



## A Parallel Struggle for Freedom: Black People During the American Revolution

“Tell them that if I am Black I am free born American & a revolutionary soldier  
& therefore ought not to be thrown entirely out of the scale of notice.”

-John Chavis to Willie P. Mangum, March 10, 1832

### Overview

The common narrative of the American Revolution is typically recounted as a battle for freedom of thirteen American colonies from oppressive British rule. However, an equally compelling part of the history is the role of Black people during this period, both in terms of their contributions to both sides of the fight, as well as their own parallel struggle for personal and legal freedom and rights. In this lesson, students will explore this important piece of the American story through reading, discussion, and a small group activity – gaining an understanding of the contributions of Black people in the making of America, as well as the ways the spirit of liberty and the disruptions of the time impacted Black people and their own individual and collective calls for freedom. As a culminating project, students will further their understanding by researching and reporting on the role of Black Americans in other wars throughout history.

### Grades

8-12

### Materials

- [“A Parallel Struggle for Freedom” PowerPoint](#)
  - Note that this PPT is currently text-heavy, in order to provide adequate information to teachers. Based on grade level and particular teaching objectives, teachers should edit the text for manageable consumption by students.
  - To view this PDF as a projectable presentation, save the file, click “View” in the top menu bar of the file, and select “Full Screen Mode”
  - To request an editable PPT version of this presentation, send a request to [CarolinaK12@unc.edu](mailto:CarolinaK12@unc.edu)
- A Hidden Chapter of the American Revolution (from [Answering the Cry for Freedom: Stories of African Americans and the American Revolution](#)), excerpt attached
- Pathways to Freedom group activity perspectives (5 family member perspectives attached)
- Optional culminating project: [Missing Pieces of the Puzzle, African Americans in Revolutionary Times](#)
- For a related lesson plan, see “Shining a Light on Untold History: North Carolina’s Black Revolutionary War Soldiers”

### Optional Teacher Resources

- [Black Experience in Revolutionary North Carolina](#), a book by Jeffrey Crow
- [Minding Our Monuments: Black Soldiers in the Revolutionary War](#), program recording by the Greensboro Historical Museum
- [Slavery and the Making of America](#), PBS documentary (individual episodes can be found via a search on YouTube and additional information/curricular resources are available [here](#).)

### Duration

- 60+ minutes

- Time will vary based on the depth of classroom discussion.

### Preparation

- Students should have a basic knowledge of the events leading up to, causing and occurring during the Revolutionary War.
- Students must understand expectations for respectfully discussing sensitive history, such as that of enslavement. While this history brings up difficult topics such as racism and racial violence, it represents a part of our shared state and national history that students must understand in order to comprehend its impact across time. To ensure students are able to respectfully and empathetically discuss such topics, teachers must ensure a foundation of civil discourse, respect and empathy in the classroom. For techniques on building such a classroom community, see Carolina K-12's [Tips for Tackling Sensitive History & Controversial Current Events in the Classroom](#) and/or [Teaching Hard History: Why & How](#).
- When studying history, it is imperative to use language that recognizes all people's humanity, elevates the concept of survivors and resisters rather than victims, and cultivates empathy. The words and terminology we use in the classroom matter. Thus, this lesson utilizes terms such as "enslaved," "enslaved person," or "freedom seeker" instead of "slave." (For more on this topic, see [The Language of Slavery](#).) Students should also be explicitly prepared for historical terminology they will encounter, including words such as "Colored," "Negro," and "free persons of color" (a catch all phrase describing people who were not enslaved but were Black, Native American/indigenous, or bi/multi-racial.)

