



The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens

# SLAVERY: A CRISIS IN THE MAKING



Grade 5  
United States History and Geography

---

## I. Standards Assessed

### History-Social Science Content Standards

5.6

- (7) Understand how the ideals set forth in the Declaration of Independence changed the way people viewed slavery.

5.7

- (2) Explain the significance of the new Constitution of 1787, including the struggles over its ratification.

### History-Social Science Analysis Skill Standards

#### *Historical Interpretation*

- (1) Students summarize the key events of the era they are studying and explain the historical contexts of those events.
- (2) Students identify and interpret the multiple causes and effects of historical events.

### English-Language Arts Content Standards

#### *Reading Comprehension*

- 2.3 Discern main ideas and concepts presented in texts, identifying and assessing evidence that supports those ideas.
- 2.4 Draw inferences, conclusions, or generalizations about text and support them with textual evidence and prior knowledge.
- 2.5 Distinguish facts, supported inferences, and opinions in text.

*Speaking*

2.2 Deliver informative presentations about an important idea, issue, or event....

**English-Language Development Standards (Grades 3–5, Level 4)***Reading Fluency*

- (6) use decoding skills and knowledge of academic and social vocabulary to achieve independent reading.
- (8) Read increasingly complex narrative and expository texts aloud with appropriate pacing, intonation and expression.

*Reading Comprehension*

- (1) Describe main ideas and supporting details of a text.
- (6) Distinguish between explicit examples of fact, opinions, inference, and cause/effect in texts.

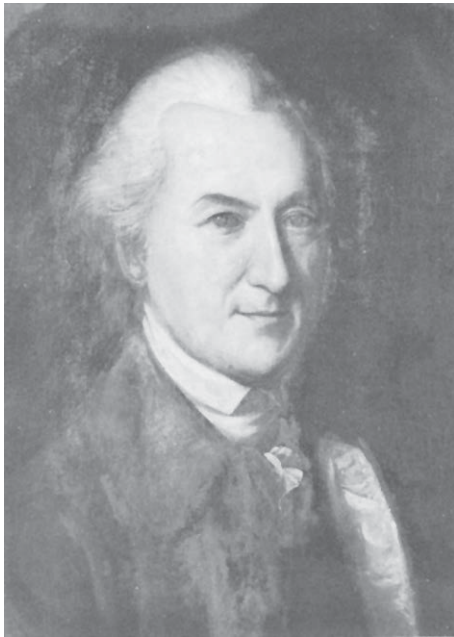
**Theater Standards***Connections, Relationships, Applications*

- 5.1 Use theatrical skills to dramatize events and concepts from other curriculum areas.

## II. Teacher Background Information

Slavery was a divisive issue during the Revolutionary Era and throughout the early Republic. There had been attempts by individuals and religious sects to bring an end to the nefarious institution. In 1773 slaves in Massachusetts called for the colony to abolish slavery. They, however, were unsuccessful.

During the conflict with Britain after the Seven Years' War, colonial legislatures saw the opportunity to retaliate by calling for an end to the Atlantic slave trade. This, according to patriots, would be another means of hurting British merchants who were profiting from the importation and sale of slaves. During the session of the First Continental Congress in Philadelphia, colonial delegates voted to end the slave trade as of December 1, 1774. Britain objected and continued the trade in slaves from West Africa to the Caribbean and continental North America. The following year Connecticut, Rhode Island, and the southern colony of Georgia prohibited the importation of slaves from Africa and the Caribbean.



John Dickinson  
(Dover Publications, 1967), 164.

The Society of Friends had opposed slavery and communities of Quakers had voted to condemn the binding of persons in perpetual bondage. Some called for gradual emancipation while others sought an immediate end to slavery. Quakers were among the leaders in the first abolitionist society founded in Philadelphia in 1775.

During the years leading up to the American Revolution, colonial leaders often accused the British Parliament of attempting to enslave the American colonies through restrictive legislation. This became as familiar a cry as “no taxation without representation.” Thomas Jefferson and John Dickinson were among those who accused the British of enslaving the American colonies in the “Necessity for Taking up Arms,” a document adopted by the Second Continental Congress on July 6, 1775.

... We have counted the cost of this contest, and find nothing so dreadful as voluntary slavery. — Honor, justice, and humanity, forbid us tamely to surrender that freedom which we received from our gallant ancestors, and which our innocent posterity have a right to receive from us. ... We most solemnly, before God and the world, declare that...the arms we have been compelled by our enemies to assume, we will...employ for the preservation of our liberties; being with one mind resolved to die freemen rather than to live [as] slaves. . . .<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “The Necessity of Taking up Arms,” *Annals of America*, Vol. 2 (Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1976), 340–1.

Just a month before the Congress had appointed George Washington as Commander in Chief of the Continental Army. Shortly after taking command, Washington announced that the army would not permit the enlistment of free blacks or slaves. Black soldiers had fought at Lexington and Concord, Bunker Hill, and other early battles with the British before the adoption of the Army's policy of prohibiting the enlistment of both slaves and free blacks—a measure not well received by those who had taken up arms. They complained to the army staff and Washington ultimately agreed to let them re-enlist once their term of duty was up but would not accept any new African American recruits.

