



Unit 4 Activities

Agency and Resistance

People of African descent were actors within their own lives, not just people who were acted upon. The purpose of this unit is to expose students to a variety of the ways in which these men, women, and children practiced agency — or personal decision-making — within a society that generally sought to limit their options for freedom and self-determination.

Aims /Objective

The modular activities and extensions in this unit provide opportunities for students to:

- Analyze the risks and rewards of various types of resistance to slavery and inequality practiced by people of African descent
- Draw parallels between acts of resistance and protest movements past and present
- Practice historical empathy when considering the lives of people of African descent in the past

Materials

Big Idea 4: Agency and Resistance

Finding Freedom Source:

- Interactive: Jack's Story
- Primary Source: *The Memorial of Sundry of the Inhabitants of Botetourt County, 1781* (Courtesy of the Library of Virginia)
- Primary Source: Runaway ad for Titus (Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society)

Other Resources:

- Worksheet: Jack's Resistance (Included)
- Video: *To My Old Master, Thomas Auld*, by Frederick Douglass, read by Common (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mcmQx4zMKPk>). Note: A transcription can be found here: <https://etc.usf.edu/lit2go/45/my-bondage-and-my-freedom/1509/letter-to-his-old-master-to-my-old-master-thomas-auld/>)

Procedures

Note: Please be aware of the environment you and your students create when discussing the experiences of people of African descent, particularly enslaved people. This can be an emotional topic with the power to create lasting memories for students of all backgrounds, particularly those who continue to experience racism in the present.

Engagement

IN MY LIFE 5-10 minutes

Teacher Preparation: Read Big Idea 4: Agency and Resistance.

Ask students to think of a time or times when they were asked to do something they didn't want to do or when they believed they were being treated unfairly. Have

students share how they reacted — what they said and what they did to protest. Make a list of these responses. Next, work with students to put their responses into categories using the following question: What are the types of strategies you see on the list? Once the list is categorized, ask students what they believe this list, compiled in the 21st century, has to do with slavery in the 18th century. Discuss and transition into your next activity.

Development

MEET JACK 30-45 minutes

Teacher Preparation: Review Jack's story in the Finding Freedom interactive. Read Big Idea 4: Agency and Resistance and The Memorial of Sundry of the Inhabitants of Botetourt County, 1781, printing enough copies for small groups or individuals. Print copies of the Jack's Resistance worksheet for distribution.

Have students explore Jack's story in the *Finding Freedom* interactive. Then, distribute copies of *The Memorial of Sundry of the Inhabitants of Botetourt County, 1781*. Have students take turns reading the document aloud, pausing to have students rephrase and to check for comprehension. Have students complete the Jack's Resistance worksheet individually or in small groups, then discuss responses as a class.

STEP IN THE CIRCLE: RESISTANCE RISKS AND REWARDS 25-45 minutes

Teacher Preparation: Review Big Idea 4: Agency and Resistance. Print out enough copies for students to read individually.

Have students read Big Idea 4: Agency and Resistance. Then have students clear a space in the classroom so that they can stand in a circle. Select examples of resistance from the Big Ideas document, and read them aloud one at a time. After you read each one, ask students to step to the center of the circle if they can imagine themselves practicing that form of resistance if they were enslaved. Ask volunteers from the center to explain why, and volunteers from the outer circle to explain why not.

Debrief afterwards, considering the risks and rewards of each approach, and what factors may have impacted an individual's decision-making.

ADAPT: If students seem to be giving "easy" answers, ask students to think not about what they might do, but what they would advise a loved one to do.

Culmination

LETTER TO MY FORMER MASTER 30 minutes

Teacher Preparation: Preview the To My Old Master, Thomas Auld video, determining whether to play in its entirety or to excerpt a particular segment.

Project the November 22, 1775 runaway ad placed for Titus. Remind students, or have them restate, his story from what is shared in Jack's *Finding Freedom* story. Play for students the video of actor and rapper Common reciting Frederick Douglass's 1848 *To My Old Master, Thomas Auld*. Note that this letter was actually published in a newspaper, not sent to Auld himself. Ask students to imagine that they are Titus and have them write a letter from him to his former owner explaining why he ran away and what he hopes to accomplish now. Afterwards, debrief with students and compare and contrast to Douglass's letter.

EXTEND: Ask students to conduct further research into Titus' life, including his time in enslavement, his participation in Dunmore's Ethiopian Regiment, and his leadership of the Black Brigade Loyalist militia group. Then, with this additional background, have students construct their letter in the voice of Titus.

Extensions and Adaptations

COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Have students explore the stories of Eve, London, Deborah, and Jack in the *Finding Freedom* interactive. Then have students choose two or more of these stories and compare and contrast them, considering the How, Where, When, and Why of their actions to resist slavery.

THE ANDREW DILEMMA

Finding Freedom's Andrew states in his pension application that he was free before he enlisted. No other proof has yet been found of his free status, nor has any been found to suggest that he was enslaved. The Museum has chosen to take him at his word. However, knowing that the Continental Army technically did not allow enslaved men to enlist, it is possible that Andrew lied. What would he have had to gain from doing so? Might his enlistment

have been a form of resistance? Ask students to examine Andrew's primary sources and reflect on these questions, and then to write a brief response.

THE POWER OF PETITIONS

Divide students into groups. Ask each group to choose an injustice that is happening in their community or one they've learned about elsewhere in the world. Have students research this problem, answering the following questions: Why is this an injustice? Why is the situation so concerning to them? What can be done to fix the problem? To whom can we reach out to express our concerns and ask for changes to be made? Have students submit a petition to the person or entity identified and ask for a response. If responses are received, discuss as a class and consider next steps.

ANALYZING CONTEMPORARY PROTEST MOVEMENTS

When studying historical protest movements, historians study primary and secondary sources and ask a series of questions to understand what happened and why. Ask students to choose, individually or in small groups, a protest movement that has occurred within the past 10 years or is current taking place. Ask students to seek at least 5 primary sources, including at least 3 created by the protesters, and at least 5 secondary sources to answer the following questions:

- Who are the protesters? Who are the key players and supporting players and what are their roles and backgrounds? How did they become involved in the movement?
- Why did the protest movement begin? What are or were protesters reacting to?
- When did the protest movement begin? Was there a "spark" or had it been building?
- What are the demands of the protesters? What are they hoping to achieve, both broadly and specifically?
- How are/were people responding to the protest movement? Who are the people who support or are against the movement?
- Have responses to the movement changed over time? If so, why?

EXTEND: Students can also select 5 objects relating to the contemporary protest movement and, with their primary sources, design a virtual museum about their selected movement.

ESCAPING HISTORY

Some freedom-seekers went on to lead lives as activists and leaders within their communities. Had they not run away, history might have turned out differently. Ask students to research the story of an enslaved person whose escape changed the course of history. Have them write an If/Then report, exploring the impact that person had on society, using the following template: If _____ had not escaped, then _____ may not have happened. Ask them to include two to three scenarios that may have turned out differently had the person not escaped.