### Procedure

#### Black People Before the Revolutionary War

1. As a warm up, project [Slide 2](#) of the [accompanying PowerPoint](#) and ask students to quickly jot down and then share as a class what comes to mind when they think about the term "Revolutionary War." Remind them that there is no "right or wrong" response and then note their answers in a quick list up front. Once students are finished, review their list. If important topics such as the contributions of free Black people and enslaved people during the war, the names of Black soldiers, Black resistance to enslavement during the Revolutionary period, and/or any other recognition of Black people are missing from the list, point this out and discuss with students why they think they omitted this information. (Save this list to return to at the end of the lesson.)
2. Go through [Slides 3-7](#), which provide a brief reminder/overview of enslaved people and their resistance to enslavement, as well as free Black people during colonial times. Remind students of the importance of not overlooking the contributions of Black people to the formation of America. The forced work of enslaved people & the contributions of free Black people supported the colonies & should be equally credited with America's eventual success & prosperity. Further, despite discriminatory laws, attitudes & institutions during colonial times, Black people played a pivotal role in the formation of American society, challenging and even setting precedents for notions of freedom and race relations.

#### A Parallel Struggle for Freedom

3. Move to [Slide 8](#) and discuss that while white colonists were demanding freedom and liberty from Britain's rule, Black people naturally wanted their own freedom. After sharing the information on the slide, provide students with the attached worksheet and reading, "A Hidden Chapter of the American Revolution." (This is an excerpt from [Answering the Cry for Freedom: Stories of African Americans and the American Revolution](#)). Have students consider and answer the top two questions posed and then read the passage.
  - How do you think enslaved people and free Blacks would respond to white colonists' calls for freedom, liberty & human rights?
  - What options do you think enslaved people may have had at the time to attempt to free themselves?

4. After students have completed the reading, further discuss:
  - (In review) why did some colonists (Patriots) want to be free from Great Britain’s rule?
  - How did colonists envision their desired freedom? Meaning, what would that freedom look like to them? (Teachers are seeking answers such as they wanted to have a voice in their government, they did not want to be taxed from officials across the ocean, they wanted rights, etc.)
  - Given what you know about the Revolutionary period and Revolutionary War already, how do you imagine Black people (free and enslaved) felt as they heard the white colonists’ grievances and calls for freedom and liberty? How do you imagine the concept and vision of freedom held by Black people (free and enslaved) compared to that of white Patriots?
  - How might the period before and during the Revolutionary War have provided opportunities, though dangerously risky, for Black people seeking freedom?

#### **Activity: Exploring Pathways to Freedom During the American Revolution**

5. Explain to students that while there were some overarching categories, assumptions and generalizations that can be made regarding potential pathways to freedom, every individual had to weigh their own circumstances and make decisions based on their own life situation. Enslaved and free Black people, and the actions they took during this time were as varied as the individuals themselves. Project **Slide 9** and have students briefly discuss the two quotes (i.e., What message is this quote conveying? What does it tell you regarding Black people and freedom during the Revolutionary period?) Teachers may want to have students pair up, and instruct half the pairs to discuss the first quote and the other half the second.)
  - “Whether fighting for the British cause or for the American cause, African Americans were fighting for freedom. It was a freedom struggle.” (Source: Historian James O. Horton in “Slavery and the Making of America”)
  - [The role of Black people] “in the Revolution can be best understood by realizing that his major loyalty was not to a place nor to a people, but to a principle.” ~Benjamin Quarles
6. Further discuss with students the importance of understanding that enslaved people “... were active, not passive, beings who in the face of unremitting adversity struggled to maintain their dignity, their African heritage, and even their lives, from the violent and brutalizing aspects of slavery obtained in North Carolina as elsewhere. They were, moreover, rational men and women who from necessity had to weigh the impact of each and every action they made. The slightest misstep in racial etiquette and expected behavior could bring whipping or mutilation. For Black people, then, the fight for liberty associated with the American Revolution took place in a more ambiguous context than for whites.” (Source: [A History of African Americans in North Carolina](#), by Jeffrey Crow, Paul Escott, & Flora Hatley)
7. Tell students they are going to further explore some of the actions enslaved people weighed in terms of their survival, as well as what may have led them to take particular actions. Break students into groups of 5, and assign each student one of the attached perspectives to examine. Each perspective involves an enslaved person who is part of the same family weighing options that may have been faced in North Carolina in the year 1774. The goal of the activity is for students to explore the various feelings, individual experiences, various actions of resistance that enslaved people may have considered, and pathways to freedom they may have taken. Students will ultimately gain an understanding of the complicated nature of survival and resistance. Give students the following specific instructions:
  - In your groups of 5, each of you will receive a piece of paper describing a member of a family from the year 1774 who is enslaved. Each perspective has differing opinions regarding what to do about their status as an enslaved person.
  - Read your individual’s perspective, jot down notes about their personality, life situation, and ultimate goals regarding family and freedom, and answer the questions provided.

