



Unit 6 Activities

Choosing Sides

Like others in the British North American colonies, free and enslaved people of African descent had a variety of reasons for deciding to support one side or the other in the Revolutionary War, or to try to stay out of it altogether. The purpose of this unit is to introduce students to the complex factors these men, women, and children needed to consider, and to invite students to imagine the weight of these decisions.

Aims /Objective

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

- Analyze and draw conclusions from primary source texts
- Describe and evaluate the risks and rewards of siding with the British or the Revolutionaries

Materials

Big Idea 6: Choosing Sides

Finding Freedom Source:

- Interactive: All Stories (Andrew, Deborah, Eve, Jack, London)
- Primary Source: *List of slaves returned from British, 1781* (Courtesy of Mount Vernon Ladies' Association)

Other Resources:

- Worksheet: What Do the Proclamations Actually Say? (Included)
- Worksheet: In His Words (Included)
- Activity: "Make the Choice" Identity Cards (Included)

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

ENEMIES AND FRIENDS 5-10 minutes

Ask students if they are familiar with the saying "The enemy of my enemy is my friend." Ask students to explain what this means and in what sort of situations or contexts the saying might be used. Explore the following questions:

- Whose needs and interests are being prioritized in this statement? Whose aren't?
- How do you know or decide who your enemies are?

- What if your enemies and your friends are very similar to one another?
- Is this the only way to decide who your friends are? What other options exist?

EXTEND: At the conclusion of this unit, ask students to revisit the saying. Do they believe it is appropriate to use when considering the decision-making of people of African descent during the Revolutionary War? If so, in what situations? If not, why not?

LUND'S LIST

Teacher Preparation: Review the Finding Freedom document, List of slaves returned from British, 1781. Note that the first half of this document is a list of enslaved people who ran to the British, and the bottom records those who were recaptured.

Project or display the List of slaves returned from British, 1781 so all students can see. Ask students to make observations about the document, beginning with "What do you see?" and becoming more specific as students continue to notice details. Explain to students that this document was created by Lund Washington, George Washington's cousin and the caretaker of Mount Vernon while he was away at war. Its purpose was likely to prepare a claim against the British for the loss of George Washington's property, after a group of enslaved people boarded a British ship called the *Savage* when it stopped in front of Mount Vernon with plans to destroy it. In the course of their observations and discussion, if students have not already explored the story of *Finding Freedom's* Deborah, be sure to point her out on the list and note that they can explore her story in the interactive.

DISCUSS:

- How many people are on this list of runaways?
- Why do you think so many ran away?
- Do you think it was easy or hard to *make the decision* to run away with so many other people?
- Do you think it was easy or hard to *actually* run away with so many people?
- How do you think Lund and George Washington felt about the enslaved people's escape? Why might these individuals have been willing to risk being recaptured and punished?
- How do you think these individuals felt when they boarded the *Savage* and sailed away?

Development

EXCERPT ANALYSIS 30-45 minutes

Teacher Preparation: Review the What Do the Proclamations Actually Say? worksheet, then print out enough copies for small groups. Review Big Idea 6: Choosing Sides.

Divide students into small groups and distribute copies of the worksheet to each group. Ask groups to read each

excerpt, highlighting or underlining words or phrases they believe are most important, and then to paraphrase each in their own words. Once all groups have read and annotated their handouts, guide the class in a conversation around the following questions:

- What do each of these proclamations actually promise?
- What do each of these proclamations leave unclear or unsaid?
- What would some of the risks have been if one chose to run to the British as an enslaved person?

Note that for people of African descent news of these proclamations would have spread primarily by word of mouth. Ask: How might this mode of transmission have impacted people's understanding of what was and was not promised? What might this mean in terms of the risks of choosing to run to the British?

WHY HE FOUGHT 30-45 minutes

Teacher Preparation: Review the In His Words worksheet. Print copies

Refresh students' memories of the story of *Finding Freedom's* Andrew, or allow time for them to explore his story in the interactive. Distribute copies of the In His Words worksheet. Ask for a volunteer to read Jehu Grant's quote aloud and have the rest of the class follow along silently. Then give students time to answer the worksheet's questions. Engage students in a discussion of their responses.

Next distribute Big Idea 6: Choosing Sides. Again, allow students time to read. Finally, ask students how the added context impacts their understanding of Grant's words and Andrew's actions. Note that in the end, Jehu did not receive a pension. Note also that Andrew said that he was free, but no evidence has yet been found from before the war to either support or contradict this. Engage students in a discussion of the following questions:

- What are the similarities between the experiences of Grant and Andrew? What are the differences?
- What do the stories of Grant and Andrew suggest about the risks and rewards of siding with the Revolutionaries?

Culmination

MAKE THE CHOICE 20-30 minutes

Teacher Preparation: Print and cut the identity cards, so that there is one for each student. Review Big Idea 6: Choosing Sides.

Distribute "Identity Cards" to the class, ensuring that each student has one. Provide a moment for students to read their card. Tell the students that for this activity, they will need to imagine that they are that person and that they are still in the process of deciding. This is their moment to decide, not based on what they know the person did, but what they would have done in his or her circumstances.

Clear space in the classroom so that students can stand on either side and in the center. Identify one side of the room as being for those who will join the British and Loyalists and the other for those who will join the Revolutionaries. Have all students begin in the center,

then ask students to move to the side that they have chosen to support. Note that students who are undecided may stay in the center for this round. Give them 15 seconds to make their decision.

Once students have moved, tell them they now have an opportunity to try to persuade students in the center or on the other side to come to their side, drawing on information from Big Idea 6: Choosing Sides. Invite students from both sides to make arguments. After both sides have presented, give students another 15 seconds to change locations. Repeat for a second round.

After students have moved a final time, have them all take note of how many people ended up in each location. Debrief with students, exploring what the process was like, which arguments they found persuasive, and what they think the decision-making process would have been like for the real people grappling with what to do, who to trust, and who offered the best chance at a better life.

Extensions and Adaptations

GEOGRAPHY AND CHOICE

Have students explore the *Finding Freedom* Google map, accessible through the interactive and at this link (<https://tinyurl.com/FindingFreedomMap>). Have them note Jack's starting location, in relation to the other *Finding Freedom* individuals. Discuss how Jack's location may have impacted his decision-making about running to the British or serving in the war. Next, direct students to the "Book of Negroes" online (<https://novascotia.ca/archives/Africans/BN.asp>). In groups, have students select 1 page, or portion of a page, and research where each individual came from before they joined the British and were evacuated from New York City. Students should also research whether, and how close, British soldiers were to each enslaved person's location. Have students write a summary of how geography and proximity to British soldiers may or may not have impacted their decision to join the British.

BUILD A TRUST TIMELINE

Print out (single-sided) the "*Finding Freedom* Timeline" and distribute to students in small groups. Ask students to imagine that they are people of African descent who need to decide which, if any, side to choose in the Revolutionary War. Have each group clip out events that would inspire trust and arrange them into one timeline. Include events that would erode trust in a second timeline. Once students have made their decisions, work together to create both timelines as a class, discussing events and exploring students' rationales and reactions. (This activity can be done with highlighters in two different colors, if using scissors is not preferred.)