Benjamin Quarles in *The Negro in the Making of America* explained that states soon followed suit.

... By the summer of 1776, every New England state had officially barred black enlistments. In Pennsylvania nonwhites were exempted from military service, and in both Delaware and New York recruiting officers were told they must not enroll anyone who owed service to a master. In the southern states the new enlistment laws were duplicates of the colonial statutes confining military service to whites, except for Virginia, which still left ajar for the free Negro.<sup>2</sup>

This policy was based on the false assumption that the war would not last long. As the war waged on with no end in sight, the enlistment of African Americans met with decreasing opposition. States were given enlistment quotas and many saw fit to include African Americans, both free and slave in those numbers. By 1779 Congress recommended the enlistment of African Americans and urged Georgia and South Carolina to raise a force of 3,000 slaves. Slave owners would be compensated up to \$1,000 for “each active able-bodied Negro man of standard size, not exceeding thirty-five years of age.”<sup>3</sup> If the slave fought bravely at war's end he would receive his freedom and \$50. Neither Georgia nor South Carolina approved of this compensation plan.

Lord Dunmore, Royal Governor of Virginia, issued a proclamation in November 1775 declaring that any slave or indentured servant who fought with the British would gain their freedom. Shortly after the proclamation was issued, Lord Dunmore was forced to flee. But, word has spread and a number of slaves flocked to British lines. During the British Southern Campaign similar proclamations were issued, further swelling the ranks of British forces.

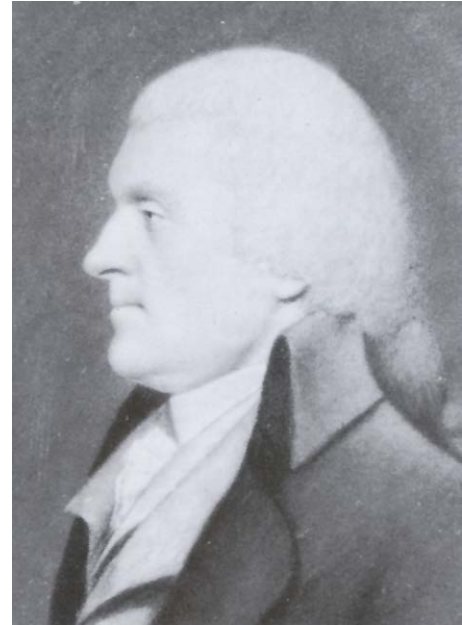
Slaves served on both sides during the conflict. They were fighting to achieve freedom. As either Patriot or Loyalist, they expected the war was a means of attaining freedom from bondage.

<sup>2</sup> Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the Making of America* (Collier Books, 1970), 47.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 49.

Years after the war, the Marquis de Lafayette who had served with General Washington and fought valiantly for the American cause expressed regret and anger that the war had not brought an end to slavery. He wrote: "I would never have drawn my sword in the cause of America, if I could have conceived that thereby I was founding a land of slavery."<sup>4</sup>

During and after the war, individual men and women rebelled against the institution of slavery. In some northern states they used the courts to win freedom. Many used the inspirational words that Thomas Jefferson had written in the Declaration of Independence asking how a nation built on this foundation could deny that the institution of slavery was inconsistent with the unalienable rights to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."



Thomas Jefferson  
(Dover Publications, 1967), 337.

In 1787 delegates from twelve states met in Philadelphia at a general convention originally designed to propose amendments to the Articles of Confederation. The majority of these delegates proposed the development of a new document as a frame of government. As they hammered out differences in drafting this new constitution the issue of slavery loomed over the convention. Each time an issue dealing with slavery arose, delegates from South Carolina and Georgia took the lead and threatened to wreck any agreement. Delegates from these two states, usually supported by North Carolina, demanded the continuation of the slave trade, the counting of slaves for the purpose of representation in the House of Representatives, and a fugitive slave clause that would return escaped slaves.

Rather than risk failure to adopt a new constitution, most delegates agreed to compromise basically conceding to the demands of South Carolina and Georgia. Political scientists and most historians in the twentieth century have accepted the belief that the nation would have floundered had the delegates not agreed to compromise on the slavery issue. Many argue that slavery was a decaying institution and was not expected to prevail in the years following the adoption of the Constitution. Some modern historians, however, have argued that South Carolina and especially Georgia were in no position to disrupt the union. Georgia needed a strong central government for protection from the Creeks and Spanish who were a constant threat to the state's security. South Carolina depended on the trade and commerce with the upper South and Northern states. The argument still persists.

---

<sup>4</sup> Alfred Blumrosen and Ruth Blumrosen, *Slave Nation: How Slavery United the Colonies & Sparked the American Revolution* (Barnes & Noble, 2005), 97.

### III. Materials Needed

- Reader's Theater Script
- Props for stage settings (e.g., desk and chairs, quill pen, hats or simple costumes if desired)

### IV. Lesson Activities

1. The lesson consists of a Reader's Theater script for class presentation. There are 24 speaking parts. All the characters in the script listed by name were actual individuals. Direct quotes are included in some of the dialogue. In other instances direct quotes were not used because of the level of difficulty in reading these passages. In these cases every attempt was made to appropriately paraphrase the dialogue. Sources for the quotes are provided in Appendix 1 (page 29).