- After approximately 5-6 minutes of planning, your group will each take turns to talk about the enslaved person’s perspective assigned to you and what their idea is for survival and freedom.
  - After everyone has shared, discuss as a group which perspective(s) you each think makes most sense, is most realistic, as well as which actions should not be taken, and why.
8. After students have had 15 or so minutes to discuss in groups, come back together as a whole class and discuss:
- What were the various resistance options and pathways to freedom members of the family considered?
  - What were the pros and cons to each?
  - What do you imagine would have been difficult and complicated about deciding whether to move forward with an idea or not?
  - In what ways might an enslaved person’s age, gender, health, and whether or not they had children have impacted their decision making?
  - Regardless of the perspective you focused on, in your opinion who in the family do you feel had the most logical idea regarding freedom? Why?
  - Are there other ideas you think should have been considered? Explain.
  - Why is it important to recognize all of the ways, great and small, that enslaved people resisted and strove for freedom?
    - While engaging in this complex discussion, it is worth a sidebar discussion that when learning history, and when considering the actions and views of “Black people” and “white people,” “Loyalists” and “Patriots,” no group is a monolith. (Meaning, each group in reality was/is comprised of millions of individuals with differing perspectives, experiences, opinions, etc. So, while our historical discussions are usually spent grouping people into one position, it’s worth remembering that it’s actually much more complex.)
  - Overall, how do you think the period of colonial Revolution impacted the struggle for freedom of those enslaved?

### **A Deeper Dive into Pathways to Freedom During the American Revolution (PowerPoint & Discussion)**

9. With this foundation laid, refer to slides 10 – 29, which provide additional details for potential (yet all very risky) pathways to freedom Black people considered during this time. Use the slides as a point of discussion with students. Topics addressed and sample discussion questions include:
- Petitions (Slide 10)
  - Running Away (Slides 11-14)
    - Why might the period before and during the American Revolution offer increased opportunity for enslaved people to run away?
    - Why was the decision to flee quite complicated? Why do you think many enslaved people did not attempt escape?
    - What risks and challenges did running away present?
    - How might this decision process have been different for women versus men? Those with families compared to those without?
  - Revolt/Rebellion (Slides 15-16)
    - What made revolt/rebellion very risky and difficult to execute for enslaved people?
    - Why do you think government officials and white colonists were so worried about and fearful of rebellions? What role might rumor and fear play in escalating white reactions?
    - How did government officials try and prevent rebellions?
    - In actuality, insurrections (both during the Revolutionary period and throughout history) weren’t very common in America. Why do you think this was the case?
  - Why would a Black man sign up to fight for the British/Loyalists? Why might someone decide to support the Patriots? (Slide 17)

