pbw00259, pbw00267, pbw00272, and pbw00341.]

Several other 1852 covers are of a brown or beige color with a similar picture gold-stamped on the front. [From the gallery view of 1852 covers, click on the last image on the third line (pba00019).] The picture shows a scene of slave life. Many of the covers that have a picture like this have some blind stamping on the front cover, in addition to the picture stamped in gold-leaf. This cover has a wide decorative border. [Click on the image of the back.] The same border and picture both are blind-stamped on the back. This copy also does not display the title on the front cover. [Click on the image of the spine.] The title, as well as the author’s name, is gold-stamped on the spine. Notice there are some designs blind-stamped on the spine as well. [Click on “Results” to return to the gallery view. You may move on or explore other examples of this technique in the gallery: pbw00020-27, pba00618-619.]

All of these covers were from editions published either in the United States or Great Britain. Let’s look now at one published in Germany. [From the gallery view of 1852 covers, click on the second image on the second line (pba00751).] The cover is blue cloth with an ornate gold-stamped design surrounded by a double-line blind-stamped border, on both the front and back. [Click on the image of the back.] This is a neutral design, unlike the others that depict slave life. Again, the title does not appear on the front. [Click on the image of the spine.] The spine has the title and more designs stamped in gold leaf. [Click on “Results” to return to the gallery view.]

The covers discussed thus far have been leather or cloth. Two examples from 1852 have paper covers. One is white paper and the other is red. [Point out the first image on the next-to-last line (pbw00265), then click on the second image on the last line (pbw00355).] Both of them have black printing, including the title, on the front cover.

This one also has an illustration of a slave auction on the front... [[Click on the image of the back.](#)] ...and an illustration of a mid-nineteenth-century town on the back.

Illustrations

Now let's consider illustrations that have appeared on the covers of various editions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The most common depict an African-American man (Uncle Tom) with a Caucasian child (the character Eva).

[[These covers can be found by going to "Guided Search" and seeking Uncle Tom's Cabin \(as a phrase\) in the title field AND African Americans \(all of these\) in the subject field AND girls in the subject field. Specify 50 records to be "Displayed in Gallery." Scroll down slowly to show all covers.](#)]

Notice that although these illustrations have a similar theme, they represent different styles and techniques.

For instance, some have full color illustrations printed on either a paper cover or a dust jacket. [[Click on the first image on the second line \(pba00621\).](#)] This cover comes from an edition of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that was published in the 1890s. The picture takes up the entire front of the book. Notice the title is printed on the front in red. There is nothing on the spine. [[Click on "Results" to return to the gallery view. Click on the last image in the fourth line \(pbw00380\).](#)] The cover that is attached to this book, from 1910, is orange with letters stamped in blue. [[Click on other part image.](#)] However, this book was sold with a paper dust jacket, which has a full-color picture and the title printed on it. [[Return to the gallery and click on the third image in the last full line \(pbw00315\)](#)] In some cases, the color illustration is printed on a small piece of paper, which is pasted onto the cloth or leather cover. This is known as an "onlay." This book from 1904 has an onlay surrounded by gold-stamped designs. The book's title is gold-stamped on the front cover as well. [[Return to the gallery.](#)]

On some books, the entire illustration is stamped onto the cover. This can be done in gold, individual colors, or multiple colors. Several *Uncle Tom's Cabin* covers have illustrations stamped in all black. [[Click on the last image in the seventh line \(pbw00294\).](#)] You can see on this 1889 cover that the picture and surrounding design, the book title, and the author's name all are stamped in black. [[Return to the gallery. Click on the last image in the eighth line \(pbw00351\).](#)] On this book cover, from 1882, the illustration is stamped completely in gold. The title does not appear on the front. [[Click on spine image.](#)] Again, you can find the title on the spine, stamped in gold. [[Return to the gallery. Click on the second image in the fourth line \(pbw00344\).](#)] Black and gold are the two most common colors used, both individually and in combination, as in this cover from the 1880s. Here the illustration, the title, the author's name, and corner decoration are in gold, and other designs are stamped in black. [[Return to the gallery. Click on the last image in the second line \(pbw00266\).](#)] Many colors can be used together to make a stamped illustration, as on this book from 1891. *Ask students: What colors do you see on this cover?* (Answer: Gold, black, red, orange, yellow, green, and brown are stamped on a blue cloth.)

Several other illustrations also can be found on various editions of the book. There are scenes of slave life, as we saw in the 1852 covers, as well as many caricatures of African-Americans, and other figures or scenes that seem to have nothing to do with Uncle Tom.

[Return to gallery. Click on last image (pbw00333)] This illustration from 1901 is considered a caricature of an African American because the features are exaggerated. *Ask students: What technique was used on this cover?* (Answer: The illustration, title, and author's name are stamped in black and white.)

[In "Guided Search," seek pbw00292 in any field. Click on the thumbnail.] The illustration on the cover of this book, from 1888, is somewhat unexpected. Printed in black and gold is a man riding a chariot, with a sun and stars in the background. [Click on spine image.] There is an angel holding a child gold-stamped on the spine.