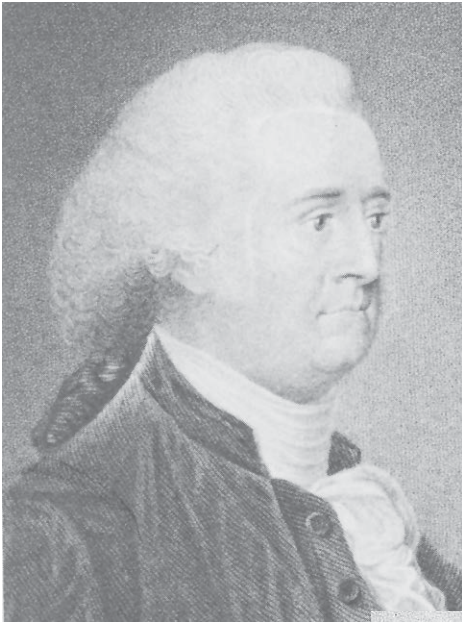
Two narrators are used in the script to set the stage for the scene, to explain or clarify events, or to break long dialogue. Selected vocabulary words in direct quotes are defined and placed in brackets in the quotation. These words are in italics. Other bracketed words are added to the original. In the quotations included in the Reader's Theater, spelling and capitalization may have been changed to conform to modern conventions.

Since it is important to involve the entire class in the Reader's Theater, it is recommended that different students be selected for roles in each act thus increasing the speaking roles from 24 to 31. For a larger class, add additional individuals with limited speaking roles. Such additions could be actual historical characters or "persons on the street" reacting to what has been said by other characters in the script. It is also important to note that some speaking roles are considerable longer than others. For example, Narrator 1 typically has the most dialogue. Mum Bett in Act 2; Gouverneur Morris, John Rutledge, and Samuel Field in Act 3; and, Benjamin Banneker in Act 4 have longer dialogues than other characters.

2. Before beginning the dramatization, insure that students have some understanding of how divisive slavery was in the era of the American Revolution and the early years after independence. You may wish to use a class brainstorming activity and record student responses or have individual students develop a graphic organizer listing what they know and what they would like to know about attitudes towards slavery in early American history.
3. Distribute the Reader's Theater script to the class and assign student roles. Students should read over the entire script before concentrating on their individual roles. If you wish, arrange the classroom for the presentation including a backdrop using pictures of individuals who are involved in the scene and props appropriate for a particular scene. Students may wish to wear some revolutionary era hats or a simple costume.



4. Conclude the lesson with a discussion of the events revealed in the dramatization. You may wish to have students write a short paper on what alternative action the Founders may have taken considering the demands that some southern states were making in order to maintain slavery.



John Rutledge (left), Benjamin Banneker (center), Charles Pinckney (right)  
*Dictionary of American Portraits*, 537; National Archives (1943), ARC# 535626; *Dictionary of American Portraits*, 490.

## **Slavery: A Crisis in the Making**

### Setting for Act 1

Scene 1    A church in Newburyport, Massachusetts

Scene 2    Meeting of the Second Continental Congress, Philadelphia

Scene 3    Meeting of the Second Continental Congress, Philadelphia,  
July 1776

### Act 1 Characters in order of appearance

- Nathaniel Niles of Massachusetts
- Narrator 1
- Narrator 2
- John Dickinson of Delaware
- Thomas Jefferson of Virginia
- Patrick Henry of Virginia
- John Adams of Massachusetts
- Thomas Paine of Pennsylvania

\* \* \* \* \*

### Setting for Act 2

A small town near Stockbridge, Massachusetts, 1781

### Act 2 characters in order of appearance

- Mum Bett of Massachusetts
- Mrs. Ashley of Massachusetts
- Narrator 1
- Mr. Sedgwick of Massachusetts
- Narrator 2
- Judge of the Court of Stockbridge, Massachusetts

\* \* \* \* \*



Setting for Act 3

Scene 1 State House, Philadelphia, Meeting of the Constitutional Convention, 1787

Scene 2 Annapolis, Maryland, office of the state's Attorney General, 1788

Scene 3 Northampton, Massachusetts, office of the *Hampshire Gazette*, 1788

Act 3 characters in order of appearance

- Narrator 1
- Narrator 2
- Gouverneur Morris of Pennsylvania
- Charles Pinckney of South Carolina
- John Rutledge of South Carolina
- James Wilson of Pennsylvania
- Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts
- George Mason of Virginia
- John Dickinson of Delaware
- Abraham Baldwin of Georgia
- Luther Martin of Maryland
- Consider Arms of Massachusetts
- Malichi Maynard of Massachusetts
- Samuel Field of Massachusetts