- Join the Loyalists (Slides 18-20)
  - What impact do you think Dunmore’s Proclamation had?
  - Evaluate the effectiveness of the British promoting running away and enlistment with the British. How could this benefit the Loyalist cause?
    - “While many joined the patriot side, many more allied with the British who openly courted a black rebellion in the South and enticed slaves with promises of freedom. The hundreds of black Carolinians who followed the redcoated columns in the southern campaign of 1780-1782 or swam to the British fleet off the Cape Fear in 1776 attest to the magnitude of black longings for freedom. If the fear of servile insurrection preoccupied the minds of white Carolinas, the hope for freedom captivated the hearts of their slaves.” (Source: [A History of African Americans in North Carolina](#), by Jeffrey Crow, Paul Escott, & Flora Hatley)
- Join the Patriots (Slides 21 – 27)
  - Why did the Continental Army first restrict and later allow free Black people to enlist?
  - Why did some Blacks choose to side with the Patriots? What were the pros and cons of this decision?
  - Who were the Harlowe Patriots? Had you heard of them before?
  - Who was [John Chavis](#)? In what ways did he defy typical societal notions during his lifetime?
    - Teachers may also want to play the 4:30 minute video, [John Chavis: An American Story](#) for students and further discuss:
      - In what ways did John Chavis defy typical societal notions during his lifetime?
      - John Chavis wrote to Wiley P. Mangum, “...prove that you are an American.” What do you think John Chavis’s concept of a true American was?
      - Helen Chavis Othow, a descendent of John Chavis, says: “He had a great sense of purpose, a sense of responsibility to his community...he wanted to uplift those who were enslaved.” She later talks of his “revolutionary spirit.” What examples from John Chavis’s life exemplify this statement, and his spirit as being “revolutionary?”
  - How does learning about people such as the Harlowe Patriots and John Chavis change usual assumptions regarding the Revolutionary War?
- Acts of Everyday Resistance (Slides 28-29)
  - It is important to highlight for students that the institution of slavery was cruel and oppressive, and thus there were numerous systems in place to prevent enslaved people from gaining freedom (from threats and acts of violence – to inhumane laws.) And while some courageous people still risked escape, for most, this was an impossibility. That doesn’t mean they didn’t resist, however.
  - Enslaved people resisted in a variety of active and passive ways, with "day-to-day resistance" the most common form of opposition to slavery. Breaking tools, feigning illness, staging slowdowns, singing, expressing joy – all were important forms of resistance and expression of enslaved people’s individuality and humanity.

**10.** Pause on [Slide 30](#) and ask students to reflect on all the ways Black people contributed to the foundations of America, whether they were free or enslaved – as well as the pathways to freedom many of them explored. Return to the list that students brainstormed at the opening of class, which likely left out or minimized the role of Black people during the Revolutionary War, and their parallel struggle for freedom. Provide each student with a Post-It Note, on which they should now write down something they have learned and feel is important or striking regarding Black people during the Revolutionary period. Have them stick their notes to the original list in reflection.

#### **Addendum: After the War**

**11.** In closing, project [Slide 31](#) and ask students what message the quote sends regarding the situation after the British surrendered and the War ended. After they share their thoughts, let students know (for context) that King was born into slavery in South Carolina in 1760 & escaped to the British Army during

their invasion of SC in 1780. He served in the British Army, was captured & again enslaved. Miraculously, King was able to escape to the British again, who secured his freedom when they sent him to Canada.

**12.** Provide students with some information regarding the War's closing:

- The British surrendered at Yorktown in October 1781, and there was no plan for the thousands of Black refugees who had fled to Loyalist lines.
- White Loyalists evacuated, often forcing those they enslaved to travel with them.
- As historian Margaret Washington wrote, "Many thousands of African Americans who aided the British lost their freedom anyway. Many of them ended up in slavery in the Caribbean. Others, when they attempted to leave with the British, in places like Charleston and Savannah, were prevented. And there are incredible letters written by southerners about Africans after the siege of Charleston, swimming out to boats, and the British hacking away at their arms with cutlasses to keep them from following them. So it was a very tragic situation. And of the many thousands of Africans who left the plantations, not many of them actually got their freedom." Subsequent peace negotiations did call for all enslaved people who escaped behind British lines before November 30, 1782, to be freed with restitution given to their owners. In order to determine who was eligible for freedom, the British attempted to verify the names, ages and dates of escape for every enslaved person in their custody. With their certificates of freedom in hand, around 3,000 Black men, women and children joined the Loyalist exodus from New York to Nova Scotia in 1783. There the Black Loyalists found freedom, but little else. After years of economic hardship and denial of the land and provisions they had been promised, nearly half of the Black Loyalists abandoned the Canadian province. Approximately 400 sailed to London, while in 1792 more than 1,200 brought their stories full circle and returned to Africa in a new settlement in Sierra Leone. ([Source](#))
- The disruptions from the war also left southern life in America in particular disarray. Thousands of enslaved people had escaped, earned their freedom, and/or attempted to pass as free Blacks. After the war, enslavers in some states (i.e., Georgia and South Carolina) tried to sue for recovery of the people enslaved to them.
- To rebuild the South's forced labor force, the trade of enslaved people increased. The population of the enslaved population nearly tripled between 1770-1810, from 470,000 to 1,200,000. In North Carolina, the enslaved population grew faster during the 1790s than in any other decade.
- While the free Black population in the North also increased after the war (from 60,000 in 1790 to 185,000 in 1810), free Blacks were not treated equally to white Americans. Special taxes were levied on free Black people, they were denied the vote in some states (NC's 1776 [constitution](#) allowed free Blacks to vote, a right they held until the Civil War), and Ohio even tried to prevent them from settling there. The fight for equality and freedom would thus continue.