[You can explore other illustrations of slave life, caricatures, and other figures/scenes by doing individual searches for the following as above (seek the pbw or pba number in "Guided Search"). Short descriptions of examples in each category are provided below, but it probably would be best to look over them and decide what you like before class.

Scenes of slave life: pbw00304 (1903; color stamping), pbw00332 (1900; color stamping), pbw00342 (1852; gold-stamped), pbw00347 (1853; gold-stamped w/ blind border), pbw00360 (1890; black stamped picture with gold-stamped title), pbw00373 (1893; black-stamped slave auction scene in center, with gold stamped faces at the corners), pbw00378 (1904; color stamping), pbw00384 (1927; color stamping), pbw00388 (1911; full color illustration on white box; actual cover has black-stamped symbol).

Caricatures of African Americans: pbw00307 (1891; black and white stamping), pbw00328 (1900; full color dust jacket; actual cover is blue with title stamped in white metal), pbw00330 (1900; full color onlay), pbw00364 (1899; color stamping), pbw00376 (1897; multi-color stamping).

Other figures/scenes: pbw00299 (1902; black-stamped onlay of a Victorian woman), pbw00300 (1896; African American child in front of a cottage with a garden; full color onlay), pbw00308 (1892; African American child drawn on paper), pbw00314 (1853; gold stamped man and angel in center with blind stamped corners), pbw00322 (1853; full color paper onlay of Napoleonic figure; gold and black ornamentation), pbw00329 (1900; full color onlay of a house w/ black-stamped ornamentation), pbw00348 (1853; Jesus with slaves, gold stamped w/ blind stamped border), pbw00354 (1880; gold stamped man), pbw00372 (1897; gold, orange, and green stamped house at sunset), pbw00754 (1853; gold-stamped Romanesque columns with figures at the corners).]

Classroom Activity:

Floral/other designs

[Find these covers by going to "Guided Search" and seeking Uncle Tom's Cabin (as a phrase) in the title field AND floral in the subject field NOT people in the subject field.

Specify 50 results “Displayed in Gallery.” Scroll slowly so students can see all of the thumbnails.]

As we saw with the German cover from 1852, some covers have intricate designs made of flowers, curves, and lines. A number of covers on different editions of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* have such designs. [Click on the last image in the third line (pbw00301).] This book from 1896 uses a technique we have not yet discussed. You can see that the title and part of the decoration look like silver. This is called white metal stamping. Silver can’t be used because it would turn black, so a mixture of other metals made to look like silver is used instead. [Return to the gallery.]

Ask the students to compare the styles and techniques used on this group of illustrations. You can click the images at random, or ask students to select thumbnails that look interesting. Things to look for include the color of the cover material; the technique of illustration (gold stamped, black stamped, multi-color stamped, full color onlay, full color on paper cover); the location of the illustration (center, corner, top, full cover); what else is on the cover (Other illustrations? Other ornamentation? What kind: stamped, blind, printed?); Is the title and/or author’s name on the front?; What color is the lettering?

Foreign language editions

Everything we’ve seen so far has been from English-language versions of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. However, the book has been translated into many different languages over the years.

[You can select any number of these examples to show. Find them by seeking each pbw/pba number in any field in “Guided Search.” For each example, you can ask the students what they notice about the covers; any similarities or differences from the English versions.

De Negerhut (Dutch, 1890) – pbw00324, red with black stamping.

La Cabana del tio Tom (Spanish, 1852) – pbw00326, green leather with blind and gold stamping

La Capanna dello Zio Tom (Italian, 1903) – pbw00268, brown with gold, black and blue stamping

Le Case de l’oncle Tom (French, 1912) – pbw00377, red with color illustration

Onkel Tom’s Hutte (German, 1900) – pbw00313, red w/ black stamping and full-color onlay

Onkel Tom’s Kebin (Yiddish, 1911) – pbw00331, blue with gold stamping

Onkel Tom’s Stuga (Swedish, 1902) – pbw00385, brown with gold, black, red and blue stamping

V Chaloupce Stryce Toma (Czech, 1927) – pbw00311, cream with blue and red stamping]

Summary

Harriett Beecher Stowe wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a fictional argument against slavery in 1850. Since its first publication as a book in 1852, it has worn many different covers. The leather, cloth, and paper used to cover the text has been every color from beige to blue to red, and taken on every form of decoration, from a blind, colorless impression of a neutral design to a full-color illustration of slave life. Sometimes the title doesn't appear on the front cover, and sometimes it's in a language other than English. Obviously, even if the text remains the same over time, one book can take on a variety of appearances.

For additional teaching resources on *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, see:

American Writers, Teacher Resources:

http://www.americanwriters.org/classroom/resources/tr_stowe.asp

Harriett Beecher Stowe Center, Teacher & Student Resources:

http://www.harrietbeecherstowecenter.org/teacher_student/

Learning Page, American Memory, Library of Congress:

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/collections/slavery/langarts.html>

“On an Underground Railroad,” History Happens, Stories from American History on Music Video:

<http://www.ushistory.com/railr.htm>

Uncle Tom's Cabin Teacher Guide, University of Virginia:

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA02/harris/utc/index.html>

“Uncle Tom's Cabin: The Most Important American Novel?”, St. Louis University:

<http://pages.slu.edu/faculty/reitzc/utc.html>