\* \* \* \* \*

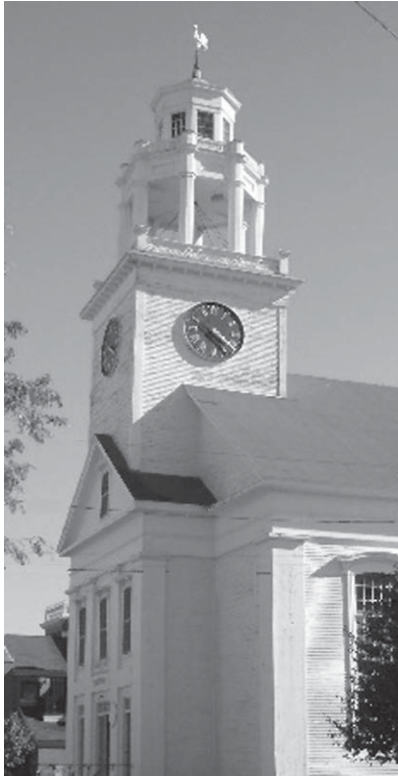
Setting for Act 4

Baltimore Maryland, August 17, 1791

Act 4 characters in order of appearance

- Narrator 1
- Narrator 2
- Benjamin Banneker of Maryland

## Act I, Scene 1



A Sunday morning in July 1774 at a Congregational Church in Newburyport, Massachusetts, Rev. Nathaniel Niles is preaching a sermon

Nathaniel Niles

*(Shaking his finger at parishioners)*

"God gave us liberty, and we have enslaved our fellow men. . . . Would we enjoy liberty? Then we must grant it to others. For shame, let us either cease to enslave our fellow men, or else let us cease to complain of those that would enslave us. Let us either wash our hands from blood, or never hope to escape the avenger [*one who rights wrongs*]."

Narrator 1

What a powerful sermon. I can't imagine anyone who says that the British are attempting to enslave Americans would ever agree to enslave others.

Narrator 2

You would think so. But, I understand that only one member of Rev. Niles's congregation left the church that Sunday intending to free his slaves.

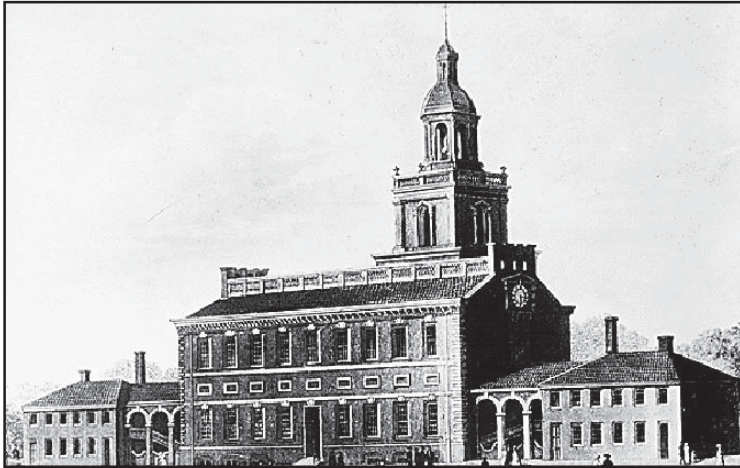
Narrator 1

How could that be?

\* \* \* \* \*

## Act I, Scene 2

Philadelphia, a meeting of the Second Continental Congress, July 1775



Philadelphia State House (Now known as Independence Hall)  
National Archives, ARC#518208

### Narrator 1

The Second Continental Congress was called to order on May 10, 1775. John Dickinson of Delaware worked with Thomas Jefferson, a representative from Virginia, on a document called "The Necessity for Taking Up Arms."

### Narrator 2

This was an important declaration of the Second Continental Congress. It said that Americans were willing to die to keep from being enslaved by the British.

### Narrator 1

Let's listen in while Dickinson and Jefferson read parts of this declaration to the Congress.

### John Dickinson

" . . . We have counted the cost of this contest, and find nothing so dreadful as voluntary slavery. — Honor, justice, and humanity, forbid us tamely [*peacefully*] to surrender that freedom which we received from our gallant ancestors, and which our innocent posterity [*our children and grandchildren*] have a right to receive from us. . . ."

### Thomas Jefferson

" . . . We most solemnly, before God and the world, declare that . . . the arms we have been compelled [*forced*] by our enemies to assume, we will . . . employ for the preservation of our liberties; being with one mind resolved to die freemen rather than to live [*as*] slaves. . . ."

Narrator 2

These are powerful words! The American colonists would fight to the death to keep from being enslaved by the acts passed by the British Parliament. I have overheard other delegates talk in the taverns that they will never agree to live as slaves under the British.

Narrator 1

What does this mean? I know a number of the delegates at the Continental Congress keep men and women in slavery. Even Thomas Jefferson has slaves on his plantation at Monticello, Virginia.

Narrator 2

That's true, but these delegates seem to be saying that they, *THEMSELVES*, will never agree to live as slaves. They just aren't willing to free men, women, and children that they say they own.

Narrator 1

That doesn't seem to make sense to me. Some of these very same delegates who were at the First Continental Congress voted that they would end the slave trade on December 1, 1774.

Narrator 2

I really don't understand how someone is willing to die rather than be enslaved but still keeps slaves.

Narrator 1

Listen to what Patrick Henry had to say some years ago.

Patrick Henry

We find men who believe in a religion that is kind, mild, meek, gentle, and generous, accepting slavery that "is inconsistent with the Bible and destructive to liberty. . . . Would anyone think I am master of slaves of my own purchase! . . . I am drawn along by the general inconvenience of living without them, I will not, I cannot, justify it."