### **Culminating Project Options**

**13.** In reflection, ask students to return to the list they brainstormed in step one of the lesson. Provide each student with a Post-It Note, and ask them to write down something that they learned about the role of Black people during the American Revolution that most interested and/or surprised them. Have students add their Post-Its to the list, making it more inclusive.

**14.** As culminating project options, teachers at this point can:

- Have students research the contributions of Black Americans and how they continued fighting for freedom (of various forms) in engagements such as:
  - War of 1812
  - Civil War/USCT
  - Black Seminoles during the Seminole Wars/Florida Wars
  - "Buffalo Soldiers"
  - Spanish American War

- World War I
- World War II & the “Double V” Campaign
- Korean War
- Vietnam War
- Assign the project [Missing Pieces of the Puzzle, African Americans in Revolutionary Times](#), in which students to a deeper dive into a particular topic or person related to Black people and the American Revolution, sharing what they learn in the creative creation of a puzzle.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## A Hidden Chapter of the American Revolution

- **How do you think enslaved people and free Blacks would respond to white colonists' calls for freedom, liberty & human rights?**
  
- **What options do you think enslaved people may have had at the time to attempt to free themselves?**

In 1775, when the American Revolution began and colonists took arms to free themselves from British rule, slavery existed in every one of the thirteen colonies. In 1776, when the Founding Fathers signed the Declaration of Independence, declaring that “all men” were entitled to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” they didn’t really mean everyone. The American Patriots did not fight to give life, liberty, and basic civil rights to five hundred thousand African Americans enslaved in the North and South. Yet African Americans living in Boston, where Patriot passions blazed, and those living on isolated southern plantations heard talk about liberty and equality.

And those ideas were as contagious as smallpox.

In 1775 and again in 1779, the British issued a proclamation offering freedom to slaves owned by Patriots. Hundreds, then thousands of men, women, and children fled to British army territory – and freedom. Sixty thousand African Americans became Black Loyalists – loyal to Great Britain – because this was their best chance for freedom.

George Washington understood their choice. He wrote: “Liberty, when it begins to take root, is a plant of rapid growth.” Among African Americans, the “liberty plant” took root in many places, in many ways. Most slaves in the American colonies did not flee to the British during the Revolution. But they sought freedom in other ways: by joining the Continental Army, by buying their freedom from their owners, and by running away. Then came their struggle for equality.

How African Americans answered the Revolution’s cry for freedom remains a hidden chapter of the American Revolution. Men and women, free and enslaved, northern and southern, African-born and American-born; soldiers, preachers, farmers, merchants, housekeepers, seamen – Black people took risks, faced hardships, and won victories. These African Americans of the Revolutionary era – the ones who remained in America and the ones who sailed away with the British after the war – shared a vision. They heard the claim that all people are free and equal...and they believed it.

