

Handout

Petition for Freedom to the Massachusetts Legislature, 1777



Directions

Read the text by yourself. As you read, make annotations in the left margin to record your ideas and reactions to the text. Use these annotation symbols:

- ♥ = **Thought** (when that line or sentence contains something that you like or that gives you an idea)
- ? = **Question** (when you don't understand the line or sentence or you have a specific question about it)
- ! = **Epiphany** (when you just learned something important from this line or sentence about yourself, people in general, or the world)

Do NOT answer the reflection questions in the dashed boxes. Do NOT complete the TQE Time! section or the connection questions.

Annotations	Black Freedom Struggles During the American Revolution	DEFINITIONS
♥ = Thought ? = Question ! = Epiphany	<p>Black activism flourished during and after the American Revolution. Free and enslaved Black people sued or petitioned state legislatures for their freedom, demanding that enslaved people be freed and that the principles of the new nation apply to them. Others chose different routes to freedom, purchasing their liberty from their enslavers or running away at the end of the Revolutionary War.</p>	<p>flourished: grew strong.</p> <p>legislatures: group of people who vote for new laws, such as in a state or country.</p>

<p>Annotations</p> <p>♥ = Thought ? = Question ! = Epiphany</p>	<p>Petitioning for Freedom</p> <p>This 1777 petition to the Massachusetts state legislature was drafted by Prince Hall and eight other Black Bostonians. Hall was a free African American who had served in the Revolutionary War at the Battle of Bunker Hill. Hall and the other signers drafted the petition on behalf of all enslaved people in Massachusetts. Although the petition was ultimately unsuccessful, subsequent petitions and lawsuits from enslaved people in the state contributed to the abolition of slavery in Massachusetts in 1783.</p>	<p>DEFINITION</p> <p>petition: a request to do something, usually to a government agency or public official. The request is made on behalf of a group. Individuals of the group sign their name to the request.</p>
--	---	---

READ and RESPOND:

Refer to the definition of the word “petition” above. Have you ever signed a petition? What do you think might be the benefits of signing a petition compared to some other civic action, such as voting?

<p>Annotations</p> <p>♥ = Thought ? = Question ! = Epiphany</p>	<p>The Petition</p> <p>The text of the petition reads:</p> <p>We understand that we have, in common with all other men, a natural & unalienable right to that freedom, which God has given equally to all and which we have never given up in any contract or agreement.</p>	<p>DEFINITIONS</p> <p>unalienable: cannot be taken away.</p> <p>contract: an agreement that can be enforced by the law.</p>
--	---	--

REFLECTION QUESTION:

What words and phrases do you recognize from the Declaration of Independence? Why do you think the petitioners used such language when they appealed to the Massachusetts state legislature?

<p>Annotations</p> <p>♥ = Thought ? = Question ! = Epiphany</p>	<p>The Petition (continued)</p> <p>But we were unjustly dragged, by the cruel hand of power, from our dearest friends, & some of us even torn from the embraces of our tender parents . . . & brought here to be sold like beasts of burden, & like them condemned to slavery for life . . .</p>	<p>DEFINITIONS</p> <p>beasts of burden: animals used to carry heavy loads, such as donkeys, mules, or oxen.</p> <p>condemned: sentenced to punishment.</p>
--	---	---

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Circle all the verbs used in this section. How do these verbs make you feel? Why do you think the petitioners chose to use these verbs in their petition?

Annotations ♥ = Thought ? = Question ! = Epiphany	The Petition (continued) Every principle from which America has acted in the course of her unhappy difficulties with Great-Britain, pleads stronger than a thousand arguments in favor of us.	DEFINITIONS principle: a basic truth. pleads: argues for.
---	---	--

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

“In the course of her unhappy difficulties with Great-Britain” refers to what historical event?

What are the “principles” associated with that event?

Why do you think the petitioners would state that those principles support their petition?

Annotations	The Petition (continued)	DEFINITIONS
<p>♥ = Thought ? = Question ! = Epiphany</p>	<p>We therefore humbly beg your honors, to consider this petition, & pass a law whereby slaves may be restored to the enjoyment of that freedom which is the natural right of all men—& their children (who were born in this Land of Liberty) may not be held as slaves after they arrive at the age of twenty one years.</p> <p>Lancaster Hill</p> <p>Peter Bess</p> <p>Brister Slenten</p> <p>Prince Hall</p> <p>Jack Purpont (his mark)</p> <p>Nero Suneto (his mark)</p> <p>Newport Symner (his mark)</p> <p>Job Lock</p>	<p>humbly: not proud or arrogant.</p> <p>honors: term of respect.</p> <p>whereby: by which.</p>

REFLECTION QUESTION:

What do the petitioners want from the Massachusetts government? On what basis do they make their case?

Directions for Reading a Second Time with a Partner



1. Read the text again with a partner. Take turns reading out loud to one another.
2. If you have new thoughts, questions, or epiphanies, add these annotations to the ones you made during the first read.
3. Answer the questions in the gray boxes at the end of each section together.
4. Do not discuss your annotations; wait until you get to **TQE Time!** at the end of the text. Read the directions there for sharing your annotations with each other.
5. Answer the connection questions together after **TQE Time!**

TQE Time!¹



Directions: Look back at your annotations. Choose two thoughts, two questions, and two epiphanies to record in the table below. Use the sentence frames to write out your thoughts, questions, and epiphanies.

♥ = Thoughts	? = Questions	! = Epiphanies
<p>Sample sentence frames:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The sentence _____ made me think . . . • I wonder about the line . . . <p>1.</p> <p>2.</p>	<p>Sample sentence frames:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't understand . . . • I am confused by . . . <p>1.</p> <p>2.</p>	<p>Sample sentence frames:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I learned that . . . • I was surprised to find out that . . . <p>1.</p> <p>2.</p>

¹ Adapted from Marisa Thompson, "TQE: Thoughts, Questions, and Epiphanies," Unlimited Teacher, accessed October 23, 2023.



Directions: Take turns sharing your annotations with your partner:

1. Start by sharing your **thoughts** with one another.
2. Then share your **questions** and try to help one another answer them.
3. Record answers to the questions in the space below.
4. Finally, share your **epiphanies** with one another.

Answers to questions and other notes:

Connection Questions



Directions:

Read the connection questions below and try to answer them together.
Be prepared to share your answers with the whole class.

1. What connections can you make between this source and the ideas of the Declaration of Independence?

- Connection 1:
- Connection 2:
- Connection 3:

2. In what way can this source be seen as its own declaration? What is the source declaring?

3. You and your partner will write a tweet with no more than 280 characters (including hashtags and emojis). You have a choice of tweets to write:
- Choose a quote from the text that affected you in some way. Maybe you found it surprising, interesting, or troubling. Explain why the quote was meaningful for you.
 - Tweet about your biggest “takeaway idea” (the most important idea that you will remember) from this text. What is the idea, and why is it important to remember?