Narrator 1

Patrick Henry is saying slavery is wrong but that he is unwilling to oppose slavery because it would be a hassle for him.

Narrator 2

Wow, that's really something! Did other delegates to the Continental Congress agree with Patrick Henry?

Narrator 1

No, not all. Some would not admit that they believed slavery was wrong. Others thought slavery would slowly disappear over time. A few wanted to end slavery immediately. Abigail Adams wrote a letter to her husband John, a delegate to the Continental Congress from Massachusetts. I overheard John reading the letter at the tavern the other night.

John Adams (*Reading a letter from Abigail*)

"I have sometimes been ready to think that the passion for liberty cannot be equally strong in the breasts of those who have been accustomed to deprive their fellow creatures of theirs."

(*He pauses, smiles, and says aloud*) I remember Abigail saying so often that she wished that there were not a slave in all of Massachusetts. She has said over and over to me that it does not seem reasonable "to fight ourselves for what we are daily robbing . . . from those who have as good a right to freedom as we have."

Narrator 2

Remember how shocked Thomas Paine was when he saw men and women being sold at auction at the London Coffee House here in Philadelphia.

Thomas Paine

How can American slaveholders "complain so loudly of attempts to enslave them, while they hold so many hundred thousand in slavery?"

Narrator 1

That was just after he arrived here from London. I wonder what Tom Paine and Abigail Adams would have to say to slave owners who are here at the Continental Congress?

Narrator 2

I'm sure it would be interesting.

\* \* \* \* \*



## Act 1, Scene 3

Philadelphia, Independence Hall, Continental Congress  
Meeting, July 1776

Thomas Jefferson (*Reading a paragraph from his original draft of the Declaration of Independence*)

"He [*King George III*] has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither [*here*]. . . . He is now exciting [*stirring up*] those very people to rise in arms among us, . . . paying off former crimes committed against the liberties of one people, with crimes which he urges them to commit against the lives of another."

Narrator 1

The slave states, especially South Carolina and Georgia, are objecting to this paragraph.

Narrator 2

Jefferson appears to be ready to argue that this paragraph must stay.

Narrator 1

Yes, but other delegates are advising him that the Congress will never agree to independence if he does not remove it from the Declaration.

Narrator 2

Look, Jefferson is marking an "X" through the paragraph. He doesn't look very happy but just look at the smiles on the faces of the delegates from South Carolina.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Act 2

A small town near Stockbridge, Massachusetts, 1781



On the road to Stockbridge, Massachusetts  
Library of Congress, LC-D4-72069

### Mum Bett

I grew up enslaved in a small town in Massachusetts. I often heard white townspeople talking about their struggle to be free. My husband joined in this fight for freedom against the British and was killed during the war. As a widow with small children I didn't know what to do. Colonel Ashley had fought for freedom in the same war as my husband, but he would not agree to my freedom. I heard Colonel Ashley and the fam-

ily recite the words Thomas Jefferson wrote in the Declaration of Independence. I don't understand why someone would say, "All men are created equal" and still believe that they could enslave others.

### Mrs. Ashley (*Screaming at Mum Bett's sister*)

When I command you to do something you don't answer me back!

(*Shouting to Mum who is standing between her sister and Mrs. Ashley trying to prevent trouble*) Mum, get out of my way, I am going to throw this shovel and I don't care if I hit the both of you.

### Mum Bett (*The shovel hits Mum on her arm leaving a deep cut*)

I have taken all I can. I'm leaving and I will never return.

### Mrs. Ashley

We'll see to that. You are my slave and I will have you arrested if you leave.

### Narrator 1

Mum left the Ashley house and when she heard that Colonel Ashley had gone to the sheriff to have her arrested and returned to the house, she went to see Theodore Sedgwick.

Mum Bett

Mr. Sedgwick, how can I be considered a slave if the newly written Massachusetts constitution says, "all men are born free and equal." Are these just words?

Mr. Sedgwick

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts cannot have it both ways. If it claims that all men are born free and equal then there can be no legal grounds for slavery in this state. I will take your case to court.

Narrator 2

Mr. Sedgwick is going to have a difficult time. Just look at the jury. They are all white men. I think Mum is in over her head.

Narrator 1

No so fast. Even though Mr. Sedgwick is a young lawyer, he knows what he is doing. He has just produced a copy of the Massachusetts constitution and has asked the court how the state could enslave someone if the highest law in the Commonwealth says that everyone is born free and equal.

Narrator 2

You're right. The jury has agreed that Mum is free.

Narrator 1

Listen to what the judge has to say.

Judge

"Is not a law of nature that all men are equal and free? . . . [Are] not the laws of nature the laws of God? Is not the law of God then against slavery?"

Mum Bett

I am free and it is only right that I take a new name. From now on I am Elizabeth Freeman. "Any time while I was a slave, if one minute's freedom had been offered to me, and I had been told I must die at the end of that minute, I would have taken it—just to stand one minute on God's earth a free woman—I would."