*Excerpt from [Answering the Cry for Freedom: Stories of African Americans and the American Revolution](#), by Gretchen Woelfle (Introduction, p. 6-7)*



### **Elizabeth, a Mother – “To stay safest, we must stay put.”**

Elizabeth was born into slavery in South Carolina in 1745. When her enslaver decided to start cultivating rice in North Carolina in 1755, he sent her to work on his new plantation in the Cape Fear region. She was only 10 and her family was forced to stay behind. The year is now 1775 and while enslaved life is gruesomely hard, she has managed to start her own family amidst the backbreaking work required of her. She has three wonderful children who luckily, remain on the plantation with her. However, 2 years ago her partner was brutally beaten by the plantation overseer – it happened in front of two of her children. He received so many lashes to his back that he developed an infection and died three days later. Since then, all three of her children have been getting more and more restless with life on the plantation. But, as bad as enslaved life may be, she feels gratitude for not have been separated from her children, since so many other families have been split between plantations. She remembers that pain all too well. She does worry constantly, however. If the plantation owner is capable of whipping her late partner that hard, she can only imagine what he would do if she or her children tried to escape. Instead of risking an escape, she feels there are other ways to maintain a little bit of power – the plantation owner and overseer might control what she does physically, but as she always tells her children, he doesn't control their minds or spirits. One of her children has recently terrified her with talk of planning a revolt. Just last year, an enslaved person in Granville County was charged with murder and burned at the stake for such actions. Others who have attempted to revolt or fight back have suffered similar consequences. Her priority is to keep everyone as safe as possible and most importantly, alive. She feels the best way to do this is to stay put.

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1. What has Elizabeth's life been like as an enslaved person? (Your answer should be guided by the details above, but you can also make inferences based on what you know about slavery in general.) How might her experiences be similar or different than other enslaved people?
2. How does Elizabeth feel regarding her family's current situation? What does she feel her family needs to do regarding their enslavement? Why do you think she feels this way?
3. Write out three arguments that Elizabeth could try to use to help convince the rest of the family to stay put:

**William – “Our best chance at a free life is to run away and never look back.”**

William is 18 years old and has been enslaved in North Carolina his whole life. He has been growing more and more tired of the abuse he and others receive from the plantation owner and overseer. Whether it's insults, beatings, or lack of adequate food and clothing provided – William is sick of being treated less than human. Two years ago, he had to stand by and watch as the plantation owner beat his father to death. When William yelled for it to stop, the plantation owner smashed the base of his rifle into William's face, causing him to lose consciousness.

William feels it is time for he and his family to run away and escape this cruel situation. He's heard of a community of Black people living in the Great Dismal Swamp. It sounds like the ideal hideout, with a whole hidden society cultivating small plots of land and farming for themselves. William's mother, Elizabeth, is afraid to leave however. But he's seen firsthand – and felt firsthand – the cruelty enslavers are capable of. William passionately believes that if he, his mother and siblings don't leave, eventually what happened to his father will happen to each of them. He tries to convince his family that anything other than running away is a death sentence. Besides, living without complete freedom is no way to live. One of his siblings keeps trying to convince the family that he'll be able to buy everyone's freedom soon enough, but William feels this is ridiculous. It would take years to earn enough money, and who knows if the plantation owner would even agree. Some of you may be dead or sold off to another plantation if you don't act soon and escape.

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1. What has William's life been like as an enslaved person? (Your answer should be guided by the details above, but you can also make inferences based on what you know about slavery in general.) How might his experiences be similar or different to other enslaved people?
  2. How does William feel regarding his and his family's current situation? What does he feel his family needs to do regarding their enslavement? Why do you think he feels this way?
  3. Write out three arguments that William could try to use to help convince the rest of the family to run away:

### **Tandey – “More important than freedom is justice through REVOLT.”**

Tandey is 16 and has been enslaved in North Carolina his entire life. Each day of his life, it feels like he grows angrier and angrier, to the point that he feels he might explode. He is a human being, yet day after day he and the people he loves are forced to do back-breaking work, cultivating rice while the white people watch. He was pegged as being “disobedient” when he was only a child, and even had his ears cropped when he was 13. When they took that piece from his ear, he vowed that one day he would get revenge. He tries to get back at the plantation owner and overseer in small ways – stealing from him here and there, working a little bit slower to keep profits down...Then, two years ago, Tandey watched silently as his father was beaten to death, simply because the amount of rice he’d cultivated that day was a pound short. When Tandey’s brother tried to yell for the beating to stop, the overseer struck him in the face with his gun. Tandey had to roll his brother over to keep him from choking on his own blood. His brother lost three teeth and still has a scar from the brutal strike. Tandey has never forgiven himself for not doing something to help them both. Recently, Tandey decided to do everything in his power to convince his family members and the other enslaved people on the plantation to revolt. He feels that with some planning, given their numbers and how strong each person is, they could easily overtake the plantation. Even if he dies in the process, slamming the overseer to the ground just one time would be worth his entire life. While his Aunt keeps talking of waiting on a war to start between the colonies and Britain, he isn’t interested in any more waiting. There might not even be a war, so Tandey is ready to take matters into his own hands. If his family won’t stand up for themselves, Tandey is going to stand up for them.