\* \* \* \* \*

## Act 3, Scene 1

State House, Philadelphia, 1787 *Delegates at the Constitutional Convention are debating the question of slavery and the slave trade.*



Philadelphia State House (Now known as Independence Hall)  
National Archives, ARC#518208

### Narrator 1

The delegates at the convention in Philadelphia have been arguing since May. The doors are still locked and the windows are sealed shut. The delegates believe it is important to discuss matters in secret. Tempers are getting short.

### Narrator 2

They are about to discuss slavery again. Some delegates have raised the topic before but decisions have been put off. Now it looks like the delegates will have to work something out.

### Narrator 1

After bitter debate the delegates to the convention finally decided that the legislative branch of government would have two chambers, a Senate and a House of Representatives. The number of votes a state would have in the House of Representatives would be based on the population of the state.

### Narrator 2

So what's the problem that is causing all this fuss?

### Narrator 1

Well, the South wants to count all the slaves living in their states in order to get more representatives in the House of Representatives. Shh! Gouverneur Morris of Pennsylvania is about to speak.

### Gouverneur Morris

Slavery is evil! I will never agree to a constitution that permits slavery. "It was the curse of heaven on the States where it prevails [*exits*]." The question before us is, how will slaves be counted to decide on the number of representatives a state will have? "Are they men? Then make them citizens and let them vote? Are they property?" Why then is no other property counted for representatives? Why are the houses in Philadelphia not counted?

Narrator 1

Look at how angry the delegates from South Carolina and Georgia are.

Gouverneur Morris

It all comes down to this. If slavery continues and slaves are counted for the purpose of increasing a state's vote in the House of Representatives without giving them any rights it simply means that South Carolina and Georgia will send ships to the coast of Africa, and "in defiance of the most sacred laws of humanity tear away his fellow creatures from their dearest connections and damn them to the most cruel bondage" so that they will have more votes in the government. Sir, this is wrong!

Charles Pinckney

"If slavery be wrong, it is justified by the example of all the world. . . . In all ages one half of mankind have been slaves. . . . An attempt to take away the right . . . will produce serious objections to the Constitution which [we wish] to see adopted."

Gouverneur Morris

If you will insist on counting men held without rights for population purposes then I guess you will agree that they should also be counted for taxation purposes.

Charles Pinckney

No, absolutely not! Slaves should not be counted for tax purposes.

John Rutledge

I agree. Slaves are not to be counted for tax purposes. States should have the right to count anyone living in their state to determine representation in the Congress. In most of the Northern states there are



slaves. Count them if you want. It is up to each state to decide who will be counted for representation.

Narrator 2

It looks like all is lost. The delegates surely will leave the convention without agreement.

James Wilson

We should count “. . . the whole number of white and other free citizens and inhabitants of every age, sex, and condition including those bound to servitude [*indentured servants*] for a term of years and three-fifths of all other persons. . . .” for representation purposes and also taxes.

Charles Pinckney

I second this motion. The South can agree to this compromise.

Elbridge Gerry

“. . . Property is not the rule of representation.” If you really believe that men can hold other men as property, then what you are saving is that a state can have its number of representatives in Congress based on how much property men in that state own. It makes as much sense to “count cattle and horses of the North.”

Narrator 2

They are going to vote on Mr. Wilson’s “three-fifths” plan.

Narrator 1

The Ayes win. The vote is 9 “yes” and 2 “no.”

Narrator 2

Well, that’s finally settled, but I guess not everyone is happy with the compromise. Looks like the Constitution will be adopted.

Narrator 1

Not yet, they still have to decide on the slave trade.

George Mason

British merchants started the slave trade for no other reason than to make money. When we in Virginia tried to stop the slave trade, the

British government refused. "Every master of slaves is born a . . . tyrant. They bring the judgment of heaven on a country. . . ."

Abraham Baldwin

You have slaves, does that make you a tyrant?

John Rutledge

Virginia wants to end the slave trade so that the plantation owners in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia will have to buy slaves from them rather than bring them in from Africa or the West Indies. We will never agree to a constitution that prohibits the slave trade.

John Dickinson

I cannot believe that the Southern states would refuse to accept this constitution if it prohibited the slave trade.

John Rutledge (*Pounding his fist on the table*)

Sir, the "true question at present is whether the Southern States shall or shall not be parties to the Union."

Charles Pinckney

"South Carolina and Georgia cannot do without slaves." We will never agree to a constitution that stops a state from importing slaves!

John Rutledge

"If the Convention thinks that North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia will ever agree to the plan, unless their right to import slaves be untouched, the expectation is in vain [*hopeless*]. The people of these states will never be such fools as to give up so important an interest."

Narrator 1

After considerable debate a compromise was reached. It was decided to permit states to continue to bring slaves into the country for twenty years.

Narrator 2

Wait a minute. It looks like Mr. Rutledge is going to object.

John Rutledge

South Carolina will never agree to this. We have already agreed that the Constitution can be amended by a two-thirds vote of Congress

and approved by three-fourths of the states. So, what is to prevent the states from ganging up on North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia and amending the Constitution ending the slave trade? We demand some protection that this will not happen.

Narrator 2

Here we go again!

John Rutledge

We can settle this matter by simply adding a few words to the section on amending the Constitution. I move that we should add the following words, ". . . provided no amendment which may be made prior to the year 1808. . . ."

Elbridge Gerry

That's ridiculous! How can we say that the Congress and states can agree to change the Constitution if they think it necessary and then say that this Constitution cannot be changed when it comes to the slave trade?

John Rutledge

All we ask is that this one thing cannot be changed for a period of time. In 20 years we can decide if the slave trade should or should not be stopped. I can speak for South Carolina, we will not agree to this government unless you add what I have asked.

Abraham Baldwin

Georgia stands with South Carolina on this issue.

John Rutledge

I call for a vote.

Narrator 1

The "ayes" have it; the Constitution cannot be amended to stop the slave trade for 20 years. Nine states voted "yes", one "no" and one state was divided and therefore could not cast a vote. Votes at the convention were taken by states. One of New Hampshire's two delegates voted "ay" and the other "no."

Narrator 2

Does that mean that all the delegates from nine states agreed?

Narrator 1

No, not necessarily. Since the states decided how many delegates would represent them at the Constitutional Convention, some states had more than others. Delegates voted by state. If the majority in a state voted "ay" that state then cast one yes vote. If the vote was tied as in the case of New Hampshire then their state vote was not counted.

Narrator 2

It's finally finished. We now have a Constitution.

Narrator 1

Not yet, it has to be approved by at least nine states before it becomes the law of the land.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Act 3, Scene 2



Annapolis, Maryland  
Library of Congress, #LC-USZ62-11490

Annapolis, Maryland, the  
office of the Attorney Gen-  
eral of the State, January  
1788

Luther Martin (*Seated at his desk  
writing an article to be published  
in the Maryland Gazette*)

" . . . It must appear to the world . .  
.disgraceful to the last degree, that  
we should . . .[have a power that  
is] contrary to the rights of man-  
kind. . . . Slavery is inconsistent  
with the genius of republicanism,  
and has a tendency to destroy those

principles on which it is supported, as it lessens the sense of the equal  
rights of mankind. . . ."

### Narrator 1

Luther Martin was a delegate to the Philadelphia Convention that wrote  
the Constitution. Although a delegate from a slave state, he left the  
Convention before a vote was taken on the Constitution.

### Narrator 2

I understand that he wanted the Constitution to end the slave trade  
and abolish slavery over a period of time.

### Narrator 1

Yes, that's one of the reasons he refused to sign the Constitution and  
tried to get Maryland to refuse to ratify it.

\* \* \* \* \*



## Act 3, Scene 3

*Northampton, Massachusetts, the office  
Hampshire Gazette, April 16, 1788*

Narrator 1

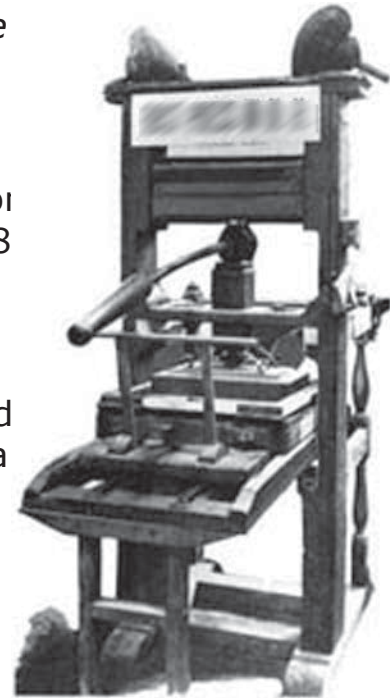
Let's listen in to what three men in Northampton Massachusetts, are writing for the April 16, 1788 issue of the *Hampshire Gazette*.

Narrator 2

Why are they still so upset? Massachusetts voted to accept the Constitution in February, over a month and a half ago.

Narrator 1

They don't believe that Massachusetts should have agreed to this Constitution because it permits slavery and also prohibits amending the Constitution to stop the slave trade for at least 20 years. Listen to what they have written.



Consider Arms

"This practice of enslaving mankind is in direct opposition to a fundamental . . . truth, on which our state constitution is founded, 'All men are born free and equal.' We have said it—we cannot go back. Indeed no man can justify himself in enslaving another. . . ."

Malichi Maynard

"It is the standing law in the kingdom of Heaven, 'Do unto others as ye would have others do unto you.' . . . Where is the man . . . [who] can lay his hand upon his heart and say, I am willing my sons and my daughters should be torn from me and doomed to perpetual slavery? We presume that man is not to be found amongst us. . . ."

Samuel Field

". . . Can we suppose that what was morally evil in the year 1774, has become in the year 1788, morally good? Or shall we change evil into good and good into evil, as often as we find it will serve a turn?"

Narrator 2

What does Sam Field mean?

Narrator 1

He is reminding the newspaper's readers that the Second Continental Congress called for an end to the importation of slaves as of December 1, 1774. Listen to what he has written.

Samuel Field

It does not make sense that some of the members of the Continental Congress who called for an end to the slave trade can now accept this Constitution that permits the slave trade. They tell us that important men like Washington and Adams accept this Constitution, so we should also. But, we must recognize that "great men are not always wise." And to be sure, the names of these great men who took out their swords on behalf of freeing themselves from the British are now acting like tyrants over Africans who were born as free as a Washington or an Adams.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Act 4

Baltimore, Maryland, August 19, 1791. A man is seated at a desk writing a letter.



Benjamin Banneker, "Astronomer-City Planner"  
National Archives, ARC# 535626

### Narrator 1

Benjamin Banneker, a free African American from Maryland, is a well-respected astronomer, mathematician, and surveyor. He was one of the three men who surveyed land set aside for the capital of the United States.

### Narrator 2

It looks as if he is writing a letter to someone.

### Narrator 1

The letter is addressed to the United States Secretary of State.

### Narrator 2

He's writing to Thomas Jefferson, President Washington's Secretary of State!

### Narrator 1

Yes, some years ago Jefferson wrote a book called *Notes on Virginia*. In that book he said that blacks were inferior. Benjamin Banneker is sending Jefferson a copy of an almanac that he had just written. He wants Jefferson to understand that African Americans are not inferior and capable of great things. Some newspapers have already criticized Jefferson for those remarks he wrote in *Notes on Virginia*.

### Narrator 2

I would like to know what he is writing.

Narrator 1

He seems to have already made his point and now is writing further.

Narrator 2

He looks like he is about to read a part of his letter aloud before he seals the envelope.

Benjamin Banneker

Sir, let me remind you of the time when the British attempted to destroy your freedom and make you like slaves. Look back, I beg you, on all the dangers you faced. Think about that time when it looked like all you were fighting for would be lost.

"This, sir, was a time when you clearly saw into the injustice of a state of slavery, and in which you had just apprehensions [*fears*] of the horrors of its condition. It was now that your abhorrence [*hatred*] thereof was so excited, that you publicly held forth this true and invaluable doctrine, which is worth to be recorded and remembered in all succeeding ages; 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, and that among these are, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.'"

Narrator 2

He's quoting from the Declaration of Independence!

Benjamin Banneker

"Here was a time, in which your tender feelings for yourselves had engaged you thus to declare, you were then impressed with proper ideas of the great violation of liberty, and the free possession of those blessings, to which you were entitled by nature; but, Sir, how pitiable is it to reflect, that although you were so fully convinced of the benevolence [*kindness*] of the Father of Mankind, and of his equal and impartial distribution of these rights and privileges, which he hath conferred upon them, that you should at the same time counteract his mercies, in detaining by fraud and violence so numerous a part of my brethren, under groaning captivity and cruel oppression, that you should at the same time be found guilty of that most criminal act, which you professedly detested in others, with respect to yourselves. . . ."

Narrator 1

Do you realize what he has just written to the man that wrote the Declaration of Independence?

Narrator 2

This is one powerful letter. Is he actually saying that Jefferson is just as guilty as the King of England in depriving people of their freedom?

Narrator 1

That's the point. He is appealing to Jefferson to think about the time when he was fighting to win the blessings of liberty while at the same time holding people in bondage as slaves.

Narrator 2

What do you think would have happened if slavery had been abolished in the United States at the time of the Revolution or by the Constitution? Do you think the Southern states would have agreed to a Declaration of Independence that condemned the British for the slave trade? Do you think the Southern states would have agreed to the Constitution if it had agreed to gradually end slavery and to prohibit the slave trade?

Narrator 1

Gee, you are full of questions! Where do you think we can find answers to these questions?

**The End**

## Appendix

### Act 1 Sources:

- Nathaniel Niles's sermon, see Gary B. Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America* (Viking Press, 2005), 151-52.
- John Dickinson and Thomas Jefferson, see "The Necessity for Taking Up Arms", *Annals of America*, Vol. 2 (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1987), 340-41.
- Patrick Henry on slavery, see Alfred Blumrosen and Ruth Blumrosen, *Slave Nation: How Slavery United the Colonies & Sparked the American Revolution* (Barnes and Noble, 2005), 43.
- Abigail Adams' letter to John, see David McCullough, *John Adams* (Simon and Schuster, 2001), 104.
- Thomas Paine, see Gary B. Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America* (Viking Press, 2005), 152.
- Thomas Jefferson's deleted paragraph from the Declaration of Independence, see Alfred Blumrosen and Ruth Blumrosen. *Slave Nation: How Slavery United the Colonies & Sparked the American Revolution*. (Barnes and Noble, 2005), 140.

### Act 2 Source:

- Mum Bett, see Gary B. Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America* (Viking, 2005), 407-409.

### Act 3 Sources:

- Max Farrand, *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787*, Vols. 1 and 2 (Yale University Press, 1966). Debates occurred on various dates. The dialogue in quotation marks for Scene 1 is not in sequence by date.
- Luther Martin, see Gary B. Nash, *Race and Revolution* (Madison House, 1990), 142.
- Consider Arms, Malichi Maynard, and Samuel Field (quotes taken from an article written by these men rather than words spoken by each man), see Gary B. Nash, *Race and Revolution* (Madison House, 1990), 135, 138, 140-41.

### Act 4 Source:

- Benjamin Banneker's letter to Thomas Jefferson, see Gary B. Nash, *Race and Revolution* (Madison House, 1990), 177-181.