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1. What has Tandey’s life been like as an enslaved person? (Your answer should be guided by the details above, but you can also make inferences based on what you know about slavery in general.) How might his experiences be similar or different than other enslaved people?
  
2. How does Tandey feel regarding his and his family’s current situation? What does he feel his family needs to do regarding their enslavement? Why do you think he feels this way?
  
3. Write out three arguments that Tandey could try to use to help convince the rest of the family to revolt:

**Jackson – “Freedom comes at a cost I will be able to afford soon enough.”**

Jackson is 21 and has been enslaved in North Carolina his entire life. As the oldest child in his family, his father secretly taught him math and to read from the time he was 10, wanting him to be as educated as possible. Because he is good with numbers, the plantation owner often sends him to the market in Wilmington to sell goods for him. When Jackson is in the city, he is dazzled by the free Blacks he meets. Jackson has vowed that he and his loved ones would one day enjoy this type of freedom, and he decided the best chance for this would be for him to purchase his own freedom and then purchase each of his family members. For the past 5 years, Jackson has been using his math skills to skim money off the top of what he sells for his enslaver. His family also cultivates a small garden behind their quarters, and he sells some of that produce for additional income. Two years ago, his 2 siblings watched as his father was beaten to death. Since then, he has been putting money more aggressively. He thinks he’s almost earned enough money to purchase his own freedom; once he is free, he can more easily work to earn the money for purchasing each of his family members. He worries about convincing his siblings of his plan, though. They grow angrier and more rebellious by the day; he is afraid they may do something irrational that will risk all their lives.



1. What has Jackson’s life been like as an enslaved person? (Your answer should be guided by the details above, but you can also make inferences based on what you know about slavery in general.) How might his experiences be similar or different than other enslaved people?
2. How does Jackson feel regarding his and his family’s current situation? What does he feel his family needs to do regarding their enslavement? Why do you think he feels this way?
3. Write out three arguments that Jackson could try to use to help convince the rest of the family to wait for him to purchase their freedom:

**Aunt Ruth – “There is a war upon us, and we must take up a side.”**

Ruth is 32 years old and has been enslaved her entire life. She was sold away from her family 5 years ago to work on the rice plantation where she currently lives. The only good thing about the situation is that she discovered her older sister was also enslaved on the same plantation, so she has formed a tight bond with her and her children over the past years. She has watched her nephews grow into fine young men and she understands the frustration and restlessness that the children are feeling over their status as enslaved people. Through some secret communication networks, she has been monitoring the situation between the colonies and England. This entire year (1774), the colonies have grown more angry regarding England’s control of them. She and other enslaved people in her information network have heard white people discussing the possibility of a pending war. She feels that if a war breaks out, this will be the ideal time for her and her family to escape to British lines. Perhaps they could join the British Army in exchange for freedom, serve as cooks, do laundry – anything to get away from the plantation. This is the most sensible way to ensure success in gaining freedom.

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1. What has Ruth’s life been like as an enslaved person? (Your answer should be guided by the details above, but you can also make inferences based on what you know about slavery in general.) How might her experiences be similar or different than other enslaved people?
2. How does Ruth feel regarding her and her family’s current situation? What does she feel her family needs to do regarding their enslavement? Why do you think she feels this way?
3. Write out three arguments that Ruth could try to use to help convince the rest of the family to join the British when war breaks out: